

ROCK THE VOTE

Winning Young Voters: New Media Tactics

June 2008

New media tactics should be a central part of any campaign targeting young voters, but can be confusing for people more familiar with TV advertising, door-knocks, or campaign rallies.

“New Media Tactics,” the second in Rock the Vote’s series of “Winning Young Voters” handbooks, shows you the basics of how to use new media – email, the Internet, social networks, and mobile phones – to register young voters and get them to the polls.

In this handbook

- Online voter registration
- Search advertising
- Facebook and other social networks
- Email
- Text messaging

Online Voter Registration

Registering voters on your website or blog is one of the easiest ways to engage people online. And with a tool that Rock the Vote offers, you can do it for free.

Rock the Vote’s online voter registration form (shown right) adds a button to your website where visitors can register to vote. Here’s how to do it:

- Go to <http://www.rockthevote.com/partners> and create an account.
- Check your email – you should have a note with the basic HTML code. MySpace requires a special version; get it by logging in to your new partner account (the link is in the email) then click “widget code” and scroll down to the second box.
- Paste the code into a page on your website.

With this tool, anyone can run an online registration campaign – for free. But placing the registration tool on your site is only the beginning. Tips for running a good campaign:

1. Place the “Register to Vote” button prominently on your website – up top, in the “Latest News” section, or on your blog.

TOP NEW MEDIA TIPS

1. Run your own online voter registration campaign with our free web tool.
2. Buy targeted online advertising, particularly search, to drive online voter registration.
3. Remind your supporters of registration deadlines and Election Day via ads, email, and text messaging.
4. Get personal via social networks.
5. Simple, clear advertisements perform best; test different variations too.

The screenshot shows the Rock the Vote online voter registration form. At the top, it says "ROCK THE VOTE" with a red checkmark over the "V", followed by "POWERED BY VOTER REGISTRATION CREDO mobile". Below this is a navigation bar with "1. Fill out form!", "2. Print & Mail!", "Español", and "x Close window". The form is titled "REQUIRED FIELDS" and contains the following sections:

- "Registration state:" with a dropdown menu for "Choose your state:".
- "Email address:" with a text input field.
- A note: "We will email you a copy of your voter registration form. Rock the Vote and its voter registration partners may contact you in the future (opt-out policy)." with a link to "opt-out".
- Three questions with radio button options:
 - "Will you be 18 years old on or before election day?" with Yes and No options.
 - "Are you a U.S. citizen?" with Yes and No options.
 - "Are you registering for the first time?" with Yes and No options.
- "Legal Name:" with dropdowns for Title, First name, Middle name(s), Last name, and Suffix.
- "Phone number:" with input fields for Mobile and a dropdown for the area code.
- A checkbox for "Send me text reminders about voting issues:".
- "Race or ethnicity:" with a dropdown menu.
- "Your Home Address:" with input fields for Address and Apt. or Lot #.

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2. **Promote voter registration.** Send emails to your lists telling them to register, blog about registering to vote, and plug registration at events and in newsletters. **Make sure to do these things around registration deadlines or big events – that works best.**

3. Try different types of emails or messaging and use the ones that generate the most voter registrations.

Rock the Vote's system also provides access to the contact information of the people you register. Use it to follow-up with GOTV reminders, volunteer outreach, or fundraising requests.

– Log into <http://registertovoteonline.org/site/login/> to download your registration list.

With this same log-in, you can keep an eye on how many people you're registering. If it's fewer than you want, re-evaluate your tactics or give us a call for additional tips.

Search Advertising

Every day millions of people use Google, Yahoo, or MSN search engines. An organization or campaign can use these search engines to register people to vote by purchasing ads that will appear when someone searches for a certain phrase – for example, “election info,” “how to vote,” “Barack Obama,” or “John McCain.”

