2010 eCampaigning Review insights & benchmarks

Part 2:

e-action review

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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.

The e-action review looked at 82 online actions.

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

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1 Summary

The 2010 e-action review analysed the quality of online actions from 82 campaigning organisations, mostly in the UK.

1.1 Mechanism

54% of actions asked users to write to an individual, mostly via email (down from 64% last year). The majority (89%, or 34 out of 38) of emails allowed, and normally encouraged, the user to edit the content. Petitions were slightly more popular than in 2009, accounting for 39% of actions, against 26% last year. This is in line with the findings of the eCampaigning Review survey.

1.2 Targeting

The majority of actions (60%) targeted specific government authorities in some form. Elected representatives accounted for a lower proportion of actions than last year (26%, rather than 38%). Worryingly, 18% (15) had no clearly explained target.

32% (26) of the UK actions reviewed dealt with devolved issues. In general, organisations are still struggling with the communication challenges of devolution, with only just over a third (38%, 10) doing well. A quarter (27%, 7) were really doing poorly. This is better than during the General Election, when over half (56%) performed poorly.

1.3 Strengths and weaknesses

In general, organisations are offering well-presented actions which are easy to find and straightforward to use.

- 65% of organisations were presenting actions well, with increasing use of video to support and explain problems and solutions.
- 67% of actions were easy to find on the organisation's website.
- 66% were simple to use, with a clear process and no technical problems.
- 60% of actions had a clear and appropriate target, and explained why and how they had the power to make a difference.
- 83% of actions did provide a thank you page of some kind, with 57% making good use of this free chance to communicate with users while they are receptive. This is a significant improvement on last year, when only 72% were providing a thank you page at all, and only 41% one of a good quality.

This e-action review is one of the three parts of the eCampaigning Review. Download all three at **ecampaigningreview.com**

Actions performed more weakly against measures to do with sustained communication and involvement with supporters. One objective of a campaign is often to build the awareness of an issue, and increase public understanding, but many organisations need to do better at working with their supporters, and keeping them informed about a campaign.

- 39% of actions had a clear and well-explained objective. Most commonly, actions articulated a problem well, but didn't make a convincing case of what should be done, or had no sense of urgency, failing to explain why taking action now could made a difference.
- 41% of actions were properly supported by good background material. Many had good background, but failed to present it well, or link it together with the action.
- 29% of actions showed how supporter action was helping, or gave chances for supporters to feed into the campaign.
- 62% sent a thank you email, 32% sent one of good quality.
- 31% of organisations sent any kind of follow-up within a month of taking the action.

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 reviews[1] 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

This document is one of three separate research initiatives, which together form the 2010 eCampaigning Review:

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

The full reports are being sent to participating organisations in November 2010, and will be available for download, together with information about how to send feedback and comments, at: ecampaigningreview.com from March 2011.

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 organisation's e-campaigning activity and thus is a good candidate for a cross-sector comparison. 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] Duane Raymond of FairSay has conducted over ten private e-campaigning reviews for UK and international organisations.

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

Online action - web content which calls on the reader to do something using their computer to further a cause.

2.2 The e-action review

The e-action review looked at online campaigning actions from an end user's perspective. It covered 82 actions in total, 68 from organisations based in the UK, 11 from organisations campaigning explicitly with an international supporter base and 3 others which volunteered to take part (from Canada, Germany and Italy).

For the purposes of this study, online actions, or e-actions, are defined as web content which calls on the reader to take a specific action, immediately, using their computer, to further a cause e.g. calling for a change in government policy, or for a corporation to change its behaviour in some way. A call to go and lobby a local supermarket in person would not be included, but a call to download and post a letter to them would be.

Where an organisation's website offered more than one campaign, the one presented first, or offered as the highest priority action, has been reviewed. Actions were carried out during July and August 2009.

The focus is quite narrowly on the quality of execution of online actions, so should not be seen as an assessment of the campaign as a whole. A weak action may be very successful if it is timely, or well-promoted, or simply captures public imagination, and a strong one may do poorly if the reverse is the case.

3 General Findings

3.1 Examples: the top performers

Almost all the actions were doing some things well, but the following are the 5 actions which scored highest (20 or more out of a possible 22 points) overall.

This is not a list of the best actions anyone has done this year (they may not even be the best actions these organisations have presented!) but they are the ones included in the review which performed best against the criteria used.

Open Doors www.opendoors.org.uk
'Right to believe' petition to the UN
The call to action is clear and well-explained with supporting video, relevant case studies and background information. Petition numbers are published to the action and thank you pages. A well-written, well laid out thank you message contains ideas for further action.

Campact www.campact.de
Petition against government plans to stop the withdrawal from nuclear power.
Excellent supporting video explains the call to action, and clearly labelled background information supports it. Includes information on petition numbers and number of tweets and shares.

UNISON www.unison.org.uk/million/
Million Voices for public services
This comment petition gathering opposition to the UK government's programme of spending cuts includes striking video and visuals, local information and a constantly updated display of supporter comments.

Oxfam GB www.oxfam.org.uk
Lift the Gaza blockade
This email action to UK government minister clearly explains what the target can do, why it is important and provides simple, authentic-sounding draft email text. Two levels of background information are available, all linked back to the action, and a clearly-related offline follow up action is promoted on the thank you page.

Leonard Cheshire Disability www.actionforaccess.org
Action for Access survey
Rather than a simple online action, this site provides tools to enable a user to contribute to a survey of the quality of disability

