

# UNSHACKLED!

Dispelling 7 MYTHS that  
May Be Stopping Your  
Association from  
Harnessing the  
Power of the Web

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The rise of the Internet has spawned a modern era of mythology.

This new mythology — this *e-mythology*, if you will — colors how we understand everything from the basic Web site to the “rules” of social media. It impacts our approach to Web design and content, media, and outreach. And it often dictates what strategies and tactics we pursue in order to fulfill our organizational goals and objectives.

For associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations, in particular, this e-mythology has often proved to be a significant impediment to the ability of the organization to unleash the full and awesome power of the Web.

This is nothing new. Throughout human history, myths have existed to explain the unexplainable, to teach lessons, to elicit a sense of awe, and to provide definition



## Introduction

and identity.

In Japan, the myth of Namazu the Earthshaker explained the origins of earthquakes.

The vengeance of Pele, the mythological Goddess of Kilauea, was said to be the first cause of volcanic eruptions in Hawaii.

And for the Cherokee Indians of early America, it was the mysterious Thunder Beings who not only caused lightning and thunder to rain down on the earth, but also brought rain for the crops that fed the Tribe.

Myths are shared from generation to generation, bridge empires, and infuse and inform values and art. And in many civilizations, myths serve as cautionary tales — warnings, really — that establish collective norms and mores, maintain the societal order, and help shape the character of the culture.

In Greek mythology, in particular, vengeful Gods, ruthless titans, and flawed heroes provided societal lessons and stern warnings about behaviors and lofty aspirations.

The ambition of Icarus and the self-love of Narcissus led to their tragic deaths.



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Prometheus boldly stole fire from the Gods to give to mankind, and he was punished for eternity.

Pandora's human curiosity unleashed all the evils of humanity — from plague to disease and beyond — unto the world.

And, like those ancient myths, modern e-mythology can act as warning or restraint: cautionary tales to discourage, dissuade, and deter those who — like Icarus — would dare to fly too high.

Over the course of nearly two decades of working with associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations all across the country, we have seen first-hand how e-mythology can prevent even the largest and most powerful organizations from using simple, accessible strategies to leverage, exploit, and unleash the power of the Internet in all its forms. We have seen how high-priced consultants perpetuate myths of complexity and incomprehensibility in order to maintain a steady flow of lucrative business. We have seen how competitive interests from fields like traditional media or print try to protect their turf with myths of Web inaccessibility and ineffectiveness. And we have seen how even the most well-meaning and qualified professionals in an organization can allow outdated facts or misperceptions become self-perpetuating myths.





## Introduction

But they are only myths.

Overcoming those myths can allow you to grow, empower, and galvanize your organization in ways you may never have imagined.

In our many years of partnering with associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations all across the country, we have worked with those organizations to dispel those myths and apply simple, innovative strategies that have helped them succeed in countless ways. Significant improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of member outreach. Huge strides in member activism. Radical growth in communications and engagement capacity. Legislative and political victories. The ability to shift and shape public opinion. And so much more. All of that was made possible by simply not allowing the myths to stop them from succeeding.

Your organization can be just as successful.

So, allow us to play myth-buster for you!

In the coming pages, we will identify and dispel some of the most common myths about Web-based communications and engagement



## Introduction

that stop associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations like yours from harnessing the full power of a connected, online community. We will introduce you to a number of innovative and effective strategies that you can employ once you have disavowed those myths. And we will provide several tips that you can use in your own online program to help you be more successful.



MYTH

## Strategies that work for **them** won't work for **us**.

**MYTH:** Although the corporate world and big-time political players have pioneered innovative and effective online techniques, those strategies simply will not work for associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations.

**FACT:** While there are certainly differences between them and you, there is no reason that your association, advocacy group, or member-based organization cannot take advantage of the strategies that others have pioneered and apply them to your own needs, objectives, and goals.

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No better place to start than with the mother of all our myths:

### Strategies that work for **them** won't work for **us**.

Let's face it: this myth — spoken or unspoken, likely unarticulated but just as likely enthusiastically embraced — may well have stopped you in your tracks as you looked to explore new and exciting ways to improve your organization or position yourself for success. It is a thought that many cannot get past, but it is absolutely false.





Of course, we are talking about the whole palette of innovative on-line technologies and strategies — you've heard the catch-words and -phrases like Web 2.0, inbound marketing, digital advertising, retargeting, and so many more — that the big corporations and major-league political and advocacy groups use. They use them because they work. They use them because they improve efficiency and cut costs. They use them because they breed success.

