



# Blue Campaign Solutions

## Digital Alchemy - Turning Website Hits Into Campaign Gold

The past few years have seen a substantial increase in the volume of political fundraising via the internet. The following are reflections, ideas and best practices to consider when raising money over the internet for a political campaign. This list should not be considered “complete” in any way – the technology and trends in this area change very quickly, so this guide will remain a work in progress.

### **1. If You Build It, They Will Come**

While websites are now considered a “must-have” part of even small local campaigns, they are still treated as an afterthought. Rarely does the role of the campaign website play even a part in the overall strategy of the campaign. And more often than not, sites are built, updated once or twice, and promptly forgotten about for months at a time. *Campaigns frequently miss fundraising opportunities by not properly devoting time, effort and money to building and promoting their campaign website.* Taking the time to ask strategic questions about the role of the website is important. Some of these questions might include:

- When will the site be updated?
- What content will be updated? Having a regular schedule for this can help
- Does the campaign “have the keys” to the website so they can update it on their schedule? Or does a consultant get paid every time there is an update to be made?
- Who is the average visitor to our website? Are statistics available to give us some idea of who and when people are visiting?
- How do we use the website to accomplish our goals, like fundraising, recruiting new people (and their email addresses) and pushing our message out?
- How do we make the contribution process as easy and simple as possible?

While consultants may try to provide slick and easy answers to these problems, there is no getting around the fact that a campaign website is a commitment. Technical tools for running a site are only as good as the people using them. A campaign website site is only worth the time, effort and money that the campaign devotes to it. **With the proper support and commitment, a website will always pay more dividends to the campaign than it consumes.**

## 2. If You Promote It, They Will Come

Your campaign has the website built and has a plan for managing it through the campaign. First, congratulations – you're ahead of most campaigns. Now how do you get people to visit the site, contribute money and volunteer to help the campaign? While there are many ways to promote your website, here are 5 ideas to get people to visit your website:

1. Put the website address on every piece of printed material, in every email, TV ad, and mention it at every public appearance. **This could really be listed twice – it's that important.**
2. **Fresh content** – Nothing makes a campaign look more lackluster than a site with no updates for the last month. For website visitors, this is roughly the same as having your candidate show up at an editorial board meeting for a newspaper in their pajamas – they were probably better off not showing up at all. Also, responding quickly to news events via email or website content also shows to voters and constituents that the campaign is “on top of things.”
3. **Frequent email contact** – While it is true that we all get lots of email, it is important to “touch” your constituents on a regular basis. If you want people to feel invested in your campaign, they need to hear what is happening and how they can help. Remember that every email sent by the campaign is one more opportunity to shape the message that voters are hearing.
4. **Ask for action** – On political campaigns, supporters frequently enjoy being asked for their help – the appeal is often the whole “being a part of something bigger” thing. Having brief, frequent campaigns on the website where visitors are asked to complete a specific task is a good way to increase traffic. Ideas include asking 5 friends to join the email list, sign a digital petition on a relevant issue, make 10 phone calls to neighbors asking them to vote, etc. Being a part of these small “action campaigns” gets supporters in the habit of visiting the website frequently.
5. **Be Viral** – Always try to capitalize on the visitors you already have, even if that's not many. Asking them to send an email to their friends, family or even everyone in their address book is a good way to help spread the word. People listen to what friends and family say – view your current visitors and donors as a way to spread the word about your website and campaign.

## **Gather Ye Email Addresses, While Ye May**

For internet fundraising, email addresses are the most important currency available. They are the primary way to contact voters and possible contributors. The importance of collecting email addresses should be a team effort – everyone on the campaign should know that collecting the email address of every person the campaign touches is a priority. It is important to get in the habit of saying “how can we get their email addresses” at every turn in the campaign, especially events or any time there is a large concentration of voters. **At every public or private event, there should be a signup sheet to allow people to list their contact information, including their email address.**

It may be possible to obtain lists of email addresses from various organizations – professional groups, grassroots organizations, county parties, etc. Rarely are groups willing to do this, because they understand the value of the email addresses and privacy of their members. If they can't give you a list, ask them to send out an email themselves introducing the candidate to the members, mentioning the next event and, of course, listing the website and contribution information several times.

If they do turn over a list to the campaign, please be respectful to the members by always providing a way for them to unsubscribe from campaign emails and honoring those requests.

One caveat: Some campaigns adopt a quantity-over-quality approach to email addresses, thinking that the goal of collecting email addresses is to have more email addresses. It's not – the goal is to convert as many people into online visitors and donors as possible, **not** to simply grow the list.

### **3. “Knowledge Is Power”**

Political campaigns have changed in the last few years. While technology and data is still not a magic wand, the truth is that campaigns need to be able to use data effectively at every turn of the campaign. It is very important to gather as much information as possible about visitors and contributors to inform future strategic and tactical decisions.

Though there are many ways to do this, one easy way is to gather information via the website. Make the email list signup very easy – probably just their email address. Then send an email asking them to visit the website to tell the campaign more about themselves. This is generally addresses and phone numbers, but it's also an opportunity to ask which issues are of greatest importance to them, what they think about recent events or who they plan on voting for.

On a large enough scale (hundreds or thousands of respondents), a picture of voter priorities can become clearer. More importantly, it means that when an issue comes up that relates to a voter's interest (perhaps health care), the campaign can approach that voter (as a part of a “voting segment”) and ask them to sign a “Healthcare for All” petition or get involved in some other way. That would never have been possible without collecting the data in the first place.

## 4. The Contribution Process

Making the contribution process as easy and seamless as possible is critically important to online fundraising success. Potential donors are frequently “scared-off” by some of the following concerns:

- “The contribution form looks really long and complicated”
- “I wasn’t sure that my credit card number was secure”
- “I was asked for information that didn’t have to do with my contribution”
- “I had to leave the campaign website to contribute, and I didn’t think that was a good idea.”

These are typical concerns – regardless of the process utilized, keep these in mind and always consider ways to make the contribution process easier and smoother for the visitor. One way to allay many of these concerns is to make sure the contribution form is integrated directly into your website. Visitors get nervous when they are taken to another website to make a contribution, uncertain if they will be returned or if their information is being treated securely. Use SSL or TLS ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport\\_Layer\\_Security](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport_Layer_Security)) for all contributions, and make the contribution form only as long as it has to be. Remember that with a visitor’s email address you can always ask them more information (issue preferences, volunteer need, etc) via email.

There are some supporters of a campaign who are “true blue” and more committed to giving. A good way to get them involved is to allow them to make automatic monthly contributions. Giving that group of donors a specific name (“Sanderson Supporters”, “Gibson Givers”) is one way to make them and others feel like that group is special.

Another way to conduct fundraising campaigns is called team-raising or friend-raising. This is when you ask supporters to build their own group of contacts and friends into a team. Teams then compete against each other to see who can raise the most money. The management of this process is made easy with technology and email. When the original list of contacts is large, this can be a highly-effective way to raise money. It also gets new people involved and connected, which is a great benefit to campaigns that rely on volunteers for other aspects of the campaign.

## 5. Final Thoughts

Technology continues to bring remarkable changes to the political campaign landscape. Campaigns can improve their effectiveness by planning for, and using their website to their very greatest advantage. Instead of an afterthought, the campaign website should be used as a tool to raise money and spread the reach of the campaign to new voters.

Good luck to you in your campaign!