



2009 eCampaigning Review

insights & benchmarks

Part 2: e-action review

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Communication with users – thank you pages, follow up emails, background information – are the key areas for improvement.

1 Summary

The online action review reviewed 84 e-advocacy actions on websites from UK, Canadian and international organisations.

Campaigners are largely offering easy-to-use actions, which are well presented and easy to find. The trend seems to be towards straightforward actions to specific targets, with fewer complicated rich media interfaces. Simple interfaces hopefully lead to more action and less distraction, and are presumably also easier to set up.

Many organisations are prioritising quality over quantity: nearly two-thirds (64%) of actions enabled or encouraged users to edit or write their own message to the target (rather than just sign a petition). Petitions remain popular though, especially with those with the largest reach.

We start to see more problems looking at actions in the context of a supporter's relationship with an organisation. Many otherwise strong online actions were let down by weak or disjointed background information, or thank you pages and emails which wasted the opportunity to build a relationship with a supporter.

Only 26% sent good quality thank you messages, and only 31% sent any follow-up within one month. Campaigners still seem to be better at asking people to do things than at thanking them or keeping them up to date.

Government authorities accounted for over three-quarters of campaign targets (77%), with 38% being elected representatives (eg MPs). Devolution is presenting significant challenges to many UK campaigners. 26% of UK actions dealt with devolved issues in some way, but few organisations were managing this well.

Environment and international poverty campaigning organisations performed best, unions and professional associations least well.

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 good performance levels and practices are or even what are good performance measures.

Individually, some organisations have addressed this by initiating or commissioning reviews 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 2009 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 available for download, together with information about how to send feedback and comments, at:

www.advocacyonline.net/ecr09

www.fairsay.co.uk/ecr09

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.
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

2.2 The e-action review

The e-action review looked at online campaigning actions from an end user's perspective. It covers 84 actions in total, 61 from organisations based in the UK, 15 in Canada, and 8 from organisations campaigning explicitly with an international supporter base. The sample includes all the organisations who volunteered to take part in the other parts of the 2009

eCampaigning Review, plus a range of others – see annex below on sample selection.

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 political cause eg 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. Coalition campaigns have not been included. Actions were carried out between 20 July and 17 August 2009.

3 Examples: the top performers

Almost all the actions were doing some things well, but the following are the 12 actions which scored highest (16 or 17 out of a possible 18 points) overall. This is not a list of the 12 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.

38 degrees

Email Chancellor of the Exchequer to call for action on the banking crisis.

Well written call to action, helpful list of points to make and writing tips. Relevant follow up with other actions to take.

Weakness – action for the target a little vague, and not much background on the issue at all.

Action for Children

Email your MP and ask them to support Early Day Motion calling for more targeted support for 7-13 year olds.

Well written, straightforward process, clearly presented.

Weakness – no follow up within 6 weeks.

Avaaz.org

Sign petition to UN Security Council calling for action to ensure freedom for the people of Burma.

Compellingly presented action. Clear promotion and prioritisation of actions on the home page. Persuasive copy, convincing

explanation of the need and the opportunity for change now. Nice welcome email, and plenty of relevant action-oriented follow-up communication. Weakness – detail on previous campaigning on Burma hard to find from the action, and not that much information on the issue.

Bliss

Email Health Minister and local health authorities to call for 1-1 nursing care for premature babies in Special Care Baby Units.

A simple and effective action. Online text and images are clearly linked together to make the case and provide convincing background. Target is clear and appropriate, the action is easy to understand and use, handling the complications of devolution elegantly, and offering users a follow-up action on the thank you page. Weakness – no thank you email, and no follow-up communication within one month.

CAFOD

Email government of Peru to call for indigenous rights.

Clearly presented, easy to use. 'Tell a friend' plus link to other actions on the thank you page. E-news within a month. Weakness – not much background on the issue.

Campaign for the Protection of Rural England

Email Minister to call for limits on greenfield development in SW England.

Easy to use, well-presented and explained. Long, but chatty and engaging e-newsletter sent within a month. Weakness – thank you email just confirms the action.

Christian Aid

Email Prime Minister Brown and President Obama to ask them to attend Copenhagen climate negotiations.

Powerful graphics, video, well-written action. Links to plenty of persuasive background information and research. Weakness – no follow up within a month.

Council of Canadians

Email county authorities to protest a planning decision to allow a landfill site which would affect an aquifer.

Clear call to action, persuasive and relevant. Thank you page provided a range of other ways to get involved. Follow up included updates on the issue. Weaknesses – excellent background information hard to find from the action page. Thank

you email just confirmed sign up to the email list, didn't mention the action at all.

Greenpeace UK

Join the campaign against Heathrow Airport expansion.

Innovative and appealing – rather than just joining the campaign, you apply to become co-owner of a plot of land on the development site. Thank you page encourages you to read more about the issue. Weakness – no proper thank you email (just a request to confirm email address) and no follow up within a month.

Oxfam GB

Join the 'Sort it, here and now' climate change campaign.

Clear copy, supported by an excellent range of background material, ranging from compelling case studies with video support, through online FAQs to downloadable research and policy documents. Thank you page provides 3 different follow-up actions, follow up communication by email is well-written and newsy, with a relevant call to action. Weakness – no thank you email.

Open Doors

Write to the Chinese Ambassador about treatment of North Korean refugees.

Simply and clearly presented, easy to use process, strong background. Weakness – not immediately obvious that you cannot send an email but have to print out and send your letter (presumably because there is no email address available.)