But don't just take our word for it.

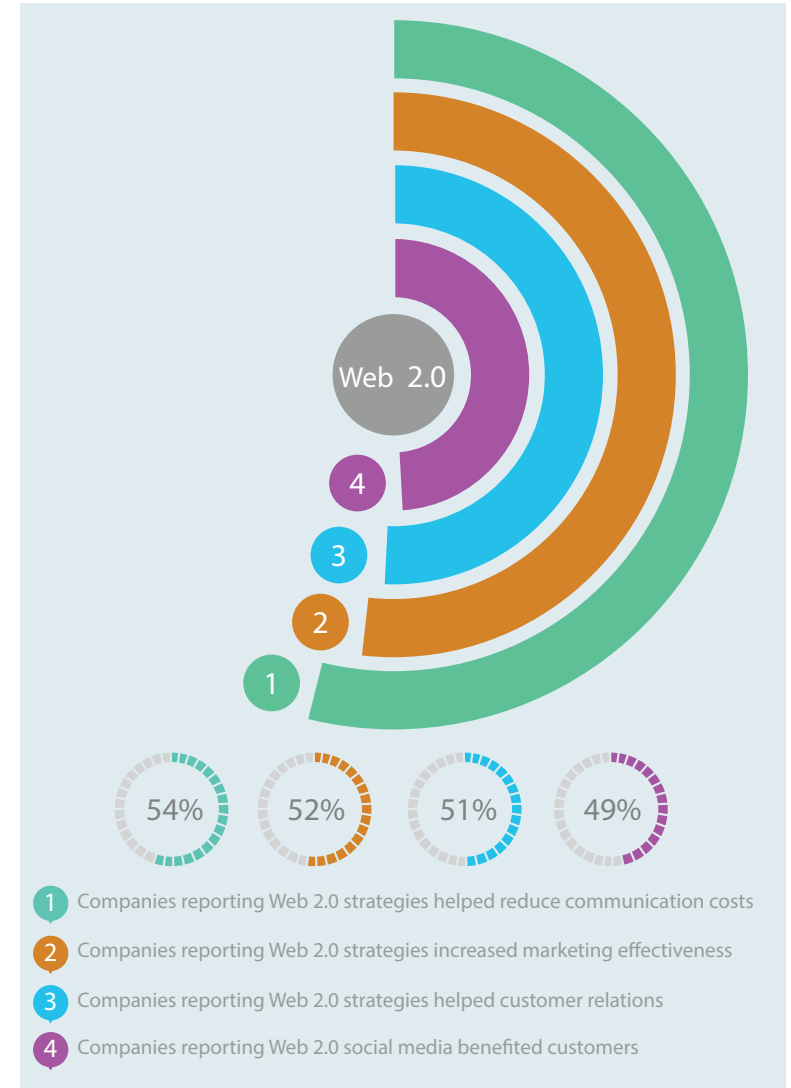
According to a corporate study by a global marketing and research firm, corporate entities that engage in a variety of “Web 2.0” strategies report significant returns on investment and operational success as a result. For example:

**54%** of surveyed companies reported that those strategies helped reduce internal communications costs, by as much as 20%.

