



Part 4:

UK 2010 General Election e-action review

Written by

Jess Day

jess@jess-day.co.uk

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advocacy online

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Credits

The 2010 eCampaigning Review was made possible by the work and contributions of:

- Duane Raymond, who processed millions of rows of data into insightful benchmarks and shared qualitative benchmarking methodologies with Jess,
- Jess Day, who conducted the qualitative best practices survey and action comparison aspects of the review,
- Graham Covington, Jonathan Purchase and Mark Swope from Advocacy Online, who got Advocacy Online clients to agree to participate and contribute their data, and extracted the data in the required format,
- Jo Shaw of PublicZone, who commented on methodology, early reviews and drafts, and Rachel Collinson of Rechord, who tested and commented on the survey,
- Organisations, whose data makes the Review possible,
- Interested readers: hopefully you can turn what you learn into more effective campaigning.

This e-action review is one of the three parts of the eCampaigning Review.

Download all three at
ecampaigningreview.com

eCampaigning Review is for:

- senior managers of organisations that campaign
- all types of e-campaigning practitioners
- staff collaborating on delivering e-campaigning activities
- consultants, freelancers, developers and other suppliers of e-campaigning services and support

How can you improve?

We can conduct an e-action review or a full e-campaigning review tailored for your organisation. If your organisation was included in the eCampaigning Review, this is relatively easy and cost effective. To learn more, email duane@fairsay.com or jess@jess-day.co.uk

1 Summary

The UK election e-action review looked at 54 online campaigning actions before and after the UK General Election in May 2010.

1.1 Targeting

Unsurprisingly, the majority of actions (78%) targeted Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs), the individuals standing for election in each constituency. Only 7 actions (13%) targeted voters directly (eg asking them to attend hustings, providing them with information to inform decisions, or with tools to challenge canvassers or candidates), 2 targeted a party leader or leaders and one was a petition to the next PM.

Only 13% of actions acknowledged parties' stated policies in messages to candidates.

Devolution was relevant to over half the actions. As seen in the 2009 eCampaigning Review, many organisations are struggling to deal with the challenges of communicating and campaigning on devolved issues, with only 39% showing that it can be done well. Many ignored the issue completely, failing to acknowledge devolution at all or directing users to email candidates on issues they will have no ability to influence.

1.2 Timing and timeliness

Timing, and having the time to maintain and update actions and information is clearly an issue for many organisations. Two weeks after the election, 37% of organisations had no feedback or follow up information on the website about the election result. Of the remainder, about half had just a press release or news story, and half had really good quality information, including feedback on number of actions taken, impact etc. Amazingly, 10 actions were still live!

1.3 Informing voters/charity law

A surprisingly small number of organisations provided information about the parties' policy positions. 76% of organisations provided none at all, probably due to overwhelming anxiety about charity law. However, many organisations, including registered charities, were providing information on party policies as they related to the organisations objectives, without apparent problem.

The 2010 eCampaigning Review focuses only on the most common e-campaigning model: **emailing supporters to take actions online**

2 Background

Over the last decade, campaigning (advocacy) on the Internet and other interactive media has grown significantly. Today most organisations with campaigning activities have an online presence. Yet despite this significant growth in campaigning online (e-campaigning), there is still little understanding about what are good performance levels and practices or good performance measures.

Individually, some organisations have addressed this by initiating or commissioning reviews¹ of their e-campaigning. While these can compare public practices, they suffer from two constraints:

1. they have no direct way of comparing performance vs. their peers since the data is private
2. the results cannot be published for the benefit of others in the sector due to being confidential

2.1 The eCampaigning Review

The eCampaigning Review addresses these constraints through three independent quantitative and qualitative research initiatives:

1. an analysis of the e-campaigning emailing and action data
2. a comparison of public e-campaigning practices
3. a survey of e-campaigning internal practices

To achieve consistency between organisations, the eCampaigning Review focuses only on the most common e-campaigning model: **emailing supporters to take actions online**. This model is primarily focused on mass-activism: getting existing supporters to take action and recruiting new supporters. This model accounts for between 75% and 100% of each organisations e-campaigning activity and thus is a good candidate for this first eCampaigning Review. However there are *many* other e-campaigning models of e-campaigning that are both worthwhile and appropriate for the different campaigning objectives but are beyond the scope of this e-campaigning review.