WWF UK

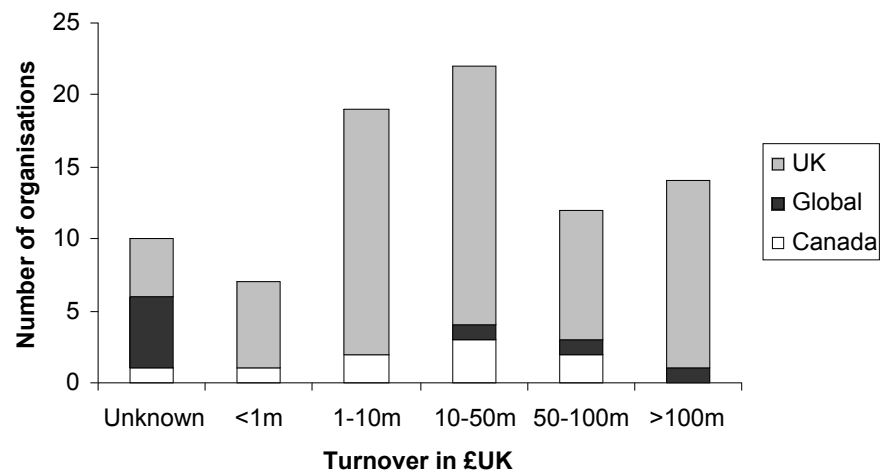
Sign petition to Prime Minister Gordon Brown calling for strong action on climate change.

Easy to find and easy to use. Clear explanation of the issue. Well-written thank you email, with links and key background information about the campaign and the organisation. E-newsletter with relevant articles within a month. Weakness – excellent background information inaccessible from the 'funnel'.

4 Who is campaigning?

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

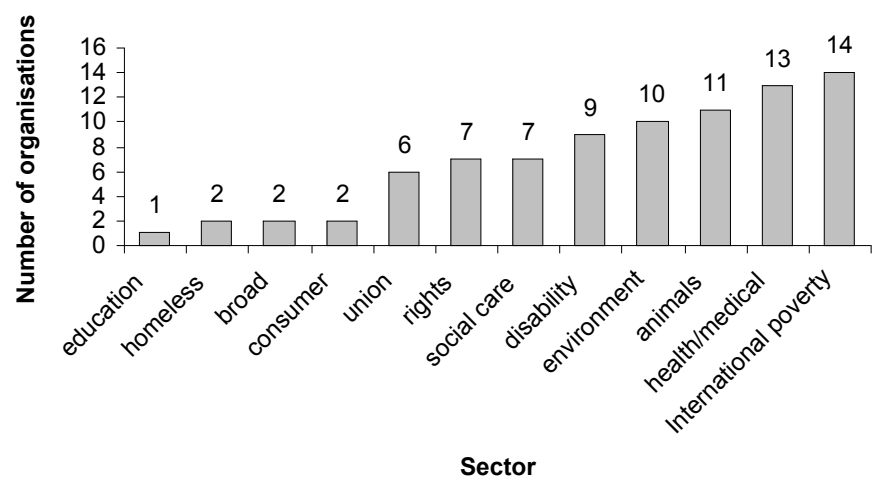
Figure 1: Actions reviewed by organisation turnover



The campaign actions considered came from a range of sectors.

Figure 2: Actions reviewed by sector

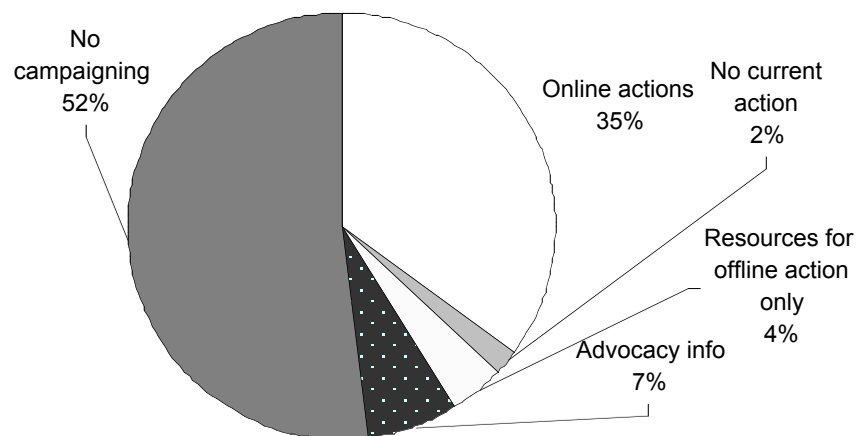
Just over one-third of the UK 100 biggest charities had an online action on their website.



For the UK, the comparison included looking at the websites of all the top 100 charities (as defined by the magazine Charity Finance).

Of the UK top 100 charities just over half (53) did no campaigning. Just over one-third had an online action on their website.

Figure 3: Top 100 UK charities' online campaigning



5 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 18. See below for further notes on methodology.

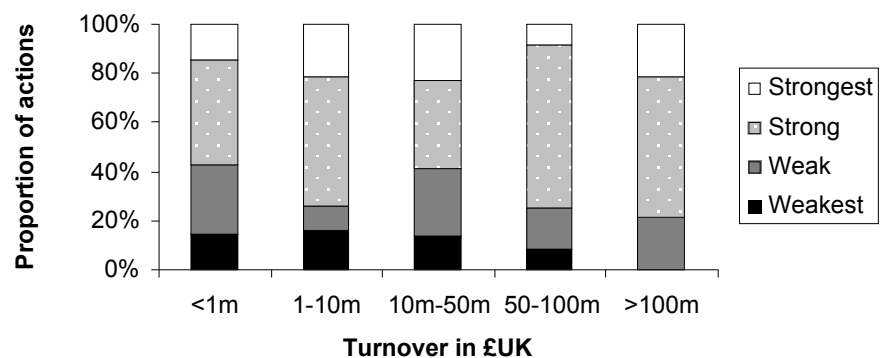
No e-action scored the full 18 possible points. Among the strongest (scoring 16 or 17) the most common weak points were weak or absent follow-up communication, and weaknesses in the background material presented to users (see more on background below.)

Actions which did not collect an email address (eg download letter) inevitably scored poorly, as they were unable to follow up at all. However, with few exceptions (Livability, WSPA and Liberty), these actions performed poorly in other areas too, suggesting that most of these organisations are not merely lacking resources, but also lacking in expertise and/or priority for online campaigning.