**52%** reported increased effectiveness of marketing efforts, with just awareness alone improving by 25%.

**51%** reported measurable benefits in customer relations as the result of blogging.

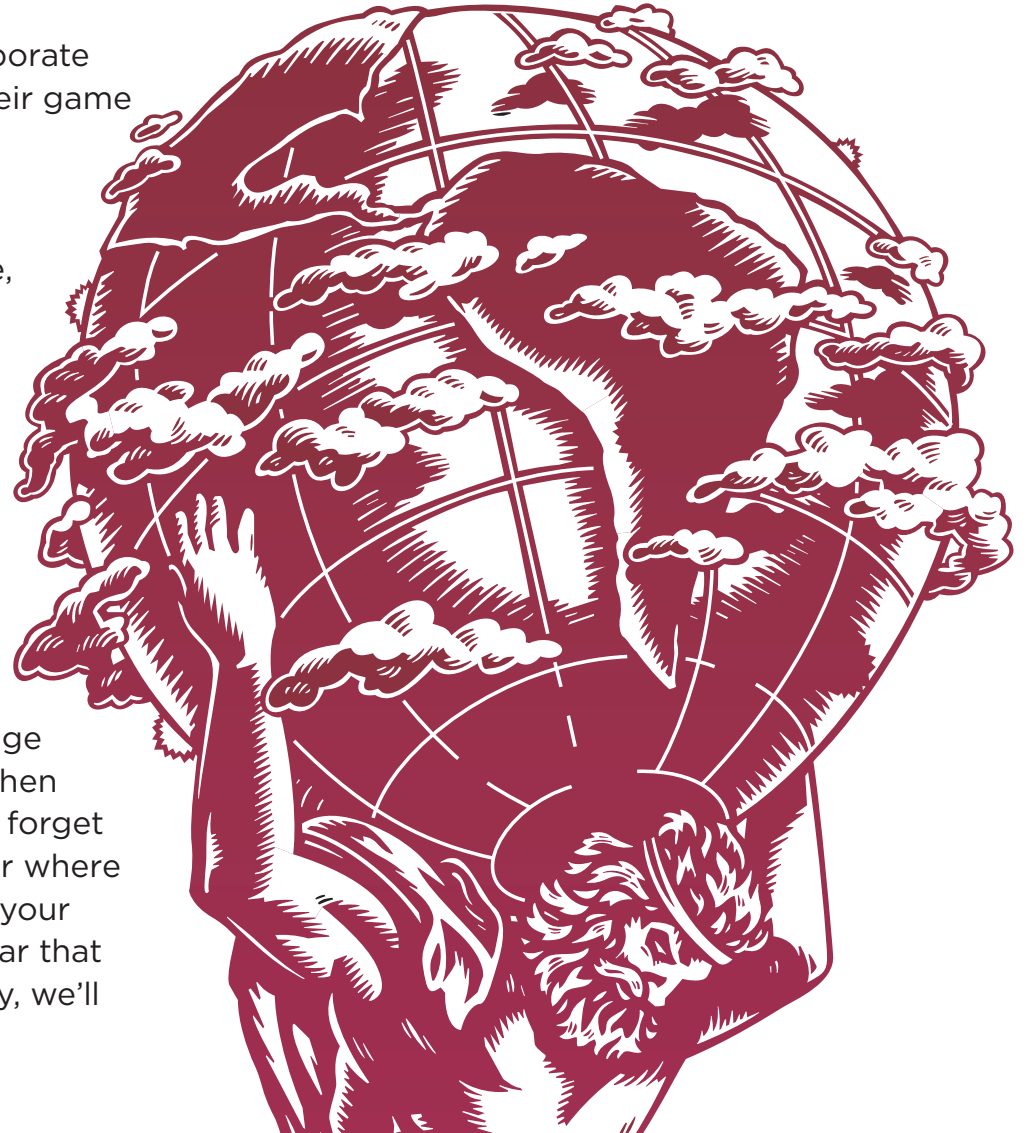
**48%** reported customer benefits from use of social media.



And those were just a few of the dozens of reported corporate benefits of incorporating these sorts of strategies into their game plan.

But you don't need statistics to tell you that Web strategies work for big corporations and small businesses, alike, do you?

After all, you have probably visited Amazon.com and seen how once you look at an item, the site intuitively knows what else to offer you as you continue your shopping. If you are a movie buff, you probably know what is playing at your local theater not by looking in the newspaper like you used to, but rather by visiting Movies.com or Fandango (where you can not only look... but buy tickets, too!). If you have a favorite local restaurant, you might be a fan of that restaurant's Facebook page so that you can know what their nightly specials are or when they are offering special events or discounts. And do not forget about online advertising! Have you noticed that no matter where you are online, somehow they know to show you ads for your favorite shoes, hotels that you might frequent, and that car that you were checking out online the other day? (Don't worry, we'll tell you more about this later!)



The corporate world has figured out how to leverage the power of the Web, for sure, and the top folks in the political and advocacy communities have, nearly as well!

Have you ever watched Twitter light up during a Presidential debate, as advocates for every candidate and point-of-view support or rebut the candidates in real time in your timeline? Or have you seen the stories about the millions and millions of dollars that are raised in a single day through a candidate's or organization's email or text club lists? And, again, let us not ignore advertising! Those "Web-only" ads hit harder, are more focused, and generate far more action than what you might find on TV.

Clearly, these are folks who know how to take advantage of emerging technologies and strategies to achieve their goals.

So why aren't you doing the same?

There is not a single online strategy that those folks use that you cannot also use to similar effect and overall success.