Rock the Vote has found this to be an inexpensive way to register young adults to vote, at less than \$2 per registration form download. You can also restrict your search advertising to certain cities or states, making it a handy tool for state or local campaigns. By combining online voter registration with search advertising you can find the people most interested in your organization and register them at low cost.

How To

1. Log in to <http://adwords.google.com> to create a search advertising campaign on Google (Yahoo and MSN will be similar).
2. Fill out the campaign details and choose the states, cities, or zip codes to target.
3. Create a basic text ad design (see below for examples).
4. Select the list of searches that will trigger your ad, such as “register to vote,” “voter form,” “election information,” or your candidate's name.
5. Set your daily spending limit and the maximum price you're willing to pay for an ad click. A low limit of \$20 per day and \$1 per click will let you try out search advertising. You can later expand your budget to fully capture your target search traffic.

Tips

- **Keywords:** Keep your keywords focused on voter registration or GOTV-related information. Phrases like “health care” or “politics” are too general to be worth advertising on.
- **Simple ad designs are best.** Use a title like “Register to Vote” or “Online Voter Registration”. Put the voter registration deadline in the description if it's soon.
- **Target:** Use geographic targeting so that you only advertise to the people you care about. Include the state or city in your ad to show its relevancy. If advertising in multiple states, create an ad campaign and destination page for each.
- **Design:** Try different variations in your ad designs and keywords, then eliminate ones that perform poorly.

EXAMPLE SEARCH ADVERTISEMENTS

Pennsylvania Registration Ad	New Hampshire GOTV Ad
Register to Vote in PA Quick and Easy Online Form - Register Before March 24th! www.RockTheVote.com/Penn	Vote in New Hampshire The Primaries are Tuesday, Jan. 8th Get All the Info You Need Here www.RockTheVote.com/NH

Facebook

Facebook is the most prominent online social network for young adults in the United States. Nearly 21 million adult Americans have Facebook accounts to date, of which 18 million are ages 18 to 29, and one-half of all Facebook users visit the site on a daily basis.

For organizations interested in registering and mobilizing young voters, four Facebook features stand out as the most useful: fan pages, events, groups, and advertising. These features are usually available on other online social networks as well.

Facebook Fan Pages

On Facebook any organization, campaign, or politician can create a fan page, which acts as their central point of contact for the Facebook community. Supporters can then visit the fan page to get the latest content (blog posts, photos, videos, or more) from the campaign in a way that is integrated with Facebook. They can receive message updates from the fan page, alerting them to action items, deadlines, or important events. Facebook users who subscribe to a fan page then display a link to that organization on their profile page. The profile link acts as a recruitment tool for their friends to join the fan page.

How To

1. Create a fan page for your candidate or organization at <http://www.facebook/pages/create.php>.
2. Fill in the basic contact information, upload your logo, and start a discussion.
3. Publish the page when it is ready for the public. Click the "Share" button (normally on the right side of the page) to invite your supporters that are on Facebook.
4. Make frequent updates with media, events, and other content from the campaign. Contact your subscribers about once a month to keep them activated.

Tips

- **Leverage Email:** Jump start your Facebook campaign by promoting the fan page to your email list, then link to your Facebook events or groups in future emails.
- **Blogs:** Use the Notes application to automatically import blog posts into your fan page.
- **Apps:** Browse through the Facebook Application Directory to find additional Page features.
- **Ads:** Targeted ads can also connect supporters to your Facebook Page.
- For more ideas visit <http://www.facebook.com/rockthevote>.

Facebook Events

Facebook events are a social RSVP system designed to encourage peer-to-peer interaction and invitations. Supporters can easily invite their friends to campaign events and expand exposure beyond the initial list of invitees. When one person RSVPs for the event all of their friends can see their response, which quickly spreads awareness of the event through a person's social network.

How To

1. Edit your fan page then click the "Events" box to begin creating your event, which will also be linked from your fan page.
2. Enter the event information then send an update to your supporters to invite them all instantly.
3. After the event, upload pictures and videos to continue engaging your supporters.