5.1 Size

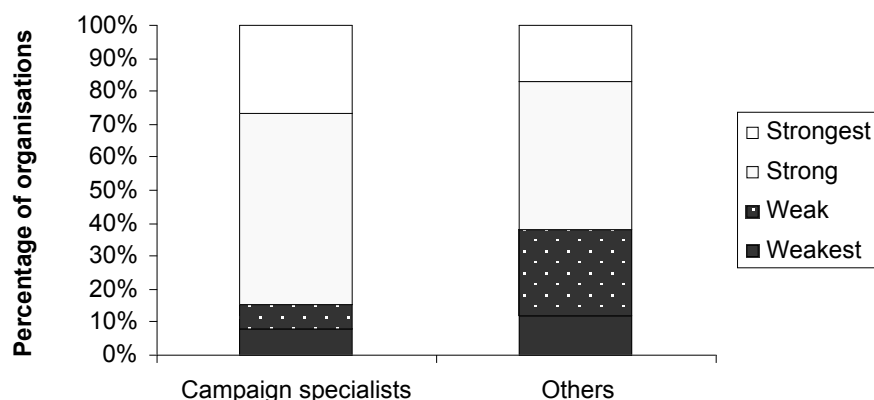
There is not a very strong correlation between income and action quality, though the biggest organisations (over £100 million/equivalent) account for relatively fewer of the weaker actions, with none rated in the weakest category.

Figure 4: Overall performance by organisation size



Large organisations may or may not, of course, give a high priority to campaigning. Splitting organisations into 'Primary campaigners' (which exist purely or primarily to campaign) and others, we do see better performance from the primary campaigners, with only 15% of actions (4 out of 26) falling in the weaker two categories, against 38% (26 out of 58) for the others. The four weakest performers of the primary campaigners are all organisations under £1m turnover.

Figure 5: Overall scores by specialism



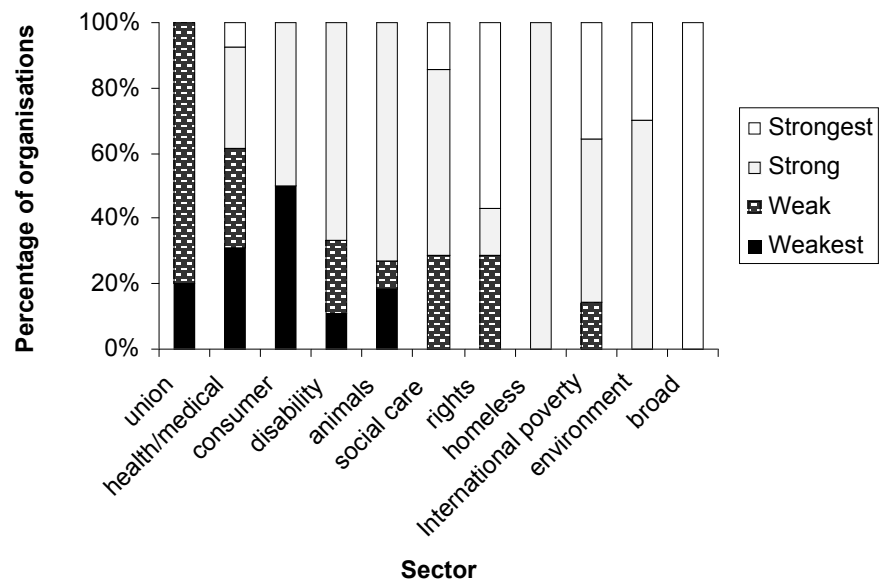
Environment and international poverty organisations performed best, unions and professional associations least well.

5.2 Sector

By sector, the best performers are, unsurprisingly, the online campaign specialist aggregators (Avaaz, 38 degrees).

Environment and international poverty sectors perform strongly – organisations in these sectors have led the way in online campaigning and benefit from greater experience and expertise. No actions from the environmental sector scored in the weaker two categories. 12 of the 14 actions from international poverty organisations (the largest sector reviewed) are in the strong or strongest categories. Disability, social care and health organisations perform relatively less strongly. This probably reflects the greater emphasis on service delivery in their structure and priorities.

Interestingly, unions/professional associations perform least well, with all five actions from this sector in the weakest categories. These organisations are not successfully transferring their undoubted abilities to mobilise and organise online, or at least not via their public websites.

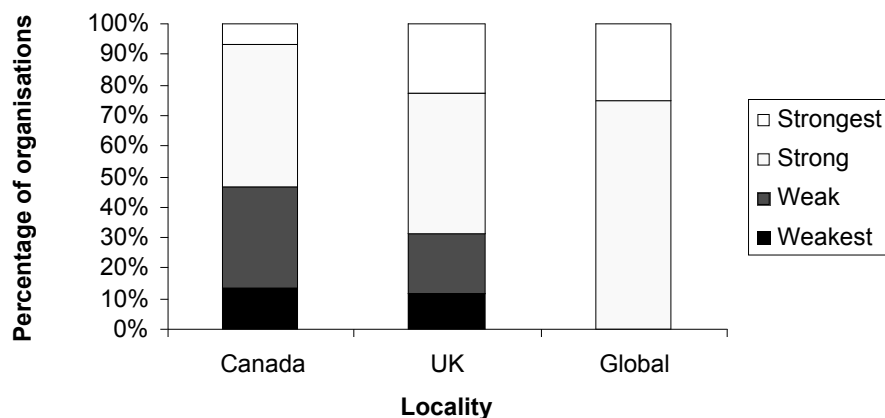
Figure 6: Score by sector

5.3 Location

Actions from global campaigners scored the most strongly, with all of them scoring in the stronger categories. The 8 organisations included work in different ways, some a single, international organisation (Avaaz), others having regional or national offices as part of a global structure (eg WSPA), some linking together organisationally separate national affiliates (eg Oxfam) and others in between. They are working on a large scale, three-quarters of them (6 out of 8) primarily campaigners.