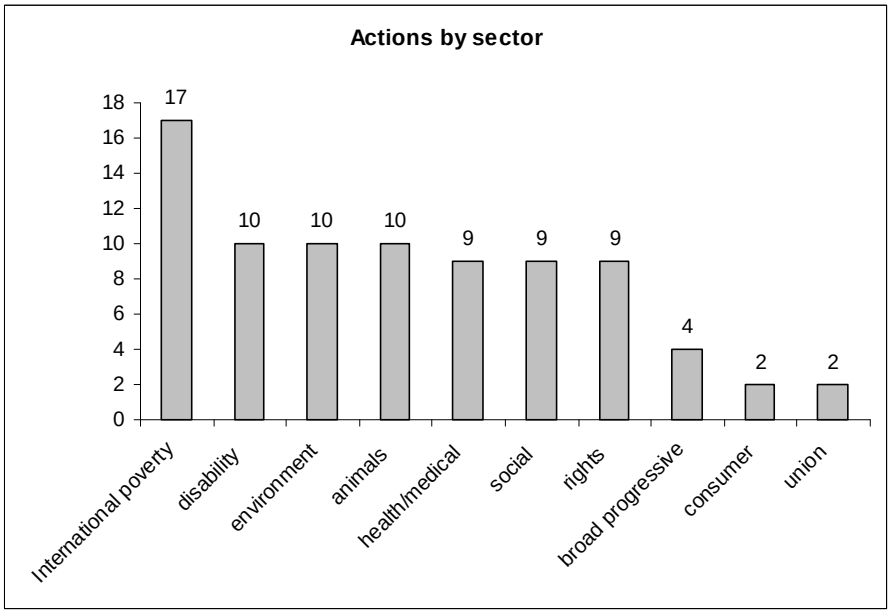
Did you know?
Even the highest rated e-actions don't implement all the possible best practices. If they did they'd perform better. To get help improving your e-actions email: duane@fairsay.com or jess@jess-day.co.uk

access in individual local businesses, and also to use this info to work with businesses to improve. The tools are straightforward to use and the objectives are clear.

3.2 Who is campaigning?

The way of selecting the sample (see Annex 1) means that the study has mainly focused on larger organisations.

The campaign actions considered came from a range of sectors.



4 Overall performance

Actions were rated on a range of criteria, using a scale of 0-2 for each one, adding up to a total possible score of 22. See below for further notes on methodology.

The overall average score was 13.8. One e-action scored the full 22 points (Open Doors).

Actions which did not collect an email address (e.g. download letter) inevitably scored poorly, as they were unable to follow up at all. However these actions mostly performed poorly in other areas too, suggesting that in general these organisations are not merely lacking resources, but also expertise and/or priority for online campaigning.

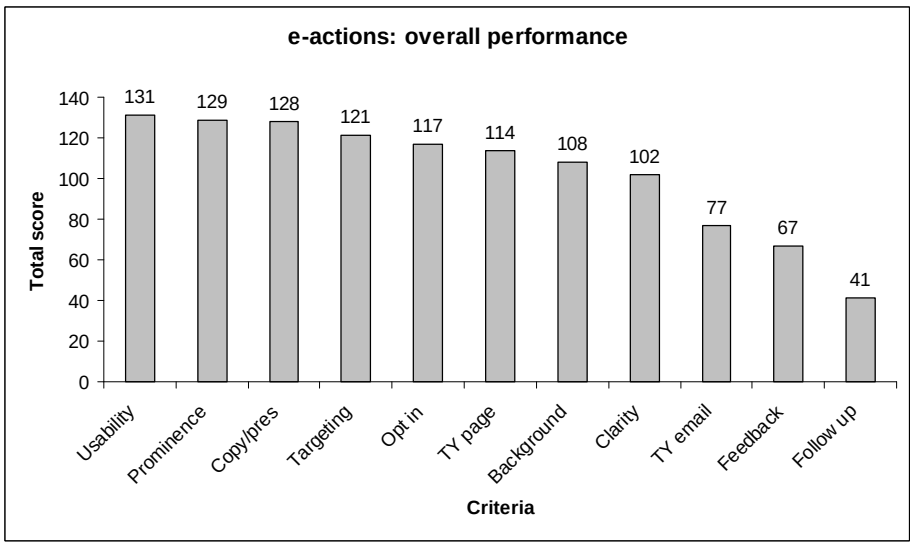
Campaigning organisations need to do more to work with their supporters. The weakest areas were all about communication and feedback.

4.1 Best and worst performing areas

Each criterion is scored out of a possible total of 162 (ie if every action had scored 2).

Most actions were straightforward to use, easy to find on the organisation's website and well written and presented.

The weakest areas were all around communication with supporters – sending a good quality thank you email, including information about supporter activity on the site, or in emails, and follow-up communication.



See below for more detail on the individual areas.

Get e-campaigning training
FairSay's e-campaigning training courses can help you identify ways to increase your email and e-action effectiveness. Find out more. Email duane@fairsay.com or visit http://fairsay.com/training

4.2 Primary campaigners

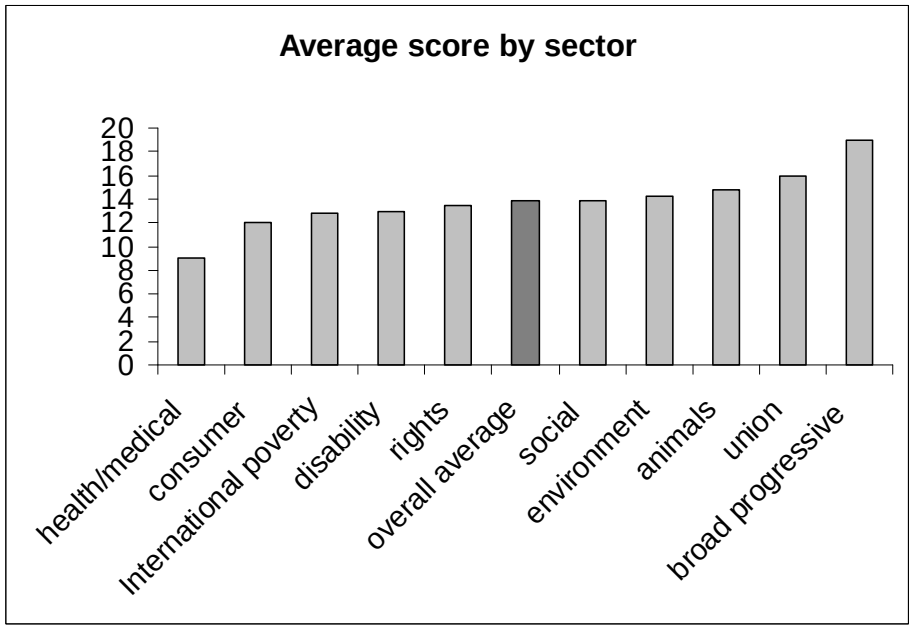
43% of the organisations can be classed as 'Primary campaigners' which exist purely or primarily to campaign. These organisations perform better overall, with an average score of 14.9, against 13.1 for other organisations, though perhaps not as much as one might expect.