Tips

- **Use Facebook Events as an earned media and organizing tactic.** Create events for campus appearances, registration deadlines, fundraisers, and Election Day.
- **Respond:** Monitor each event's discussion board and respond to any comments or questions.
- **+1:** Ask attendees to invite other people they know to generate viral growth.
- **Voter Registration:** Include a prominent link to your online voter registration page.

Facebook Groups

Informal online groups of users have proliferated on Facebook and other social networking sites. Many of these groups are related to political issues, popular local candidates, or upcoming elections, and can grow at astonishing speeds due to the viral nature of online social networks. When groups are related to political engagement they represent a prime opportunity to channel new members to online voter registration, and at no cost. Political organizations in particular should create Facebook groups for their key programs and issues as a way to build awareness among young voters. Groups are more limited than fan pages in that they cannot import content from outside sources; they also do not support the event system's RSVP functions.

How To

1. Go to <http://www.facebook.com/groups/create.php> to begin creating your group.
2. Invite current supporters on Facebook and use the email import feature to add people who aren't on Facebook.
3. Keep the group updated with the latest news for that issue and provide a few different action items for the members.

Tips

- **Voter Registration:** Include a voter registration link so that all the group members are able to vote in November. As a rough estimate expect to get a registration form download for every 100 members.
- **Officers:** One easy way to reward active volunteers is to designate them as "officers" of the group.
- **Messages:** If your group has less than 1,000 members you can send mass updates to sustain interest.

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Facebook Advertising

Political advertisers can purchase “Social Ads” on Facebook, which are small advertisements similar to Google’s text ads. They can be targeted by demographics (age, gender, education status, relationship status), geography (country, state, city), place of employment, school, and profile keywords. These targeting options make Facebook ads an inexpensive tactic for voter registration, particularly among 18-29 year olds.

How To

1. Go to <http://www.facebook.com/ads/create/> to begin creating your ad.
2. Choose the destination page and targeting options.
3. Enter the title (25 characters or less), body text (135 characters or less), and optionally upload a picture (110x80 pixels or smaller).
4. Choose your daily budget and set the amount you are willing to pay for each ad click. A small campaign could start out at \$20 per day and a bid of \$0.50 per click.

Tips

- **Titles:** Use a clear call to action in the title, such as “Register to Vote” or “Vote on Tuesday.”
- **Deadlines Motivate:** Running ads near a registration deadline or close to Election Day can more than double the click-through rate and lower the cost of the ads.
- **Test multiple advertising designs** at the same time and eliminate poor performing designs.
- **Pay Per Click:** Low click-through rates are typical for Facebook advertising: buy your ads on a pay-per-click basis rather than pay-per-impression.
- **Context:** Include the target geography in the text, e.g. “Pennsylvania votes on April 22nd.”
- **Track:** If the ad links to your website, include a tracking code in the URL to log the hits sent by the ad.

EXAMPLE FACEBOOK FLYERS

General Registration	New Hampshire GOTV	Pennsylvania Registration
<p>Register to Vote</p>  <p>Register to vote using our easy, fast online form - don't miss the deadline. Download your personalized PDF, then print and mail it.</p>	<p>Vote New Hampshire</p>  <p>Tuesday, Jan. 8th!</p> <p>The NH presidential primary is this Tuesday, get out and vote! Click for more info from Rock the Vote: polling places, candidates, etc</p>	<p>PA: Register to Vote</p>  <p>Your vote matters. Register to vote today to make sure it counts. Pennsylvania's deadline is March 24th and Election Day is April 22nd.</p>

Cost Per Registration

A clear, simple registration advertisement on Facebook can generate a form download for \$5 - \$10 and can be highly targeted. Targeting generally increases the cost per registration and reduces the total number of registrations that will

be generated over a given time period. Other methods of online organizing, such as events, groups or fan pages, generate registrations at no cost other than the time of staff and volunteers.