UK organisations scored higher overall than Canadian with 69% (42 out of 61) in the top two categories as opposed to 53% (8 out of 15). The sector is much less developed in Canada than in the UK, and the political environment much less supportive of campaigning, with charity law placing tighter restrictions. This can also be seen in the small number of actions identified for review.

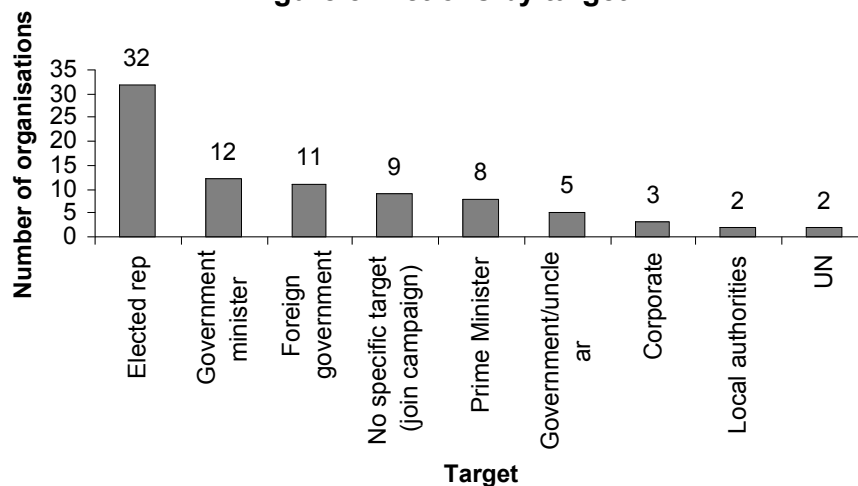
Figure 7: Score by locality



6 Campaign targets

Only 3 actions were aimed at a corporate target.

Figure 8: Actions by target



The majority of actions (77%) targeted specific government authorities in some form: 38% (32) to elected representatives such as MPs, 10% (8) the Prime Minister, 14% (12) another government minister, and 13% (11) a representative of a foreign government. 11% (9) were 'Join the campaign' actions with no specific target, and 6% (5) had no clear target, or a vaguely stated 'government' target. Only 3 actions had a corporate target.

Global actions were more likely to go to a specific government target. None of them asked users to contact their own government or representatives, and none were 'Join the

campaign' actions. 47% (7) of Canadian and 41% (25) of UK actions asked people to contact their representative.

6.1 UK – devolution

Many organisations are campaigning on issues such as health, planning, 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. This presents significant campaigning challenges, including how to present actions so that users are clear about what they should do and who they should contact. 26% (16) of the UK actions reviewed dealt with devolved administrations.

Some organisations are specific to one administration (SSPCA, Advocates for Animals), or have separate national entities (Age Concern). Most though, were struggling with the challenge of communicating via a single site.

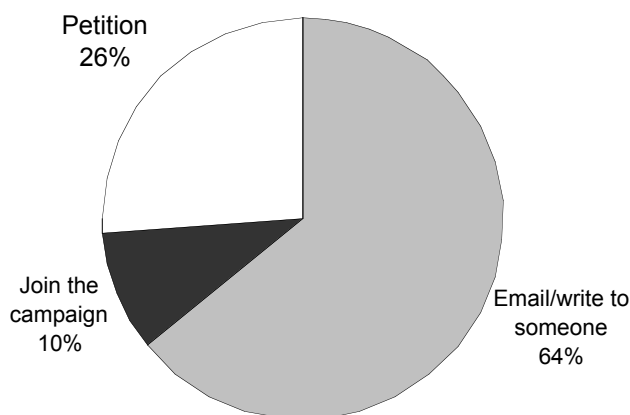
Problems included:

- an action which allowed a user to email a Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish MP about an England-specific issue (NHF),
- several actions which didn't tell you they were England-only until you tried to take the action, and gave no details of the equivalent situation in other places,
- one action which supplied a Welsh-language thank you page to users who had taken the action in English (Diabetes UK).

Many UK organisations are struggling with the complexities of campaigning on devolved issues.

7 Mechanism

Figure 9: Actions by mechanism



Good practice

Oxfam International's Big Promise widget allowed people to make their own promise while holding world leaders to account on commitments to the Millennium Development Goals. Users could display a widget on their social network profile and be 'nudged' by others until they reported they had fulfilled the promise – keeping people engaged in the campaign.

Greenpeace UK's campaign to stop Heathrow Airport expansion asked users not just to 'Join the campaign' but to become co-owners of a piece of land to help stop Heathrow Airport expansion.

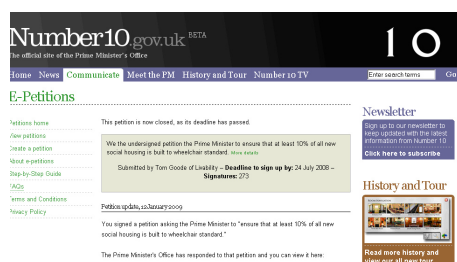
The majority of actions - 64% (54) - were email/letter actions to specific targets.

The vast scale of campaigns such as Make Poverty History has raised the bar for online petitions, but most organisations are simply not in a position to generate those kinds of numbers without the huge advertising and PR campaigns to support them.

Simple petitions and 'Join the campaign' actions (often a petition without a specific target) do remain popular though. Two UK organisations (Scope, WDM) prompted people to make specific pledges to change their own behaviour, making a simple petition more engaging and perhaps more convincing to the target. Two actions (Tearfund and WaterAid) described themselves as 'Email' actions but did not allow users to edit the text at all, and have been categorised as petitions.