Their actions were less likely to be very weak: accounting for only 20% (3 of the 15) organisations scoring less than 10. Over half 57% (16 of the 28) actions scoring 17 or more were from primary campaigners.

4.3 Sector

Unions, environment, animal and social organisations performed above the average. Union actions were rated very poorly last year.

By sector, as last year, the best performers are, unsurprisingly, the broad progressive online campaign specialists (e.g. Avaaz, 38 de.g.rees) who gather a large supporter base to campaign online on a range of issues.



Unions, environment, animal and social organisations performed above the average – interestingly union actions were rated very poorly last year.

International poverty, health and medical and consumer organisations performed worst overall, though six in these cate.g.ories scored 18 or more.

This is most likely an issue of resources, as organisations in these cate.g.ories are likely to have large programmes, and the most successful in these cate.g.ories are all larger organisations

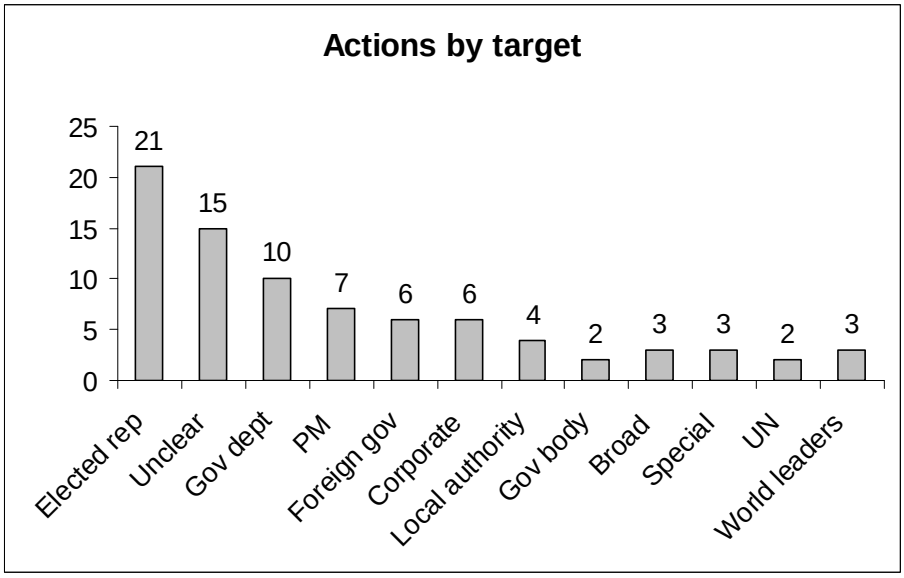
or coalitions. International poverty organisations were among the stronger performers last year – this year's sample included more small organisations, which may account for the difference.

4.4 Location

Actions from global campaigners scored an average of 14.7 against an overall average of 13.8. The 11 global organisations included are working on a large scale, three-fifths of them (9 out of 11) primarily campaigners, so stronger performance from them is not surprising.

5 About the campaign actions

5.1 Campaign target types



15 actions had no clearly explained target.

The majority of actions (60%) targeted specific government authorities in some form: 26% (21) to elected representatives such as MPs, 12% (7) the Prime Minister, 12% (10) another government minister or department, and 7% (6) a representative of a foreign government.

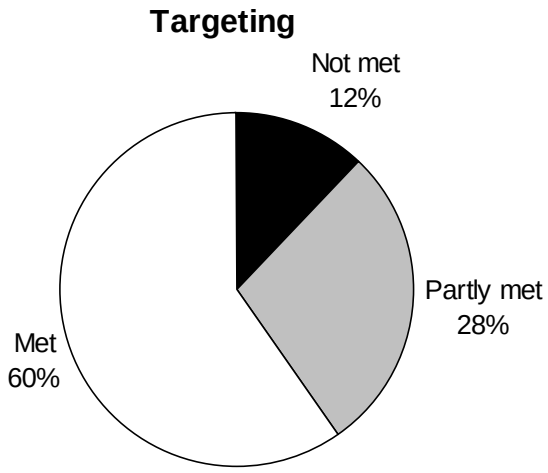
Worryingly, 18% (15) had no clearly explained target. While some of these actions were broad-based 'Join the campaign' actions, a supporter should still have a clear idea of who their support can be used to influence and how.

Elected representatives accounted for a lower proportion of actions than last year (26%, rather than 38%). This may be accounted for by the fact that actions were reviewed only a few months after a General Election in the UK.

The spread of targets was broader than last year, with more actions looking at local authorities (local councils and Primary Care Trusts), two enabling supporters to target specific businesses relevant to them (Which?, Leonard Cheshire Disability) and one collecting messages of support (Liberty).

5.2 Target rationale

The actions were evaluated according to whether they made it clear who was being targeted, why, and how they had the power to effect change.



This was a strong area, with 60% of actions performing well. Worryingly though, ten (12%) actions were very weak on this point, either failing to communicate who the target of the action actually was, or why and how the target could make a difference.

One action asked people to contact PM Gordon Brown, and another referred to the 'forthcoming election', three months after a change of government!

5.3 Devolution in the UK

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.

Many UK organisations are campaigning on issues such as health, agriculture, education or housing which are now dealt with by the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, rather than by the central UK government in Westminster. 32% (26) of the UK actions reviewed dealt with devolved issues.

Devolution presents significant campaigning challenges, including how to present actions so that users are clear about what they should do and who they should contact. Some organisations are specific to one administration (Advocates for Animals, Play England), or have separate web content for the devolved nations (NDCS). Many though, were struggling with the challenge of communicating via a single site.

In general, organisations are still struggling with the communication challenges of devolution, with only just over a third (38%, 10) doing well. A quarter (27%, 7) were really doing poorly. This is better than during the General Election, when over half (56%) performed poorly.

Communicating a compelling call to action and creating several different routes through an action is clearly a challenge, but

Good practice

National Autistic Society's action was for England only, but handled devolution well with clear labelling at every point, and indications of what else users could do.

