

VOTE THE SITE

Thanks again for your participation in votethesite.com! We've tallied the results and put them together in the report below. We thought now would be a great time to release the results, as it will help campaigns make informed decisions about building out their websites in 2009.

Introduction



Votethesite.com (VTS) was launched on October 28, 2008 to the public - exactly one week before election day. VTS was built by the team at New Media Campaigns, a web design and development firm with a focus on political design. The site's purpose was to allow visitors to look at the two campaign websites for every Congressional-level race and higher around the country. Visitors could then vote on which site of the two sites they preferred - they could vote based on seeing a site at random or choose a specific race they wanted to vote on.

The goal was to gather a significant amount of data and compare the results of VTS with the actual election results, in order to see if there was a correlation between a victorious online campaign and actual campaign. In one week's time, the site garnered over 15,000 votes by more than 3,000 unique voters.

In addition to this data, the VTS team also checked each campaign site for certain criteria including a donation landing page, video on the homepage, a Blog, an action center, and social networking links. This data was used to see which features the typical winning online campaign possessed, and also to see if there was a correlation of features to actual election victory.

VTS has assembled all of this data into the following report in an attempt to gain new insights into the efforts of online campaigns.

State of Online Campaigning

In 2004, Howard Dean showed the world the power of the Internet through his online fundraising and signup efforts. In 2006, candidates and campaigns refined and improved their online campaign tactics through the midterm election cycle. At this point, a campaign website was ubiquitous, whether you were running for town council or US senate, you were online.

However, there remained great disparities in online campaigns at each level. Some candidates embraced the web and harnessed its power of fundraising, organizing, and educating, while others were perfectly content to just have an online static brochure.

In 2008, online campaigns began to come into their own. Campaigns had two cycles to witness the power and value of the Internet, and consultants were intent to take the lessons learned to build formidable online presences for their candidates.

As new technologies emerge and more firms enter the field, the cost of having a cutting edge web campaign has been dramatically reduced. This has allowed for more campaigns to make a strong play online, and allowed for the Internet to frequently serve as a leveling agent for candidates in races that have lopsided fundraising advantages.

Across the board, the overall quality of online campaigns increased with each cycle. However, there was still disparity as some campaigns would fully embrace and leverage the Internet while others would be satisfied with just having a simple "presence."

Correlation Between Online Campaign Results and Actual Election

The screenshot shows the 'Vote the Site' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Find a Race', and 'Random' options. The main heading reads 'VOTE THE SITE' with a small map of the US, followed by the question 'Which candidate has the best website?'. Below this, the section is titled 'AZ Races'. Three race comparisons are displayed in a grid:

- Ann Kirkpatrick vs. Sydney Hay**, House District 1. The left image shows a campaign site with a landscape background and the text 'SERVING ARIZONA. CHANGING WASHINGTON.' The right image shows a campaign site for Sydney Hay with a red, white, and blue design and the text 'Sydney Hay U.S. CONGRESS'.
- Bob Lord vs. John Shadegg**, House District 3. The left image shows a campaign site with a blue background and the text 'ActBlue' and 'Lord for Congress'. The right image shows a campaign site for John Shadegg with a blue and white design and the text 'JOHN SHADEGG'.
- David Schweikert vs. Harry Mitchell**, House District 5. The left image shows a campaign site with an American flag background and the text 'CONTRIBUTE Here your support for...'. The right image shows a campaign site for Harry Mitchell with a blue and white design and the text 'Harry Mitchell U.S. CONGRESS'.

Authorized report of Vote the Site – a New Media Campaigns (www.newmediacampaigns.com) project.

The primary purpose of VTS was to gain a significant amount of data to see if there was a relationship between a successful online campaign and successful election effort. With over 15,000 votes, we are confident that the data sample is significant enough to inspect the correlation and see if there is a relationship between the two factors.

According to the data, **campaigns that won online were nearly twice as likely to win the actual election.** 66% of campaigns that won the election, also were voted to have the better campaign site. These results show a strong correlation between a successful online campaign and overall campaign.

Furthermore, **campaigns with worse online campaigns were 1.33x more likely to lose the actual election.** 59% of campaigns that lost on election day also were voted to have the inferior online campaign.

Both of these data confirm our original hypothesis that there is a strong link between a successful online campaign and an actual election victory.