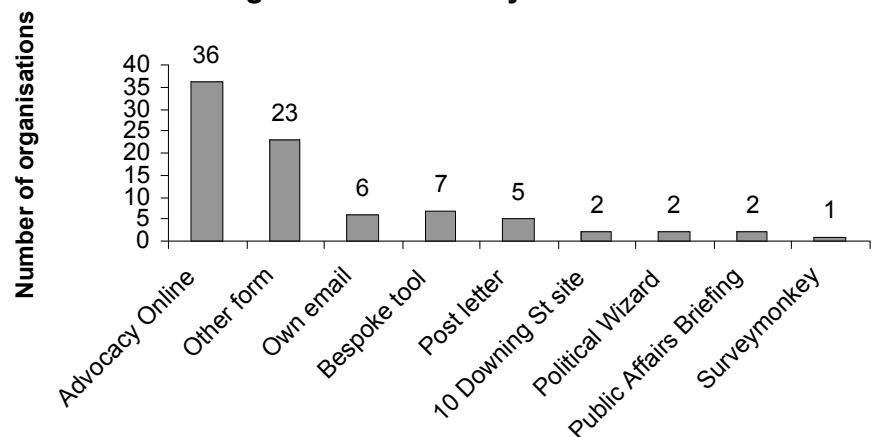
There were only 3 'enhanced' petitions (Oxfam International, WSPA, Save the Children UK) which contrasts with the popularity a few years ago of photo petitions, virtual crowds, avatars etc. Two of the 'enhanced petitions' were merely more 'fun' ways to sign up (thumbprints – Save the Children UK, and choosing a flower – WSPA), but the third, Oxfam International's 'Big Promise' widget was innovative.

The Canadian and global actions reviewed were all either petitions or email actions. Petitions were far more popular with global organisations, accounting for 75% of actions (6 out of 8). This can probably be related directly to their larger reach and mailing lists – petitions are more useful when you can generate very large numbers.



8 Interface

Figure 10: Actions by interface



In contrast with a few years ago, complicated visual interfaces and games did not seem to be widespread. Only one action (Water Aid) was integrated with a game, and only 8% (7) used Flash or other rich media for the action itself.

Four hosted services (Advocacy Online, Political Wizard, Public Affairs Briefing, Surveymonkey) accounted for 49% of the actions (41), with Advocacy Online being by far the most popular, hosting 43% (36). (NB this is not just sample bias – 51% of the online actions run by UK Top 100 charities (18 out of the 35) are run through AO e-activist.)

Only two actions used the UK's 10 Downing Street petition site, explained by its limited usefulness to a sustained campaign, as the organisers are not able to contact supporters. It's surprising therefore that one of the organisations using it is a charity with a turnover of £6m. (Livability).

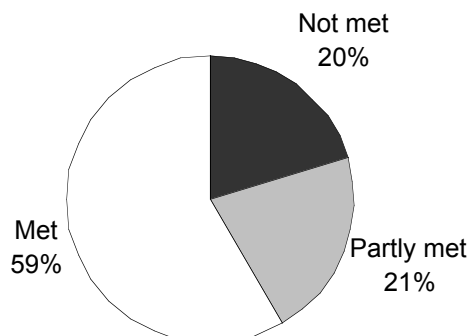
Good practice

The **Christian Aid** website has a clearly signposted campaign area 'Act now' which showcases places where you can take action immediately.

Mencap's campaigns home uses high-impact video to promote the priority action.

9 Easy to find

Figure 11: Easy to find

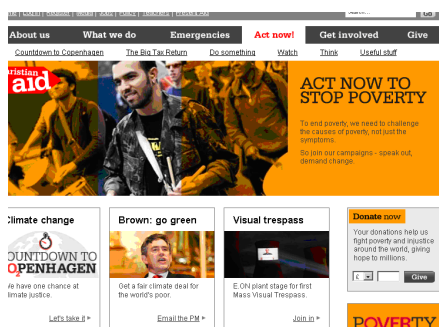


Is the action easily found, and well-promoted on the organisation's website?

Most actions performed well on this measure (59%), 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 (Mencap, Christian Aid, UNISON, Carers UK) succeeded in balancing campaigning with their other messages online.

Weaknesses included failing to indicate which campaign areas had actions users could take to support them, or failing to fully link campaign information and campaign actions together.

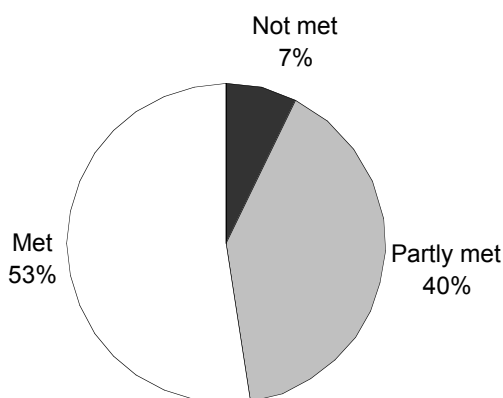
A fifth (17) of the actions were genuinely hard to find, for example hiding campaigns under headings such as 'media' or 'information'. One primary campaigning organisation (League against Cruel Sports) linked to the campaign from the home page, but failed to link onwards to the action from there.



10 Quality

Is it immediately clear who the target is, why they can make a difference, what the end user and target should do, why, and why now?

Figure 12: Quality



Good practice

The **RSPB's** Save our Seas action asked MPs to attend the First and Second Readings of a relevant Bill going through Parliament, making a clear case for why the target could make a difference right now.

The **David Suzuki Foundation's** action to MPs calling for a ban on harmful garden pesticides used the fact that two provinces had already brought in a ban to emphasise the opportunity for change.

This was another strong area – over half of actions performed well, and only 3 actions were in the weakest category.

The most serious problem was vagueness about who the action was aimed at. More common were weaknesses around timeliness, such as failing to explain convincingly that taking action now can make a difference. Six organisations presented actions relating to deadlines/events which had passed eg writing to MPs about a political process or consultation which had closed. (Which?, Consumer Focus, Alzheimer's UK, RSPCA, RCN, Livability).

