Online Political Campaign Tips

An E-Book from

Online Candidate

Introduction

This booklet brings you practical tips for you to improve your online political campaign. Whether you are a seasoned candidate or just starting your first political campaign you are sure to find some useful information in these tips.

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Things a Candidate Should Never Do Online

1) Assume you have privacy. First and foremost, anything you ever say, post or share online should pass the 'New York Times Test'. That means, if you wouldn't be comfortable with what you've done appearing on the cover of the New York Times, then don't do it.

2) Pretend to be someone else. This happens more frequently than you might think: a local candidate creates several profiles on a local newspaper discussion board and uses them to promote themselves or bash their opponents. If the candidate or supporter is outed for doing this, it just looks bad … and petty.

3) Try to delete material after the fact. It's not the crime, but it's the cover-up that gets politicians in trouble. If you must delete a post, do it, publicly acknowledge that you have done so, and move on.

4) Not completing profiles. Each and every social media profile should be completed in full with a description, website and any other important information.

5) Spam out. Bombarding your supporters (or worse, voters who are not actively following you) with automated or unwanted messages of any sort will only serve to annoy others – and can get you a reputation as a political spammer.

6) Share too much information. Think before you post. If you're not sure where to draw the line with your posts, then err on the side of caution and keep things professional.

7) Engaging in social media without a plan. Figure out where you want to stake your online presence before you begin your campaign. Take some time to figure out where you should be directing your social media efforts, who in your campaign is best equipped to manage the accounts, and what kinds of content you will offer.

Add Interactivity To Your Campaign Website

1) Email list signup. Email is still an essential way to keep in touch with supporters. Having an automated way for people to add and remove themselves from your list is important. The most popular ways are to have an email list system installed on your website server or, for more functionality, consider using an email list service.

2) Social media links. Link out to your social media profiles, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. This gives visitors the opportunity to learn more and link to support the campaign through alternate channels.

3) Polls and surveys. For candidates with limited budgets, online surveys and polls help gather feedback and provide a way for visitors to share their opinions. Most everyone likes a quick poll, and a well-designed survey can allow visitors to share their opinions on a variety of topics.

4) District Maps. A district map makes a great addition to your voter registration page.

5) Video. Video is a growing part of the web, and the tools and software available make it easy for just about anyone to create video. For political campaigns ads, YouTube makes it easy to link and share videos through HTML code that can be embedded in a web page.

6) Donations. Perhaps the most valuable interactive feature is having a way to take donations through the website. There are a number of payment processors available, and some specifically cater to political campaigns. We do not get involved in campaign donations or fundraising, but we recommend PayPal as a simple, inexpensive way to process transactions.

7) Other Forms. Contact and volunteer forms also add a level of interactivity, though it's more one-way from the user. Regardless, be sure that your campaign is easy to contact, and that your site actively invites people to join and participate.

Build A Social Media Following

1) Start early and start small. While you should build your online presence as early as possible, you'll want to start small with social medial. Signing up for Twitter, Facebook and every social network you can find is a recipe for disaster. Building profiles for multiple social sites is hard work, so it's best to start by only tackling a couple at first.

2) Use widgets. Add social network widgets on your campaign website. The best place to attract new followers is your own site. These widgets can include buttons to your Facebook and Twitter profiles pages. There are also widgets that you can add above and below your page content that allows readers to share with others.

3) Don't sweat the numbers. "The journey of a million followers begins with the first Like." Sure, it's great to have a high number of followers, but it's better to have a smaller number of interested ones. A few politicians have artificially boosted their follower numbers, and it's not that hard to do. In the end, though, 'bots don't vote – only people do.

4) Be consistent. Publish regularly. It's better to update a little over time than a lot all at once. Starting a social media presence and then abandoning it is worse than never having created a presence in the first place.

5) Listen to what's being said about you online. Go beyond just monitoring what others are saying about you. While most social media interactions regarding your campaign might not require a response, it's critical to find the few that do and engage those individuals in a timely fashion.

6) Share with others. Don't just post things about your campaign. Share other news items, links and resources that may be of interest to those following you.

7) Be careful what you post. Never post anything that you would not be comfortable having anyone read at any time. Once something goes online it may be difficult, if not impossible, to remove it.

Use Facebook Like A Pro

1) Create your Facebook Page. Any politician can create an official Facebook Page. (You'll want to create an Official Page and not a Community Page.) Facebook only allows you to create a page if you are the candidate or you are an authorized person on that politician's staff. Unlike your basic profile, Facebook Pages are visible to everyone on the internet by default.

2) Update your page profile. Use the Info tab to provide users with information about yourself and your campaign. Fill it out with as much detail as you can, including a link to your campaign website. Upload a profile picture to appear in the upper left corner of your Page. This is typically a candidate head shot or campaign logo.

3) Consider using a custom landing page. Unlike Twitter, Facebook pages all have a standard look and feel. However, you can show off your creative side by creating a custom landing page for your page. This can display any initial information, images, or added functionality you choose. There are a number of free and paid services that can help you create one.

4) Be authentic. Voters value authenticity from politicians who use social media. Candidates should work to engage in a conversation with readers, rather than simply broadcasting campaign updates. The goal is to get people to know, like and trust you. That won't happen if every post sounds like it was vetted by a PR firm.

5) Don't be a jerk. Be yourself. Share your opinions, your personality, and even a bit of your daily life. Post frequently, but not so often that you appear to have nothing better to do. Most voters will never meet you in person. If you are a jerk online, they will only assume that you are a jerk in real life.

Campaign Twitter Tips

1) Claim @YourCampaign. Even if you don't plan to use Twitter right away, be sure you claim your name or campaign name as your Twitter handle. If you put it off, there's a risk that your name could be taken by someone else, similar to domain name squatting.

2) Modify your account settings and look. Add your information and website link to the account settings. Brand your profile design by customizing the color settings and background to create a consistent look with your campaign website.

3) Update your Twitter account regularly. How often you post is less important than posting regularly, no matter what the schedule may be.

4) Post relevant material. Candidates don't have to just post updates on what they are doing or thinking. Look at how other prominent politicians use Twitter for style and content ideas. News articles, campaign press releases, endorsements, website updates, blog posts and event alerts are all good material to keep followers up to date.

5) Post to the proper account. Very often the person who posts will have a personal Twitter account. That person should be careful to know what account they are logged into when they post. Having a personal tweet appear in a campaign account may be embarrassing.

6) Make your Twitter account part of your larger online presence. Your website, blog, Facebook and other social accounts should be kept up to date as well. Because Twitter is designed for 'small bites' of information, you can update your status far more frequently than you would on Facebook without ticking off your followers.

About Online Candidate®

OnlineCandidate.com provides affordable campaign website design for small to medium sized political campaigns. It allows users to create a high-impact campaign website loaded with features such as a built-in page editor, polls, advanced contact and donation forms, data capture and more.

OnlineCandidateResources.com is designed for campaigns who want to leverage online communication to reach, communicate and motivate supporters. Focus on the essentials of creating an effective presence for online political campaigning. Distill the online opportunities, tools, and strategies in order to reach out to voters and help build the support necessary to win your election.

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