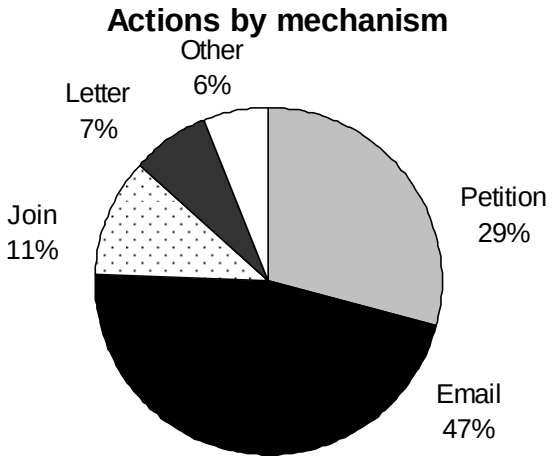
British Heart Foundation supplied different text highlighting the relevant calls to action for each nation.

several organisations were proving it could be done well. (British Heart Foundation, National Autistic Society, Shelter)

If organisations dealing with these issues want to deliver real change on the ground, they need to be more effective in helping their supporters to engage with devolved administrations.

They also risk alienating and offending supporters. One organisation simply posted 'PLEASE NOTE: Due to devolution this action can only be sent to English local authorities' next to the form. The least supporters deserve is a proper explanation, even if there is no alternative action to direct them to.

5.4 Action mechanisms



The most common type of action was a letter or email to an individual – 54% of actions in total, most of which were emails, down from 64% last year. The majority (89%, or 34 out of 38) of emails allowed, and normally encouraged, the user to edit the content. Two organisations had fixed emails that users could add a paragraph to (Consumer Focus, Guide Dogs), one had a non-editable email (BUAV). Only one asked users to compose their own email (Equality Trust).

Good practice

WWF International's 'Roar for Tigers' petition allowed users to upload a picture or sound file.

CTC's action calling on the Royal Mail to 'keep posties cycling' asked supporters to print and send their letter through the post – recognising this is a better way to deal with this particular target.

Petitions were slightly more popular than in 2009, accounting for 39% of actions, against 26% last year. This is in line with the findings of the eCampaigning Review survey.

There were 5 'enhanced' petitions (Oxfam International, CARE, Abortion Rights Group, PLAN UK, WWF International,). The first two used voice capture technology, the others allowed users to upload images, and in the case of WWF, sound and video files.

Platforms 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:

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c) Training
d) Advanced set-up

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This year there were more other kinds of action, including two contributing information (Mind, Leonard Cheshire Disability) and one 'share on social networks' (Plan International). NB Many other actions prompted users to share the action after taking it, but only one used sharing on a social network as the primary campaign action in itself.

5.5 Platform

Two hosted services (Advocacy Online and iParl) accounted for 50% of the actions (40), with Advocacy Online being by far the most popular, hosting 47% (38). No actions were found using de Havilland or Political Wizard, which were in use last year. No sites were found encouraging users to go to Campaign Central or Louder.org.

Most of the others were using some kind of bespoke interactive tool. Only one action used the 'write to them' site, which is not really designed for co-ordinated campaigning and does not enable organisers to contact supporters. The No 10 Downing Street Petition site, used by some organisations last year, has now closed.

7% (6) of actions encouraged users to send a letter. Two (Marie Stopes and MS Canada) provided a downloadable template, three encouraged supporters to write their own, one (CTC) used a form to generate a printable letter.

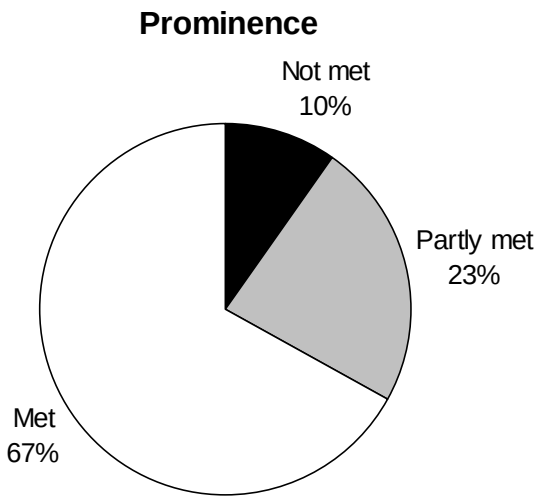
6 Supporter experience

6.1 Prominence

Good practice

Mencap's homepage uses high-impact, emotive video to promote the priority campaign.

Age UK's home page 'carousel' allows four different features to be strongly presented with high-impact visuals.



Is the action easily found, and well-promoted on the organisation's website?

Most actions performed well on this measure (67%, up from 59% last year), with actions clearly flagged up either on the home page or a clearly-visible campaigns home. This may be much easier to deliver for organisations with campaigning as their primary purpose, but plenty of more complex organisations (e.g. RSPCA, CAFOD, Macmillan) succeeded in balancing campaigning with their other messages online.

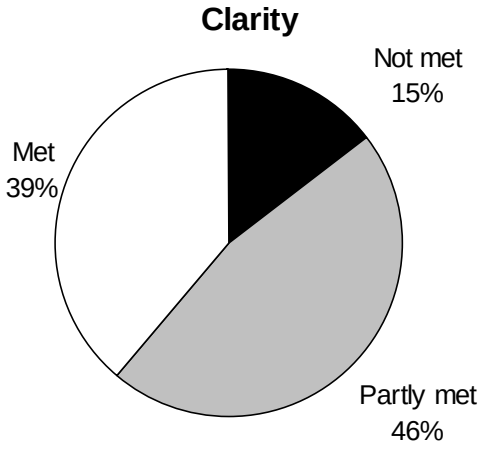
Only a tenth of actions were genuinely hard to find. This is a big improvement on last year, when a fifth were hard to track down.

This may be partly explained by the widespread use of home page 'carousels' which allow several different features to be given prominence on the organisation's home page.

The growth of social networks and other promotional channels means that visibility on the organisation's website may not be that significant in promoting an action, but a clear journey to the action should certainly help.

6.2 Clear and compelling?

Has the action been thought through? Is there a clear and convincing 'theory of change' explaining not only why the issue matters, but how it could be made better, and why now is a good time to take action?



It is concerning that only 39% of actions really did well on this measure. Most commonly, actions articulated the problem well, but didn't make a convincing case of what should be done, or had no sense of urgency, failing to explain why taking action now could made a difference.

