

InfoTech Column  
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## **Promotion and Politics**

by Stephen Abram

I recall a situation, very early in my career, actually my first job. I was working as head librarian for one of the largest accounting and consulting firms in the world (when they were the Big 8). I was called, for the very first time, up to the office of the chairman. He was a quite substantial figure and quite well known and respected in Canada. His office was the opposite of the modern clean lines of the rest of the office – antique desk, paneled office and no fluorescents. I went to meet the tall, white-haired partner with some trepidation. Whatever research could he want? He normally sent his secretary or other minions for his information needs. So off I go to the “executive” floor.

It turns out that he had advance knowledge of a coming election in Canada. [For you U.S. folks, Canada is on a parliamentary system and an election can occur at any time as long as our Queen agrees through her representative in Canada the Governor General. Thankfully, elections are legally limited to something like 35 days from the dropping of the writ with strict financing and donation rules.] I was sworn to secrecy and then told my services had been volunteered to assist with the campaign fundraising. Luckily, I wasn't too conflicted since he was working for the party I supported. (The firm across the street was for the other guys.) Anyway, I was given some assignments to create mailing lists and target donor lists. It was interesting and oh so secret. The best news is that he became a great library supporter.

I have since discovered my experience is quite common. Talk to a few fellow SLA members at conference and you'll find many have been dragooned this way. I don't regret the research. Indeed I loved it and was quite engaged. It wasn't the titillating secrecy aspect. I'd done loads of highly confidential work and secret projects with government policy or the mergers and acquisitions group. It was the nature of understanding influence and how the political machine works.

Either way, I am still fascinated by the political process. And I know many of our members work in political organizations, supporting the local, state or national political process and are just involved people and informed voters. What's interesting today is the shift that's happened in political influence – driven largely by the new range of web 2.0 tools as an opportunity to communicate with the citizenry and involve, motivate, and engage them.

So, in an effort to keep you up-to-date on the key electronic tools being used by politicians and politicos everywhere, I thought I'd use this month's column to list

the main tools that you'll need to be aware of in case you get asked - like I did – or proactively volunteer.

So, what is supplementing the traditional tools for politics, like brochures, websites, ads direct mail, flyers, billboards, and lawn signs?

Here's a modest list (I haven't included URL's since they're so easy for you to find and I've blogged about many of these at Stephen's Lighthouse.) Most of these you've already seen have a major impact on the current U.S. presidential elections and have figured prominently in many other jurisdictions.

### **1. YouTube**

- Every candidate in Canada and the U.S. in the last two years has had some form of YouTube video. Sometimes they're planned and produced and sometimes they just happen, driven by the competition or the amateur audience and citizen journalists.
- Have you learned how to track and discover this content source? If it has influence, you have to discover it and respond in time or the river of public opinion moves on.

### **2. Second Life**

- IBM has 400 (!) employees working on environments for this site. Companies, libraries, and charities are having early successes here.
- I am told that every U.S. presidential candidate has a presence here. Indeed, John McCain's Second Life site was vandalized by a feces spewing robot.
- Could you have discovered events and speeches here as seamlessly as you do for blogs and mainstream news?

### **3. Facebook**

- This is the sweet spot for some politicians since it attracts the majority of first and second time national voters.
- My 22 year old son's Facebook site got him interviewed by the Canadian Press newswire.
- Understand the power of Facebook Groups, political party links, friends' networks and event features to political parties and event organizers.
- Are you there and reviewing how you might provide research on trends in support and opinion there?

### **4. MySpace**

- This is the granddaddy of big social networks. It's more entertainment and socially-oriented but the average age is reported to be 32 and that's significant.

- Get on MySpace to learn more and look at its use for special markets. Advertisers are big there – politics follows quickly.
- How are your MySpace searching skills?

## **5. Flickr**

- Collect your pictures in one place and share them with teams? It's a natural concept for political rallies and engagement.
- Are you ready to develop tagging rules for political use? Can you approve pictures or decline the use of others?
- Can you collect your volunteers' pictures so that you'll recognize them?

## **6. Podcasts**

- Check out ODEO or the myriad of other podcasting tools.
- Remember that iTunes is both a platform and distributor.
- Telling stories is at the heart of the political process to make your arguments passionately and with color.
- Can you find podcasts and search the spoken word?

## **7. Wikipedia**

- Remember you can create your own Wiki with PB Wiki and Media Wiki.
- Check out the Wikipedia entries that matter to your political situation (or create one). Check out the competition too. Check out the issues? Are the entries balanced?
- Can you set up RSS feeds on the Wikipedia entries that matter to you? Beware of vandalism.

## **8. Ning**

- Create communities within communities. Organize your teams and provide them with access to your community's videos, podcasts, blog posting, links, etc.
- Build a team – private or public – to share information in context of a political campaign

## **9. Twitter**

- Too poor to afford walkie-talkies on the convention floor or at an event?
- Try Twitter (or Jaiku) on your phone or laptop and you can keep everyone in contact and informed.
- Get ready for the trend in micro-blogging!

## **10. Mozes**

- Looking to build a smart mob? Try building a texting system to local cel phones (e.g. local press, teams) so that you're connected.

- Can you build a messaging dashboard tied to mailing lists for communicating news, events, ideas, positions...?

### **11. NowPublic**

- Check out more about the revolution in participatory news gathering
- Maybe try playing with the new Truemors site.
- Push your own news or information.

### **12. MyBlogLog**

- You'll need to connect with local people. Here's a way to do so.
- Can you build a community focused on success?

### **13. Blogging**

- Yeah, blogging seems a no-brainer in the political space. But vanilla blogging isn't enough.
- You need to make sure it's populated – probably by more than one voice.
- Are you ready for picture blogs, video blogs, link blogs and more? All at once?
- Connect your blog to a city or institutional agenda (e.g. Chamber of Commerce / Board of Trade) for extra points.

### **14. Tagging and RSS**

- Learn the major tagging styles so that you can use them for more powerful searching.
- Are you ready for tagging to your standards to meet the needs of the major search engines?
- Set up Technorati, Bloglines and Google Alerts, etc. to ensure you're actively listening to the political conversation.

### **15. SEO: Search Engine Optimization**

- Learn how to do this or hire someone to. It's essential.
- Keep it up to date and make sure that your points of view end up in the major web conversations.
- Search your issues on all search engines (including maps).

### **16. LinkedIn / Plaxo**

- Most reporters are there – are you?
- Get yourself connected beyond libraries and into new realms.
- Check these out in a political context (e.g. for candidates, bond votes, propositions, etc.)

What can you offer with these 2.0 tools? First, you are an information professional and you'll need the format and container independence of this Millennium. You'll need to not only know how to use each, but also to search

their trails, create alerts, develop search strategies and provide advice. After all, our organizations exist in a socio-political context and it's a valid use of our time to actively scan the environment for threats and opportunities everywhere.

Sound familiar? I thought so. Another great opportunity that transfers into much of our regular work

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