The studies are insightful for four key e-campaigning stakeholders:

1. **senior managers** of organisations that campaign
2. all types of **e-campaigning practitioners**: e-campaigning specialists, campaigning specialists, Internet specialists, communications specialists, etc.

¹ Duane Raymond of FairSay has conducted over ten private e-campaigning reviews for UK and international organisations

3. **staff collaborating on delivering e-campaigning activities:** fundraising, press officers, designers, analysts, supporter care, etc.
4. **consultants, freelancers, developers and other suppliers** of e-campaigning services and support

3 The UK 2010 election e-action review

This report aims to take a snapshot of what organisations were doing online in the run up to the 2010 General Election, and includes also a quick review of some interesting ways the internet was being used to campaign.

The review looked at 52 organisation's websites, reviewing 54 actions. The list was drawn together from:

- Advocacy Online's list of client election campaigns
- Organisations covered in the 2009 e-campaigning review
- Actions suggested by members of the eCampaigning Forum email list
- Others I could find.

This means Advocacy Online actions are likely to be over-represented in the review.

Over three-quarters of actions targeted Prospective Parliamentary Candidates directly.

4 Targets

Unsurprisingly, the majority of actions (78% or 42 out of 54 actions) target Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs), the individuals standing for election in each constituency. 7 actions (13%) targeted voters directly (see below for more information on this), 2 targeted a party leader or leaders and one was a petition to the next PM.

Two organisations had live actions directed at MPs. This is an embarrassing error, as there are no MPs during a pre-election period, and constituents will not get a response to these messages.

4.1 Actions to PPCs

These made up the majority of actions. 39 of them asked users to email the PPCs directly about the organisation's concerns, 10 of those had a 'pledge' they were asking PPCs to support or adopt. 3 asked users to write to PPCs by post.

It surprises many people to learn that there is no official list of PPCs. A high proportion of the actions were using Advocacy Online's list, which covered the main UK parties, including national parties, but not smaller parties such as UKIP or independents. 6 organisations were using tools which used a free API to integrate the 'crowdsourced' 'Yournextmp.org.uk' list (see below), which was more extensive, though potentially less reliable.

A couple of actions said that messages would go to PPCs, but did not reveal the list, including one (Woodland Trust) which cited the political neutrality aspect of charity law as the reason for this.

In nearly half of the actions (21 out of 44) PPCs were asked to respond directly to the constituent. This is appropriate, but makes it hard for organisations to track responses, though a few did supply an email address or page where users could post responses back to the organisation. 9 actions directed PPCs to AO's Political Exchange to pledge support, 8 more had pledge forms on their websites, 2 used a survey to gather information on candidate's positions and 2 asked PPCs to respond to the organisation via email.

Only 7 actions included any acknowledgement of the party's stated position in the message text.

Only seven actions acknowledged the party's stated position in the message text.

4.2 Other political targets

A few organisations used other political targets – one (Carers UK) with a petition directed at the next Prime Minister, one (Parkinson's Disease Society) targeting the three main party leaders, and one (Friends of the Earth) targeting David Cameron directly on the relatively weak response of the Conservative party's candidates to the organisation's questions. (See below on timing.)

4.3 Informing voters

A surprisingly small number of organisations provided information about the parties' policy positions. 76% of organisations provided none at all, probably due to overwhelming anxiety about charity law (see below).