A very common failing, accounting for many of the 'partly met' assessments, was hiding crucial information about what should be done in the email or letter message to the campaign target. This is pretty patronising to the supporter, assuming that they are either not interested, or not capable of understanding.

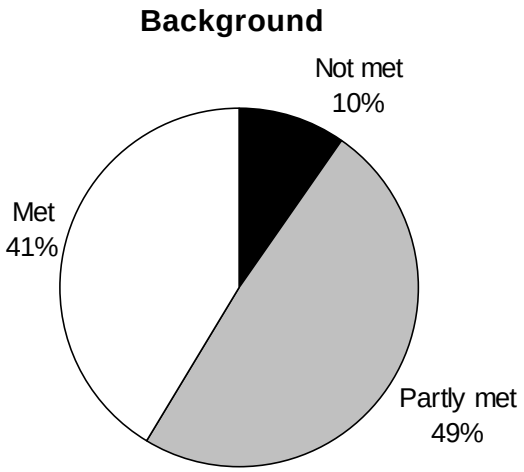
A simple, natural-sounding text, containing key points, is likely to be more convincing to the target. It is also more likely to be edited by the user to make it more authentic.

Other organisations provided sample message text which was overly technical. An effective and well-planned campaign will be talking to most campaign targets in other ways, such as briefings or letters to ministers etc – this is a more appropriate channel for detailed technical points.

One action had no proposals for change at all, and referred to the 'forthcoming election' in July. (The UK General Election took place in May.)

6.3 Background information

Is the end-user provided with appropriate, high-quality, persuasive, readily-accessible background information?



Good practice

Robin Hood Tax campaign's website made a potentially difficult technical issue accessible with video, quick facts and thorough questions and answers.

Rainforest Action Network provided different levels of well-written background information on their palm oil action, including case studies, policy documents and a video documentary.

It is important that an organisation can provide information which convinces both supporters and targets that they know what they are talking about, and are an authoritative source of information on the subject. It's also vital that campaign supporters are able to adequately understand the issue. Failing to provide good background information risks alienating more 'discerning' campaigners, and misses the chance to develop casual supporters into informed advocates for a cause.

Campaigners are perhaps concerned to get the maximum number of people down a narrow funnel without 'distractions' from the path to action. But failing to enable people taking the action to be properly informed about it risks undermining the credibility of a campaign.

The most successful actions from this point of view provided users with a range of levels of detail to support the case for action: simple, compelling action copy/content, supported by straightforward, specifically-written background explanations/FAQs (linking clearly back to the action), plus further detailed research where relevant, often presented as downloadable PDF documents. 41% of organisations performed well on this measure – this is comparable with 2009. Video is being used increasingly widely to present background information such as case studies.

Ten organisations provided really thin background, or weak evidence that they were speaking from a position of knowledge.

The most common error, frustratingly, were websites which had plenty of relevant background information, often of very good quality, but failed to link it together with the actions, leaving highly-motivating campaigning copy standing unsupported, quite unnecessarily. This also meant that anyone looking for more background was unable easily get back to the action.

Others provided good action copy and links to PDFs, but nothing in-between.

High quality background material may be a resource issue – once the policy research and the action itself are in place, campaigners may struggle to get the time or budget to produce specifically-written material to bridge the gap between the two.

Good practice

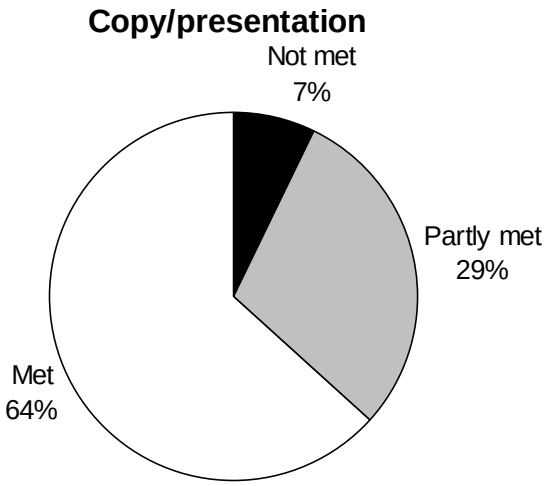
Mencap's high-impact 'Getting it right' campaign video was well-integrated into the site, and led naturally into the action.

Water Aid 's copy and outstanding video for the 'Dig toilets not graves' action struck the right (difficult!) balance between toilet humour and making a serious point.

WWF International's Roar for Tigers action had excellent, well-presented copy, friendly and accessible without being trivial.

6.4 Copy and presentation

Is the need for action clearly presented in appropriate, motivating language, with supporting imagery etc?



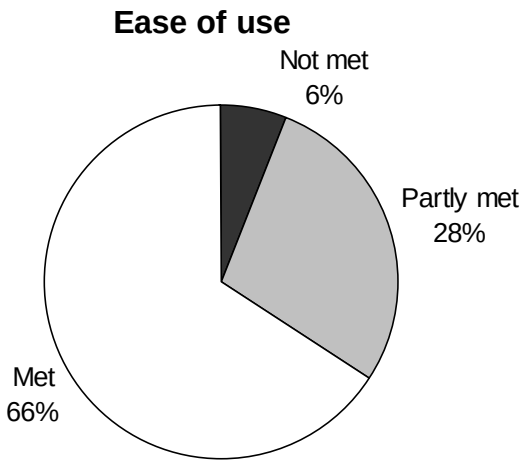
This area was one of the highest scoring overall, scoring 127 out of a possible 162. 65% of actions presented the issue in clear copy, well laid out and presented. There were also some good uses of video (Mencap, Rethink, Unison, Open Doors).

Problems included jumbled presentation, graphics which didn't render properly and videos which were embedded in the page at too small a size to view properly. Where copy was weak, this was usually because it was too dry or contained too much technical detail in the wrong places, e.g. talking about an EDM without explaining what it is, and why it might further the campaign. One

had copy which was trying too hard to be funny to properly communicate the issue.

6.5 Ease of use

Is the process straightforward for the end-user?
NB This looks only at ease of use for an average end-user, not at issues of accessibility or browser compatibility.



Good practice

38 degrees' campaign action had letter-writing tips and points to make displayed alongside the action text box.