One argument may be that typically a victorious campaign has more overall resources, and therefore more resources to spend on the Web, allowing them to have the better online campaign. While this may be true, that argument is somewhat hampered by the fact that through new technology and competition in the market, **an engaging online presence is rather affordable to any race** from the Congressional level and above. Also, due to this fact, we typically see campaigns with smaller bank accounts embrace the Web and put together stellar online campaigns, such as in the case of Ron Paul.

Whether it was because the campaigns were willing to spend more money online or not, the data is conclusive that a more polished online campaign is a harbinger for the election outcome. By having a more polished campaign Web presence, a candidate will be more likely to engage and educate voters, and to assure donors of your campaign's viability. By investing resources online and focusing some effort on the campaign website, there is a clear indication in the data that a campaign is significantly enhancing its chances of winning on Election Day.

Democrats vs. Republicans

Much has been made of the different online campaigning styles of Democrats and Republicans. Bob Dole's 1996 Republican campaign for President was perhaps the earliest pioneer of campaign websites. The site interacted with visitors by allowing them to take Dole quizzes, customize campaign buttons, design and mail their own e-cards, and review information relevant to the state in which you're located. Dole even gave his campaign site a shout out in the Presidential debates.

However, while Republicans got an early start with Dole, the buzz over the past decade has mainly centered on innovative Internet use by Democrats. Howard Dean's 2004 campaign really set the tenor for the modern online campaign. He took his website to the next step and rather than just using it as a brochure of information, Dean leveraged his site as a volunteer and fundraising tool, briefly catapulting him to the position of frontrunner in the 04 primary. In 2008, Barack Obama picked up right where Dean left off and unleashed the most powerful online campaign to date. Using the site as the campaign's primary mobilization and organization tool, Obama was able to break just about every fundraising record that ever existed.

So, it is clear that Democrats have been the savvier Internet pioneers at the Presidential level, but how would that extend to the Congressional campaigns? We were excited to see and knew that this would be one of the most interesting aspects of the report. In the end, voters affirmed that the Democratic technology lead also applies to

smaller campaigns, as they judged that **Democrats won 65% of online campaigns.**

In two of the most heated and closely contested for US Senate, the seats of Senator Dole and Senator Coleman's seats, both Republicans lost the online battle.

This report shows a direct correlation to the success of an online campaign and the success of an overall campaign. Republicans would be best advised to dedicate more resources to the Web in the next cycle in order to improve their performance in the General Election.

Trends Developing with Online Campaigns

In 2008, many new political website tactics and trends emerged, many of which would become ubiquitous by the end of the cycle.

The most omnipresent feature was the Action Center. **Nearly 75% of online campaigns had an action centers prominently displayed on the homepage.** The action center made it easy to quickly funnel visitors to the most important areas of a campaign site: the volunteer and contribution forms. Often, action centers were continued throughout the internal pages, always giving visitors quick access to the action oriented areas of the site.

Another technique that really came into its own in this cycle was featuring video on the homepage of a campaign site. **Over half of all the campaigns had video on the homepage.** This statistic is largely due to the popularity and uniformity of Flash Video - this technology is on nearly everyone's computer and allows visitors to quickly stream video from the homepage without having to deal with painful loading times. Also, the YouTube contributed to the video explosion, as many campaigns simply embedded YouTube videos onto their homepage, allowing them to easily capitalize on the advantages of video.

It seems that campaign Blogs have not yet hit the mainstream. **One third of campaign sites had updated Blogs.** It seems that Blogs are used by the two extremes in campaigns: those with a lot of resources and those with very few. Resource rich campaigns are able to dedicate entire teams to their Blogs, ensuring they stay updated. While poorly funded campaigns see Blogs as a very cost-effective method to disseminate their message to a wide audience that they are unable to reach through TV ads. Given the disparity in the campaigns that utilized Blogs, it is not surprising to see that a campaigns with updated Blogs had no real statistical advantage in winning or losing.

Conclusions

First, we want to again thank everyone for their participation and promotion of [Vote the Site](#); your support is what made this report possible.

In conclusion, we were able to collect a fairly significant data set that definitively shows a correlation between a successful online campaign and actual electoral victory. This report reinforces the need for candidates to dedicate resources to their online campaign and to be sure to impress visitors. The Internet reaches every media market and will leave an impression on visitors that will shape their vote in the election.