However, many organisations, including registered charities, were successfully providing detailed and helpful information for voters. For example, the RSPB provided video clips from party representatives, answering key questions, and Save the Children listed the relevant manifesto commitments, highlighting which of the organisation's key policy objectives were included in each.

13% (7) had 'actions' directed at voters, asking them to attend hustings, providing them with information to inform their voting decisions, or with tools to challenge canvassers and candidates themselves. Some of these were technically simple, eg the Pro-Life alliance provided downloadable PDFs with details of the candidates' known positions (and voting record for former MPs) on abortion issues. Others were more complex, for example the King's Fund had an interactive quiz aiming to challenge users on how well they understood the policy differences between the parties on health, and anti-vivisection campaigners BUAV had a tool which allowed users to compare individual candidates positions on vivisection issues, and email the questions to any which had not yet provided information.

24% of organisations provided information on parties' relevant policies.

5 Timing and timeliness

Timing, and having the time to maintain and update actions and information is clearly an issue for many organisations. Most clearly posted an action and didn't touch it: when the actions were reviewed two days before the election many still had wording that had clearly not been updated since the beginning of the campaign, such as 'an election looming...' or 'with an election just weeks away...', or promising more information before the election date.

63% of organisations had posted follow up information to their websites two weeks after the election.

The best example of 'nimble' campaigning during the election period was Friends of the Earth, who noted the relatively poor response to their survey from Conservative party candidates, canvassed supporters via Facebook for a good way to illustrate this, and used a supporter's idea of inflating coloured balloons to show the difference. Videos were posted on the site, and a follow up action created, challenging Conservative party leader David Cameron directly on his candidates' weakness on environmental issues.

Two weeks after the election, 37% of organisations had no feedback or follow up information on the website about the election result. Of the remainder, about half had just a press release or news story, and half had really good quality information, including feedback on number of actions taken, impact etc.

Amazingly, 10 actions were still live!

6 Devolution

A high proportion of organisations reviewed work in the health sector, so devolution was relevant to over half the actions (54%). As seen in the 2009 eCampaigning Review, many organisations are struggling to deal with the challenges of communicating and campaigning on devolved issues, with fewer than half (39%, or 11 out of 28) doing this well. Many ignored the issue completely, failing to acknowledge devolution at all or directing users to email candidates on issues they will have no ability to influence.

Others did well. For example, National Deaf Children's Society provided different pledges for candidates in the different nations, Age UK (formed from the merger of Age Concern and Help the Aged), had an outstanding microsite, providing detailed information tailored to the different nations.

Devolution is the transfer of powers in areas like education and health - but not, for example, defence - away from central government to the UK's nations and regions.

Tools are not enough

Having an e-campaigning tool is not enough: you need to have the strategy, plans and expertise to get the most from your tool.

FairSay can help get the most of your investment in a tool in a number of ways:

- a) Hands-on support
- b) Review of current usage
- c) Training
- d) Advanced set-up

To find out more, email duane@fairsay.com or visit <http://fairsay.com/what-we-do>

7 Tools

A majority (34) of the actions reviewed were using Advocacy Online's e-activist tool. 7 used html/PDF/video content only, 6 had bespoke interactive tools (eg flash quiz), 5 used iParl, 1 de Havilland, 1 Public Affairs Briefing.

8 Visibility

81% of organisations (42) had their election material prominently on the organisation's home page. 5 organisations had special election microsites.

9 Charity law

There is clearly substantial anxiety about the restrictions that charity law places on registered charities during the pre-election period. As seen above, many organisations were reluctant to publish any information, let alone commentary, on the parties' positions.

This would seem to be justified after The League Against Cruel Sports was censured by the Charity Commissioners during this election for its Keep Cruelty History campaign against repealing the Hunting Act.