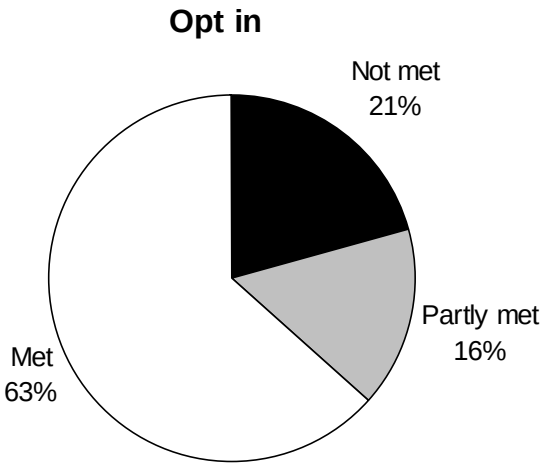
Generally, this was also a high-scoring area, with best practice fairly widespread. 66% (54) actions had a straightforward process, with well-written instructions, labelling, helpful error messages etc. Layout and design supported the process, with decent sized font, good contrast and copy in the right places.

Problems

- Two actions didn't work at all and just returned repeated error messages. Neither organisation responded when the problem was reported.
- One action had a very difficult interface, which loaded in unexpected places in the page.
- One suggested writing a letter, but provided no guidance as to what to include.

6.6 Opt in for future contact

Does the action ask for consent to contact, in the correct form?



An email list is a cost-effective way of building a network of campaign supporters. In general, the only actions which failed to collect email addresses and permission to contact in the future were those where this was not possible, i.e. downloadable letters.

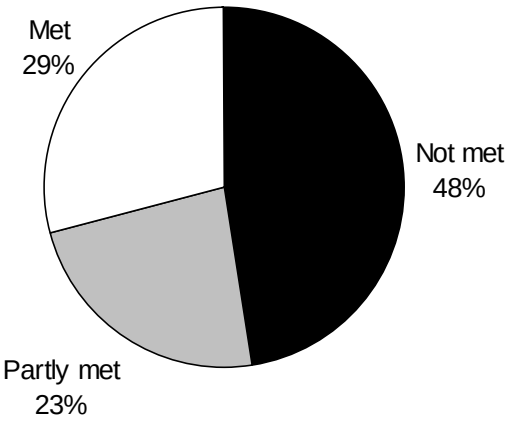
51% (35) of those that did capture an email address required the user to make an 'active tick' to approve future contact. 20% (14) had a prechecked tick box, two used yes/no radio buttons and two directed users to a separate sign up form for email contact.

22% (15) of those that did capture an email address treated taking action as an automatic opt in – in most cases explaining that this was the case, and making it clear that users can opt out at any time. A few collected an email address with neither an opt in, nor any information on how the address will be used.

6.7 Feedback loop

Is the organisation feeding campaign information back in some way so that supporters can see what they are achieving? Can campaigners see ways to feed into the campaign itself?

Feedback



Along with follow up, this was a very weak area, with nearly half (48%) of organisations failing to include any information on the site, or in emails, about how supporters were making a difference, or how supporters could feed in.

More sophisticated sites were able to build in counters, tickers or other gadgets, but others were doing this without technical fixes.

Good examples:

- Many organisations provided an email address and encouraged supporters to send responses from the target back to the campaign team.
- Abortion Rights campaign and National Housing Federation published a list of MPs who have expressed support.
- Several organisations included counters showing how many people have taken the action.
- Some actions enable people to leave comments on the action page itself (Robin Hood Tax Coalition, War Child, Unison).
- Some actions included user-generated imagery (WWF International, Greenpeace UK).

Good practice

CAFOD's site included a counter of the number of actions taken, a gallery of photos taken at local actions, and an email address to send responses from MPs.

World Development Movement's action included feedback and supporter comments from a previous action.

Greenpeace UK's Beyond Oil action encouraged users to redesign the BP logo to convey the problems of oil pollution.

6.8 Thank you page

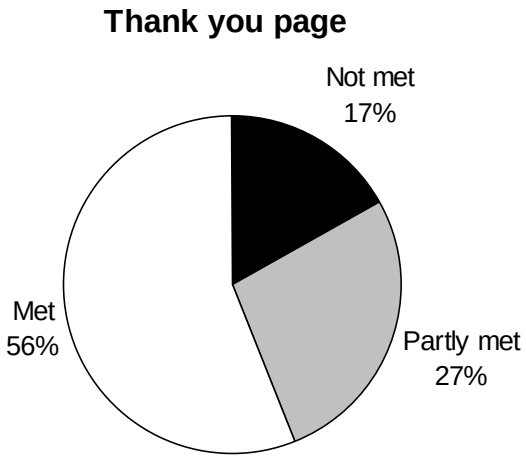
Are users delivered to a specifically-written, appropriate thank you page?

Good practice

38 degrees offered a donation form on the thank you page with the user's details pre-filled.

ActionAid provided compelling 'hunger headlines' for users to post to twitter.

Amnesty International UK included a positive case study on the thank you page, alongside a call to donate.



Most actions (83%) did provide a thank you page of some kind, with 57% making good use of this free chance to communicate with users while they are receptive.

This is a significant improvement on last year, when only 72% were providing a thank you page at all, and only 41% one of a good quality.

The best thank you pages were specifically written for the action, reinforcing key messages and including prompts to:

- send to a friend (28%)
- other online actions (15%)
- share on social media (13%)
- further reading about the campaign (10%)
- support the campaign by donating (9%)
- send any responses from the target back to the organisation (7%)
- support the campaign offline, e.g. order pack or attend an event (4%)

More detailed links and information demand time and resources to generate and to keep up to date, but this is a chance to reinforce campaign messages, or ask for further action, which organisations should not miss.

Interestingly, only 3 of the thank you pages (4%) took the chance to reiterate the key campaign messages. Since a key objective of most campaigns is increased knowledge and understanding of

Strategic thank-you pages
Most of thank-you pages are not used strategically. Yet they are one of the most important elements of an e-action because only people who have just participated see them.