Many UK organisations are campaigning on issues which are now devolved to the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government or the Northern Ireland Assembly, and a number of organisations were struggling with the complexity this presents for campaigners – see 'Targets' for more on this point.

A couple of email addresses returned errors. This highlights the problems of keeping really complex databases up to date.

Good practice
Macmillan Cancer Care
made good use of video to support the case for action.

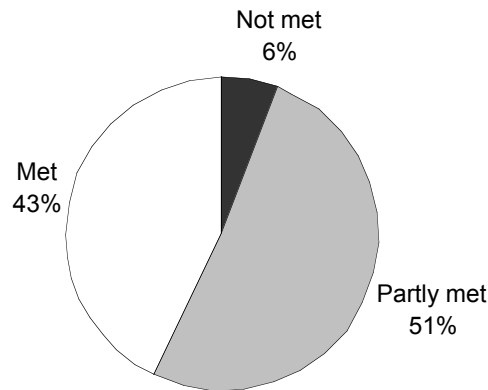
The **Bliss** website provided straightforward, well-written background detail, including updated information on official responses to the campaign so far. Crucially, all of it links back to the action at every stage.

The **Practical Action** site provides personal 'climate change diary' case studies, readable background, and detailed research as PDF downloads.

11 Background

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

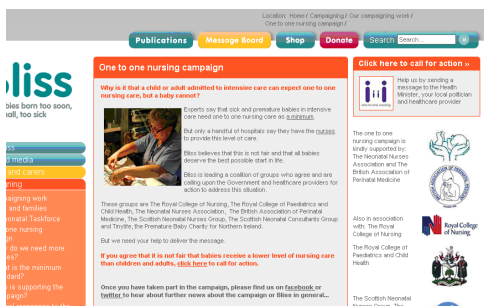
Figure 13: Background



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, usually presented as downloadable PDF documents. 43% of organisations performed well on this measure.

Only 5 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 (eg RSPB, CPRE, WWF UK, Canadian Cancer Society, Nature Canada). 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. (Marie Stopes, NHF), and one only provided links to detailed research after the user had taken the action (WaterAid). Another common problem was letters/emails which introduced new information, unavailable elsewhere (see Copy/Content below).



Campaigners are perhaps concerned to get the maximum number of people down a narrow funnel without ‘distractions’ to take action, but failing to enable people taking the action to be properly informed about it risks undermining the credibility of a campaign.

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.

12 Copy/content

Is the action itself clearly and compellingly presented?

Good practice

Mencap’s impactful ‘Changing Places’ campaign video was well-integrated into the site, and led naturally into the action.

Oxfam GB’s climate videos provided compelling support for the call to action with personal stories.

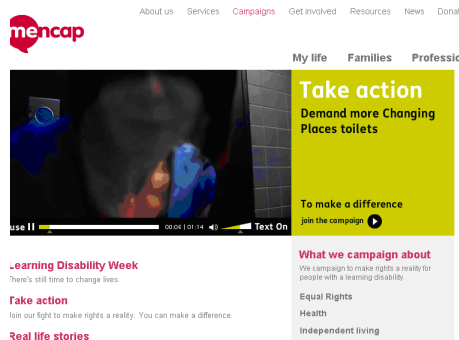
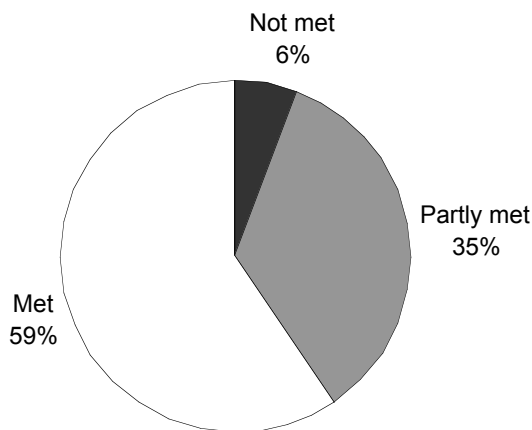


Figure 14: Copy and content



This area scored highest overall, with 59% presenting a clear argument for the importance of the issue. There were also some good (Mencap, Stroke Association, Macmillan, WSPA, Oxfam GB) uses of video material to support an action, and one disappointing one (UNISON).

Only 2 actions had serious problems. One had spelling errors and repetitions another didn’t really explain what the target was expected to do (Practical Action).

The most common weakness among email actions was an email/letter which contained far too much technical detail,

Good practice

Leonard Cheshire Disability provided straightforward, natural-sounding copy for the user to edit.

sometimes introducing important new information which the user has not even seen before deciding to take the action (NHF, PCSU, PETA). A simple, natural-sounding text, containing key points, is likely to be more convincing to the target, and is more likely to be edited by the user to make it more authentic.

An effective and well-planned campaign will be talking to most campaign targets in other ways eg briefings or letters to ministers etc – this is a more appropriate channel for detailed technical points.

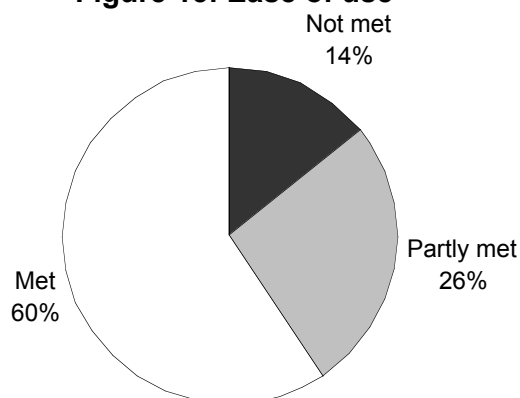
Another pitfall for campaigners is forgetting that the general public are not as engaged with the issue and the campaign as they are! One organisation (Mencap) sent a follow up email about UK party conferences with no explanation of what these were, why they were important and no reminder of what the campaign was about. Most people take campaign action as one thing they do in a busy life – you can't assume they will remember the details 6 weeks later. Another (Friends of the Earth International) assumed knowledge of climate change and of international talks processes.