However, the criticisms of the League were quite specific, relating to their commissioning a poll which, in the words of the Commissioners, "appeared to be designed to elicit a particular response for the purpose of criticising the party". (It asked "In 2002, a senior Conservative party politician described the party as having been regarded as 'the nasty party'. The current Conservative leader has sought to rebrand them as the 'Compassionate Conservatives'. Do you think the Conservative pledge to hold a vote on whether to make the hunting with dogs of deer, hares and foxes legal again is MORE in keeping with a 'nasty party' or a 'Compassionate Conservative' party?")

The Commission also said that, while a charity must not encourage or discourage support for any political party, it "...may have a view about the policies of a particular political party in the interests of its beneficiaries and the need for changes in the law. It can make voters aware of the policies of political parties about that issue and the need for change."

Some registered charities were providing information for voters on parties' relevant policy positions without any apparent problems (eg Save the Children, RSPB), so it would appear that many are perhaps taking an overly cautious approach. Perhaps

most surprising was the Woodland Trust's action, which cited the need for impartiality as a reason for not telling users which parties and candidates would receive the message.

10 Other online campaigning of interest

10.1 Informing voters

Vote Match

www.votematch.co.uk

Interactive tool from Unlock Democracy aiming to help voters understand which party's policies align most closely with their own opinions on a range of issues.

Vote for Policies

www.voteforpolicies.org.uk

Another tool, enabling users to choose between party policies in four subject areas to help inform their vote.

My Gay Vote

www.mygayvote.co.uk

Very simple online comparison of the main parties' record on issues of interest to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transvestite people.

10.2 Challenging the system

Unlock democracy

www.votefordemocracy.org.uk

Campaign for change in the UK electoral system.

Vote for a change

www.voteforachange.co.uk

Campaign for change in the UK electoral system.

Power 2010

www.power2010.org.uk

One

www.onevote2010.one.org

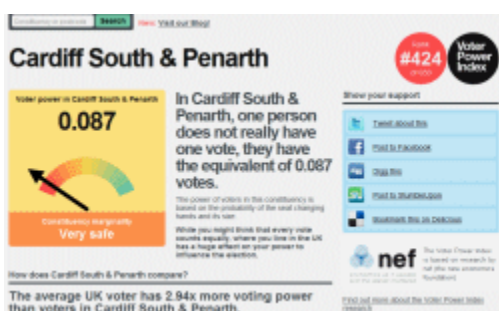
38 degrees

www.38degrees.org.uk

Voter Power

www.voterpower.org.uk

Allows users to calculate the significance of their individual vote according to how marginal their constituency.



10.3 Crowdsourcing

Democracy Club

<http://www.democracyclub.org.uk/>

Recruits volunteers in each constituency to support the projects below.

They work for you

<http://election.theyworkforyou.com/>

Compiled pre-election questionnaire to get feedback from PPCs on local and national issues.

Your next MP

<http://www.yournextmp.com/>

Used local volunteers to build as exhaustive a list as possible of all PPCs – something which is not centrally available.

The Straight Choice/Election leaflets

www.electionleaflets.org

Used volunteers to upload images of local campaigning leaflets to allow comparisons over time and across the country.

11 Annex 1: Sample selection for General Election e-action review

Abortion Rights group
Action Aid
Action for Children
Age UK
Alzheimer's UK
Amnesty UK
Barnardo's
BHF
Bliss
Breakthrough
BUAV
CAAT
CAFOD
Cancer Research UK
Carers UK
Christian Aid
Christian Aid
CND

Countryside Alliance
CPRE
CTC
Diabetes UK
Dogs Trust
EDCM
Equality Trust
Friends of the Earth
Greenpeace UK
Greenpeace UK
IFAW
King's Fund
League Against Cruel Sports
Macmillan
Mencap UK
Mind
NDCS
NSPCC

Oxfam GB
Palestine Solidarity campaign
Parkinson's disease society
Plan UK
Play England
Pro life alliance
RCN
Refugee Council
RNID
Royal British Legion
RSPB
RSPCA
Save the Children
Scope
Shelter
Stop the War coalition
Water Aid
Woodland Trust