FairSay can help you improve your thank-you pages and other e-action elements with:

e) Hands-on support
f) Review of current usage
g) Training
h) Advanced set-up

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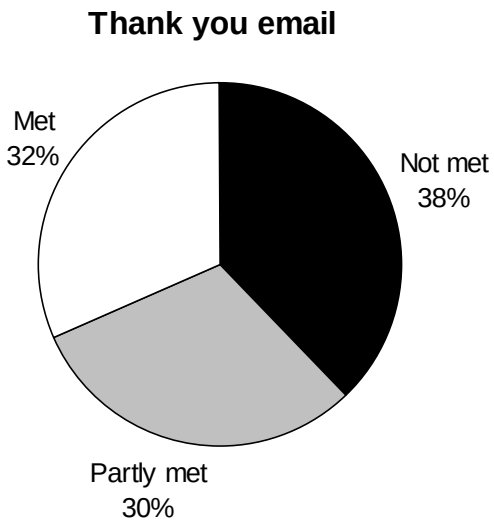
the issue among the public, this is a surprising missed opportunity.

Most of the 16% (13) actions which failed to provide any kind of thank you page were of course ones where this was not possible e.g. – letter downloads, and most of the remainder had technical problems. Only two failed to provide a proper thank you page at all when this would have been possible – down from 11 last year.

Weaker thank you pages generally just acknowledged the action and failed to prompt the user to do anything further. One (Greenpeace UK) contained links to a competition which had closed. But while last year there were several poorly written pages, or pages with broken links, there were far fewer of these kinds of errors this year.

6.9 Thank you email

Are users sent an appropriate thank you email?



This was one of the weakest areas overall, with only 62% (50) of actions sending a thank you message of any kind. This is a slight improvement on last year. The best examples (32% or 26) made creative use of this opportunity to engage with supporters with well-written copy inviting further action.

31 actions sent no email at all, though over half (57% or 17) of these had collected email addresses and permission to contact, so had no reason not to send a thank you. One sent an empty email and one just a copy of the user's own message with no thanks.

Thank you emails contained:

Good practice

Open Doors' thank you email provided prayer ideas and links to printable resources for further campaign action.

Oxfam International's thank you email provided links to further information about the campaign.

Greenpeace UK's thank you email provided a clear and motivating reiteration of the campaign messages and explanation of next steps.

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- Prompts to forward to a friend (20%)
- Reiteration of campaign message (14%)
- Prompts to share on social networks (12%)
- Prompts to forward responses from target (12%)
- Links to more information (10%)
- Prompts to donate (6%)
- Links to further actions (6%)

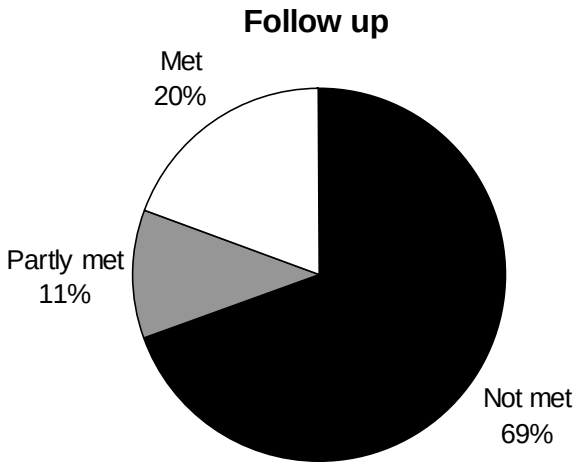
Weaker examples contained no links or ideas for further action, or errors. For example, one thanked the user for donating, when they had taken a campaign action. A number of thank you emails displayed poorly in plain text, though this was more of a problem with follow up (see below).

Many organisations used the same content and links in both the thank you page and the thank you email. The best examples made the most of the opportunity, for example encouraging people to share or forward to a friend immediately after the action, when they are fired up about the issue, then using the thank you email, which users may not see immediately, to draw them back in with further information or links to more action.

While an improvement on last year, it is still disappointing that so many organisations are wasting this chance to engage with supporters.

6.10 Appropriate follow-up communication

Do users get appropriate follow up communication from the organisation?



This was the area where actions performed least well overall. Only 31% of organisations sent any kind of follow-up at all within

Good practice

Leonard Cheshire Disability's e-newsletter contained directly relevant news and a chance for supporters to help shape next steps in the campaign.

Compassion in World Farming followed up with relevant news on the campaign, and information on related issues.

a month of taking the action. This represents no improvement at all on last year.

Running an effective email programme is extremely resource-intensive and time-consuming. However, email remains emphatically the best way of staying in touch with supporters (see practices survey), so there is plenty of room for improvement in this area, with big potential gains for campaigners. A lot of follow up emails displayed very poorly in plain text, meaning that recipients who choose to view their emails this way would be unable to read them.

Not all campaigns will generate enough new information for very frequent new actions or updates, but many organisations get round this with well-put-together e-newsletters (CIWF, CAFOD, Oxfam). At the other extreme, one organisation (PETA) sent 10 emails in the space of a month.

Only one organisation sent a welcome email.

7 Appendices

7.1 Annex 1: Sample selection for e-action review

As set out above, the comparison looked at one action only from each organisation.

1 Goal
38 degrees
Abortion Rights group
Action Aid
Action for Children
Advocates for Animals
Age UK
Alzheimer's Society UK
Amnesty International UK
Article 19
Avaaz
Breakthrough Breast Cancer
British Heart Foundation
BUAV
CAAT
CAFOD
Campact (Germany)
Cancer Research UK
Care International
Christian Aid
Christian Solidarity Worldwide
Church Action Against Poverty
CND
Compass
Compassion in World Farming
Consumer Focus
Consumers' Association
Countryside Alliance
CPRE
CTC
Diabetes UK
EDCM
Equality Trust
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Earth International
Greenpeace International
Greenpeace UK
Guide dogs for the Blind Association
IFAW
IFAW International
League Against Cruel Sports
Leonard Cheshire Disability
Liberty
Livability
Macmillan Cancer Support
Marie Stopes International
Mencap
Mind
MS Society of Canada
National Autistic Society
National Housing Federation
NDCS
Open Doors
Oxfam GB
Oxfam International
Parkinson's disease society
PCSU
Peta (UK)
Plan International
Plan UK
Play England
Rainforest Action Network
Refugee Action
Refugee Council
Rethink
Robin Hood Tax
RSPCA
SANDS
Save the Children
Shelter
Tearfund
UCODEP (Italy)
UNICEF UK
UNISON
War Child
Water Aid
Which?
Woodland Trust
World Development Movement
WSPA International
WSPA UK
WWF International
WWF UK

Annex 2: Methodology for e-action review

For the purposes of this study, online actions, or e-actions, have been defined as web content which calls on the reader to take a specific action, immediately, using their computer, to further a political cause; calling for a change in government policy, or for a corporation to change its behaviour in some way, e.g. a call to go and lobby a local supermarket in person would not be included, but a call to register online to do so as part of a group, organised via the internet, would.