13 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.

Figure 15: Ease of use



Generally, this was also a high-scoring area, with best practice fairly widespread. 60% (50) 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.

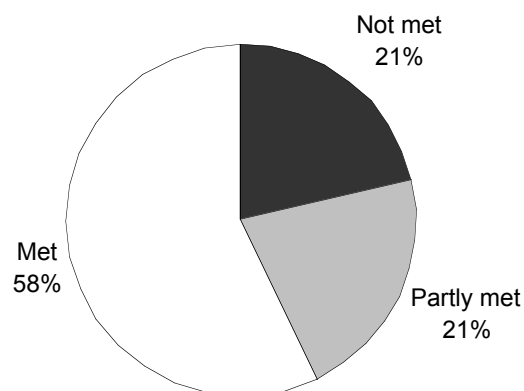
Most of the weaker scores were actions which asked the user to use their own email account, or print and download their own letter, but other actions also had processes which were more confusing. The two actions using Political Wizard had too much explanatory text, far from the point where it was relevant, making it hard to follow. One (UNICEF) had a confusing drop down list of constituency names, with some constituencies missing. Another (Livability) had a campaign microsite which was offline on both occasions it was checked.

This seems to be an area where size does matter, with the smallest organisations performing less strongly. Global organisations, all large organisations with a strong campaigning bias, performed best.

14 Opt in for future contact

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

Figure 16: Consent to contact



Good practice

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

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, ie downloadable letters, petitions via the 10 Downing Street petition site. One (PCSU) did not collect

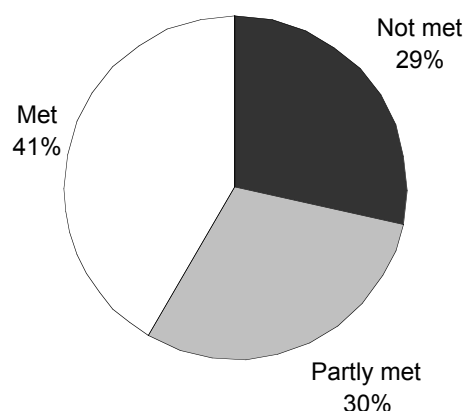
permissions – presumably because, as a union, it has its own database of members and has no strategy of what to do with other names. This is a sensible decision.

The majority had a straightforward consent for future contact. A few (Amnesty, NHF) take participation in the action as consent for future contact – while not outside the terms of the UK Data Protection Act this is not best practice. One (Age Concern) had three different opt-in options, which were unclear.

15 Thank you page

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

Figure 17: Thank you page



Good practice

Nature Canada provided a summary of the message the user had just sent, plus a list of other ways to get involved with the organisation.

Mencap's thank you page encouraged users to write to their local paper about the same issue.

Most actions (71%) did provide a thank you page of some kind, 42% making good use of this free chance to communicate with users while they are receptive.

The best thank you pages were specifically written for the action, reinforcing key messages and including, as well as simple 'tell a friend' prompts:

- encouragement to send any responses from the target back to the organisation
- links to further reading about the campaign,
- links to other online actions,
- prompts to support on social network sites,
- prompts to support the campaign by donating,
- ideas for other ways to support the campaign offline,
- a clearly-written explanation of what happens next in the campaign (next steps for an EDM).

Most of the 29% (24) actions which failed to provide any kind of thank you page were of course ones where this was not possible – letter downloads or links to 10 Downing Street petition site. However 11 actions failed to provide a proper thank you page when this would have been perfectly possible. Interestingly, 5 of these were Canadian actions and 2 international.

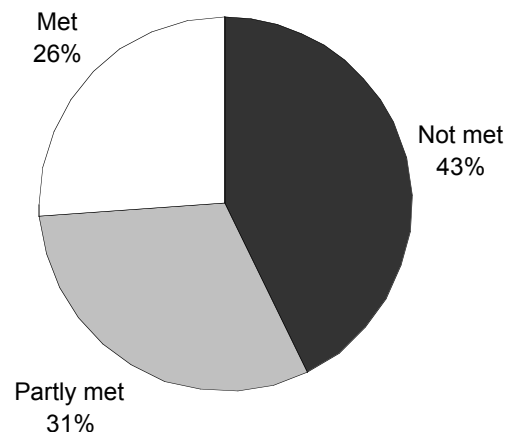
Weaker thank you pages were fairly generic and/or only asked people to tell their friends about the campaign, failing to make the most of this opportunity. A couple included links to actions which had expired.

More detailed material demands 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.

16 Thank you email

Are users sent an appropriate thank you email?

Figure 18: Thank you email



Good practice

Action for Children's thank you email provided links to other ways to support the organisation: by donating, volunteering or fostering a child.

Care International's email offered prompts to promote the organisation on social networks and links to a toolkit of banners and buttons.

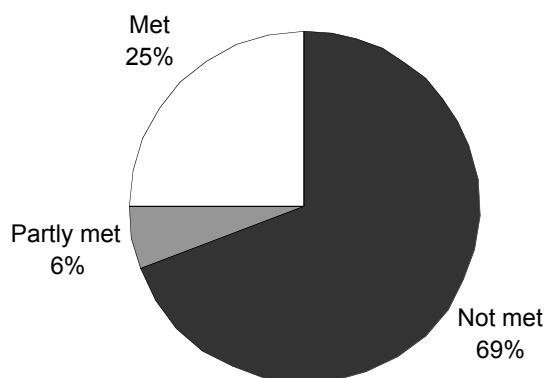
This was one of the weakest areas overall, with only 57% (48) of actions sending a thank you message of any kind. The best examples (26% or 22) made creative use of this opportunity to engage with supporters, as with the thank you page above, with well-written copy reinforcing the key campaign messages and inviting further action.