Examples of Success

- A student created a Facebook group entitled “1,000,000 Strong for Stephen T. Colbert,” which reached its membership goal in less than two weeks.¹ The student added an online voter registration link and generated about 4,000 registration form downloads within a week. To date the group has been responsible for over 11,000 registration form downloads, or one download for every 76 group members.
- “Presidential Election 2008,” a popular Facebook event for the 2008 general election, has generated 5,300 registration downloads to date. With 600,000 RSVPs, that corresponds to about one download per 112 RSVPs. A smaller event for the Texas primaries generated 500 downloads in January 2008, at rate of one download per 11 RSVPs.
- Academic research on the 2006 election and the 2008 presidential primaries has found a relationship between the number of supporters a candidate has on Facebook and their share of the youth vote. These results, while preliminary, suggest that online social networks can be an effective component of youth outreach for campaigns... provided those supporters are leveraged into offline actions.²
- In 2006 the Minnesota DFL campaign successfully used Facebook to find potential supporters in their target geographies, then generated walk and call lists to persuade and mobilize those young people.

Email

Simply emailing your list and asking your members to register to vote is a surprisingly effective and low-cost tactic.

How To

1. Determine the best time in your email outreach schedule for your registration blasts. These can be repeated every 2-3 months without a drop in click-through rate.
2. Design the content of the email. Keep it simple and focused on the registration message so that recipients can quickly understand the email’s purpose.
3. Embed a voter registration form in the destination page and include a unique source code for that email so that you can track the number of registration form downloads.

Tips

- **Emails near registration deadlines are effective**, but provide 1-2 weeks leeway to account for people who may be slow to open the email.
- **Trial Runs:** Set aside a portion of the email list (about 20%) as a test group and divide them into a few groups. Send each group a different subject line and see which group has the best response rate. Then use that subject line to email the remaining 80% of the list.

¹ “The Colbert Nation Quickly Colonizes Facebook.” New York Times. October 29, 2007.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/29/business/media/29colbert.html>

² “The Political Impact of Facebook: Evidence from the 2006 Midterm Elections and 2008 Nomination Contest.” Williams, C. and G. Gulati. (January 2008). Unpublished Manuscript. <http://blogsandwikis.bentley.edu/politechmedia/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/gwdiscourse11jan08.pdf>

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- **Be Consistent:** The destination page should look similar to the email and be focused solely on the registration form. Set up the page to open the registration form automatically.
- **Authoritative calls to action do best,** so emphasize the candidate or organization's official clout.

Cost Per Registration

Rock the Vote's testing has shown response rates between 0.5% and 5%, depending on 1) email address quality, 2) the prominence of the call to register, and 3) the email's subject line. These response rates correspond to one registration form download for every 20 to 200 emails sent out. At 0.5% response rate an organization with a million person email list can generate about 5,000 voter registration downloads by encouraging their members to register. At \$0.05 per email that's \$10 per registration form download, which is comparable to traditional registration techniques.

Examples of Success

- Targeting young movers using change of address data from the U.S. Post Office has proven to be a highly effective targeting technique, generating response rates between 1% and 7%. This results in a cost per form download of \$2 to \$10.
- Targeting unregistered youth using voter file data is more expensive, in part because it is a population less likely to register to vote, but has shown a cost per form download of about \$25 from a pilot test (response rate of 1%).