Where an organisation's website offered more than one campaign, the one presented first, or offered as the highest priority action on the corporate website, has been reviewed. Coalition campaigns have not been included. Actions were carried out between 20 July and 20 August 2010.

Actions were categorised under the following headings:

End target of campaigning action

- Elected representatives
- Premier
- Government minister
- Other governmental
- Local authority
- Foreign government leaders or representatives
- Corporate
- No specific target (join campaign)
- Target unclear

Mechanism

- Petition
- Enhanced petition (e.g. photo petition, voicemail petition)
- Editable email to target
- Non-editable email to target
- Download and post letter
- Other

Interface

- Download and post letter
- Email from own email account
- Hosted service
- Other HTML form
- Rich media tool (flash)

Actions were then rated on a scale of 0-2 (equivalent to Not Met, Partly Met and Met) against nine criteria, as detailed below.

Easy to find

Is the action easily found, and well-promoted on the organisation's website?
2 – Linked from home page, or from a highly visible microsite, or from a campaign section home page which clearly indicates how to take top-priority action.
1 – Linked from a campaign home, not immediately clear where/how to take action and which is top priority.
0 – Hard to locate, or too many undifferentiated actions.

Targeting
Is it immediately clear who the target is, why they have the power to effect change, what the end user and target should do? For broad 'Join the campaign' actions, is it clear what the point of joining will be e.g. to take part in future actions. [For UK actions, does the action deal appropriately with devolution if relevant?]
2 – Target is appropriate. Action is an appropriate way to contact/ pressure them and messages to them are clear.
1 – Not clear why target can make the change, or what it is that user or target has to do, or why they should act now.
0 – Target is vague or inappropriate. Action allows messages to be sent to wrong targets, e.g. email Westminster MP about devolved issue.

Clarity
Have the target and action been thought through? Is the action clear and understandable to the end user? Is there a convincing 'theory of change' explaining why the issue matters, how it could be made better, and why now is a good time to take action.
2 – The call to action is clear, and makes a good, authoritative case for what should happen and why it matters to do it now.
1 – Fails to make the case clearly e.g. no timeliness, lack of clear objectives for change, or too much key information hidden in template letters.
0 – Action may be more providing campaigners with something to do…

Background
Is the end-user provided with appropriate, high-quality, persuasive, authoritative, accessible background information?
2 – Appropriate, persuasive and well-written background provided, with access to more detailed FAQs, analysis, policy papers etc for those who wish to make sure the action is well-researched etc.
1 – Adequate background info, or (more common) good background info which is not readily accessible from the call to action.
0 – Weak background info, e.g. call to action and policy paper and nothing in- between, or fails to deal with obvious questions.

Copy and presentation
Is the action clearly and compellingly written? Is the page well laid out, using appropriate imagery to support the text?
2 – Appropriate, well-written, focused, action-oriented copy. For email actions: editable subject line, suggested copy which users can edit if they choose. Encouragement to write own copy, with guidance on points to make. Images/graphics which help clarify or motivate and are not distracting.
1 – Missing or weak on any of the above.

0 – Missing or weak on more than one of the above.

Usability
Is the process straightforward for the end-user? Does the technology work as the user might expect?
2 – Process is clear and easy to use, with well-written instructions, labelling, helpful error messages etc. Layout and design support the process, with decent sized font, good contrast, copy in the right places etc.
1 – Missing or weak on any of the above, technical problems with make the action harder to use.
0 – Missing or weak on more than one of the above, technical problems which made it impossible to complete the action.

Add to email list
Does the action ask for consent to contact, in the correct form?
2 – Clear opt in boxes, with appropriate labelling.
1 – Opt in with poor labelling or explanation.
0 - No opt in.

Feedback loop
Is the organisation feeding campaign information back onto the site so that supporters can see what they are achieving? Can campaigners see ways to feed into the campaign itself?
2 – Campaign input is clearly visible on the site in a motivating way, e.g. comments, ticker showing number of emails sent, campaigner ideas adopted and used. Input is sought, e.g. send in your MP's response, contribute ideas.
1 – Some effort to feed back on campaign pages, or to get input from campaigners.
0 – No feedback. Organisation is just broadcasting.

Thank you page
Are users delivered to a specifically-written, appropriate thank you page?
2 – Thank you page with more information, encouragement to take secondary actions and/or encouragement to promote actions to friends or on networks.
1 – Appropriate thank you page.
0 – No thank you page, or generic thank you.

Thank you email
Are users sent an appropriate thank you email?
2 – Specifically (well) written confirmation email, delivered immediately, (including a copy of what the user has sent to the target, if an email action), with encouragement to take further action and/or reiteration of key campaign messages.
1 – Email confirmation.
0 – No confirmation.

Appropriate follow-up communication
Do users get appropriate follow up communication from the organisation?
2 – Clearly relevant (i.e. on the same or related topic) follow-up communication sent within 1 month.
1 – Contact within 1 month.

0 – No follow up within 1 month, or inappropriate follow up (e.g. a fundraising ask, or sales pitch.)

All actions were carried out in order to try and minimise disruption to campaigns and to targets' workloads. Downloaded letters were not posted. Where email and petition actions were carried out through Advocacy Online's e-activist system these were done in DEMO mode, so no email was sent to the target. Otherwise, email actions, where possible, were sent with all editable text removed, and the following text included instead. A range of postcodes were used so that no target received more than one message.

Subject: Test email – no action required.

My name is Jess Day. I'm carrying out a research project into online activism, reviewing the kinds of actions campaigning organisations offer online and how they work. This email was sent via an email action prompt on the XXXX website.

I'm doing my best to limit any confusion or impact on campaigns, and disruption to recipients, by trying to make it as clear as possible that these are test mails. I'm also using a range of postcodes to try and ensure I don't contact the same MP, MSP or AM more than once. Apologies for cluttering your inbox.

Many thanks,

Jess Day