Surprisingly, 30% (20 out of 66) of actions which had collected email addresses and permission to contact failed to send any kind of email confirmation at all. Another 41% (27 out of 66) sent thank you emails which merely acknowledged the action (sometimes including a copy of the email generated, where relevant) and sometimes encouraged the user to 'tell a friend'.

17 Appropriate follow-up communication

Do users get appropriate follow up communication from the organisation?

Figure 19: Follow up communication



Good practice

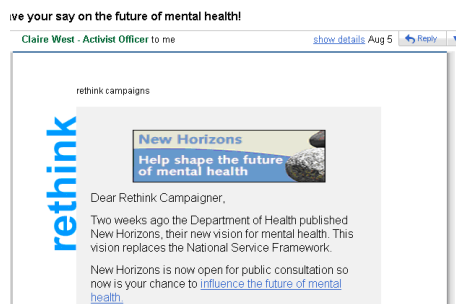
Council of Canadians sent an e-newsletter, and a news alert of a campaign win.

Rethink sent an email encouraging supporters to take part in a government consultation on mental health issues.

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

Good practice included organisations which sent other related e-actions (Tearfund, 38 degrees, PETA, NHF, Open Doors, Friends of Canadian Broadcasting), or invitations to feed into organisational research (Macmillan, Rethink); a creative use of supporters as more than just 'campaign fodder'. One organisation (UNICEF UK) sent a 'welcome email' giving more information about the organisation and what kind of communications the supporter would receive. Only two organisations provided any kind of follow up on the specific impact of the action (Amnesty UK, National Autistic Society).

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.

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 (CAFOD, Oxfam). At the other extreme, one organisation (PETA) sent 7 emails in the space of a month.

18 Annex 1: Sample selection for e-action review

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

For detail of which action was reviewed and how it scored organisations may contact Jess Day directly. Jess@jess-day.co.uk

Alzheimer's Society of Canada
Canadian Cancer Society
CEP Canada
Council of Canadians
CUPE
David Suzuki Foundation
Friends of Canadian Broadcasting
Greenpeace Canada
MS Society of Canada
Nature Canada
OCUFA
Oxfam Canada
Parkinson Society Canada
Public Service Alliance of Canada
War resisters support campaign

Avaaz
Friends of the Earth International
Greenpeace International
IFAW
Oxfam International
Rainforest Action Network
WSPA
WWF International

38 degrees
Action for Children

ActionAid
Advocates for Animals
Age Concern
Alzheimer's Society
Amnesty International UK
Barnardo's
Bliss
British Heart Foundation
CAFOD
Cancer Research UK
Care International
Carers UK
Christian Aid
Compassion in World Farming
Consumer Focus
Consumers' Association
CPRE
Diabetes UK
Dogs' Trust
Greenpeace UK
Guide dogs for the Blind Association
Help the Aged
League Against Cruel Sports
Leonard Cheshire Disability
Liberty
Livability
Macmillan Cancer Support
Marie Stopes International
Men Get Eating Disorders Too
Mencap
National Autistic Society
National Housing Federation
NSPCC
Open Doors
Oxfam GB
PCSU
PETA (UK)
Practical Action
Royal College of Nursing
Refugee Council
Rethink
RNID
Royal British Legion
RSPB
RSPCA
SANDS

Save the Children
Scope
Shelter
SSPCA
Stroke Association
Tearfund
UNICEF UK
UNISON
VSO
Water Aid
World Development Movement
WSPA
WWF UK

The eCampaigning Review overall has a UK/Canada focus as the data set for the performance analysis comes from UK and Canadian organisations using Advocacy Online's e-activist system. The sample of actions reviewed was broadened wider than AO clients as follows.

UK – 61 actions (135 organisations in total.)

List compiled from:

1. organisations in the Charity Finance Top 100 UK charities
2. organisations taking part in the data analysis part of the study
3. organisations taking part in the e-campaigning practice survey
4. organisations identified as peers in the survey at #3.

Canada – 15 actions

List compiled from:

1. organisations taking part in the data analysis part of the study
2. organisations taking part in the e-campaigning practice survey
3. organisations identified as peers in the survey at #2.

Global – 8 actions

List compiled from:

1. organisations identified as actively campaigning at an international level.

19 Annex 2: Methodology for e-action review

This is the first time this study has been carried out, and this methodology and approach has been developed for this piece of research. Inevitably, each assessment has been a personal and subjective view, so individually open to challenge and discussion, but hopefully this does not undermine the usefulness of the overall picture.

To help us improve the review next year feedback on the methodology is particularly welcome – if you think the best practice definitions are wrong, or are measuring the wrong thing, or if you have ideas of other areas which should be reviewed, please get in touch. jess@jess-day.co.uk.

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. Eg. 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.

Where an organisation's website offered more than one campaign, the one presented first, or offered as the highest priority action, has been reviewed. Coalition campaigns have not been included. Actions were carried out between 20 July and 17 August 2009.

Actions were categorised under the following headings:

End target of campaigning action

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

Mechanism

- Petition
- 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.

Quality

Have the target and action been thought through? Is it immediately clear who the target is, why they have the power to effect change, what the end user and target should do, why, and why now?

2 – Target is appropriate. Action is an appropriate way to contact/pressure them. The call to action is clear, and makes it clear why it matters to do it now.

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 – Action may be more providing campaigners with something to do...

Background

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

2 – Clear, 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.

0 – Weak background info. Eg Call to action and policy paper and nothing in-between, or fails to deal with obvious questions.

Copy

Is the action clearly and compellingly written?

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.

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?

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.

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

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.

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.

1 – Email confirmation.

0 – No confirmation.

Appropriate follow-up communication

Do users get appropriate follow up communication from the organisation?

- 2 – Clearly relevant (ie 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 (eg 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.

For more information about the research, click here:

<http://e-activist.com/ea-campaign/clientcampaign.do?ea.client.id=136&ea.campaign.id=4011>

Many thanks,

Jess Day