EXAMPLE SUBJECT AND SENDER OPEN RATES

Sender	Subject Line	Open Rate
Rock the Vote	Make them pay attention: Re-Register to Vote	6.6%
Rock the Vote	By law you must re-register to vote.	12.8%
Voter Registration Center	Notice: You must re-register to vote immediately.	16.6%

EXAMPLE REGISTRATION EMAILS

Official Design	Branded Design
<p>a message from</p> <p>The VOTER REGISTRATION CENTER AT ROCK THE VOTE</p> <p>You Must Re-Register In Order To Vote</p> <p>According to our records, you've moved. When you move, you need to re-register to vote. Re-registering to vote is easy. No need to go to an office or wait in line. Just click here. If you don't re-register, you will not be able to vote. Re-register today or you may not be eligible to vote in the upcoming elections.</p> <p><small>This email is being sent to you as a public service by Rock the Vote, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that encourages young people to register and vote. Email information@rockthevote.com.</small></p> <p><small>Click here to forward this email to your friend.</small></p> <p><small>This message is intended for mgolberg@rainpartners.com. If you do not wish to receive future emails, please unsubscribe.</small></p>	<p>RE-REGISTER TO VOTE</p> <p>YOU MUST RE-REGISTER TO VOTE</p> <p>Hey [First Name] RE-REGISTER TO VOTE ></p> <p>According to the U.S. Postal Service you've moved recently and need to re-register to vote. Take a minute to download your registration form so that you don't miss out on the 2008 elections. Rock the Vote is reminding everyone who has moved in the past year to re-register to vote, and the response has been amazing. Re-register to vote today and join in on the huge voter turnout this year.</p> <p>Rock on, Heather Smith Executive Director, Rock the Vote www.rockthevote.com</p> <p><small>If you wish to unsubscribe from the Rock the Vote list, click here. © Copyright 2008 Rock the Vote</small></p>

Text Messaging

Text messaging and mobile outreach are growing tactics within the political sphere, particularly for youth mobilization organizations. Rock the Vote's February 2008 poll found that 85% of 18 to 29 year olds own a cell phone, compared to 75% who own a landline phone. Early research has found large impacts from text messages. A 2006 program by Working Assets and the Student PIRGs showed that a text message on Election Day increases the likelihood that a young adult will vote by about three percentage points.³ In the 2008 primaries Rock the Vote has found that a text message reminder of a state's registration deadline makes a person about four percentage points more likely to turn in their registration form after downloading it online.

How To

1. Collect cell phone numbers on your website, at events, in your email newsletter, and through voter registration. Make sure they opt-in to receive text message reminders from your organization as it is illegal to send unsolicited text messages.
2. Hire a mobile messaging vendor that can manage your list of text message recipients and send out SMS blasts.
3. Send a text message to your mobile list the day before the registration deadline and again on Election Day.
4. Support your other programs, like direct mail or canvassing, with related text messages blast to prep the recipients.
5. Send an update your mobile list with the results of the election.

Tips

- **Mobile Opt-Ins:** Add a custom question to your online voter registration form so that supporters can opt-in to your mobile list – about 10% will do so.
- Organizations can **rent a mobile short code** that lets supporters opt-in to their mobile list at events and respond to text message blasts. For example, you can text "VOTE" to RTVOTE (788683) to join Rock the Vote's mobile street team, which features GOTV reminders, election news, and volunteer opportunities.
- Text messaging can be particularly effective for reaching youth of color as they are more likely to opt-in to a mobile program and have high rates of text messaging.

Conclusion

If the primaries are any indication, two of the defining factors of the 2008 elections will be the increasingly sophisticated use of online organizing tactics and the surge in participation from young voters.

Organizations that leverage new media tactics to register and mobilize young adults can reap significant rewards at the ballot box and on the ground. But rather than replacing traditional campaign efforts, new media tactics should be seen as compliments to established offline tactics such as door-to-door canvassing and phone banking. Combined, new and traditional tactics are essential to a strong campaign.

With a results-oriented mindset, new media opportunities can expand the reach of campaigns to a new generation of Americans that is ready and willing to be engaged.

³ "Mobilizing the Mobiles: How Text Messaging Can Boost Youth Voter Turnout." Dale, A. and A. Strauss. (September 6, 2007). <http://www.newvotersproject.org/research/text-messaging/youth-vote-and-text-messaging.pdf>