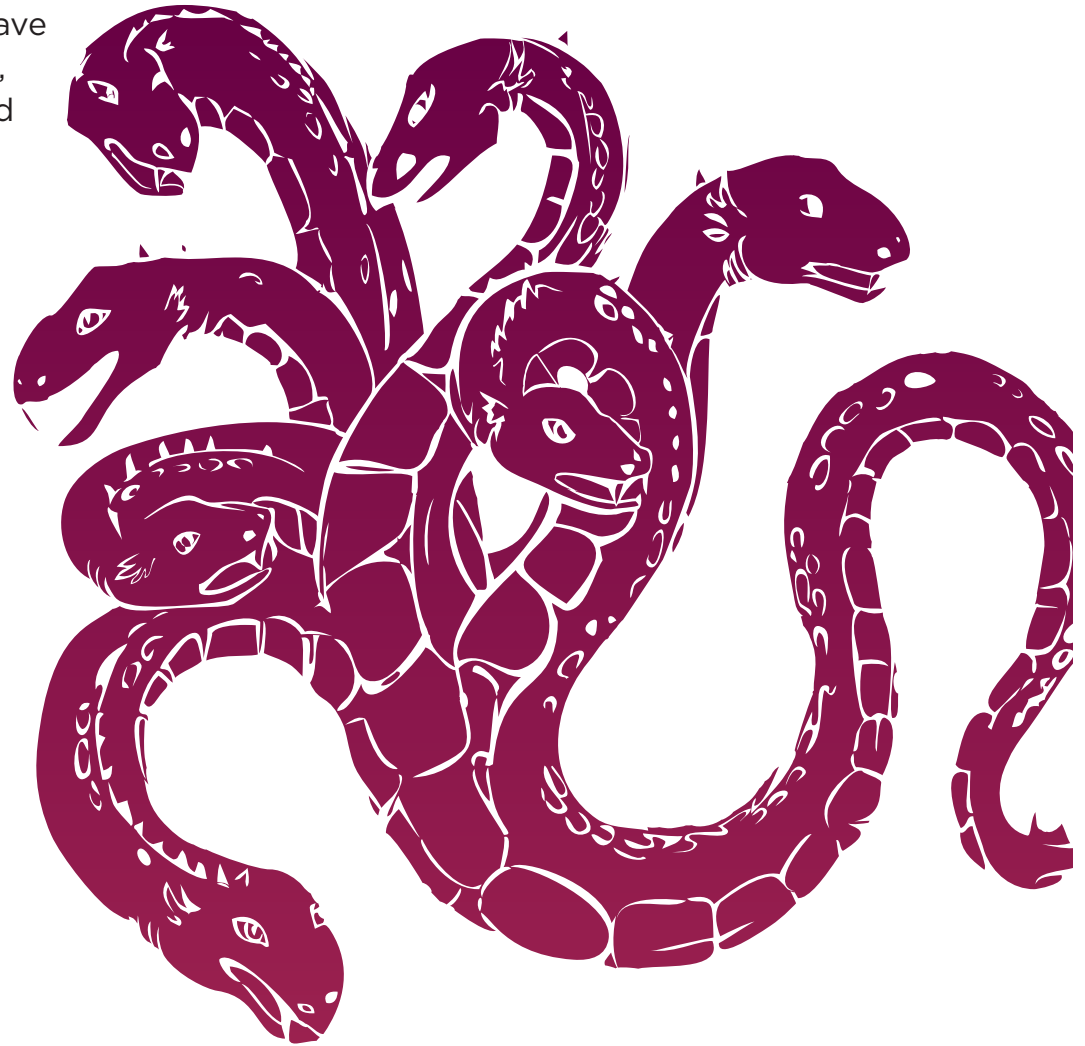
How do we know?



Well, over the course of the past 20 years or so, we have worked with countless associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations all across the United States. And for many of those 20 years, our primary focus has been to help them embrace and exploit the kinds of strategies that we will be discussing in the next several chapters. Their willingness to ignore the common myths — especially this these-things-won't-work-for-us myth — has been the first step toward new levels of success.

Using the kinds of strategies we will be discussing, we have helped associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations like yours:

- Strengthen their brands
- Grow their memberships
- Build stronger relationships with members
- Inform and engage members
- Increase member activism
- Improve event attendance
- Deliver quality, effective online training
- Manage and shape public opinion
- Grow their capacity
- Boost their fundraising



- Support and defeat candidates at every level of government
- Achieve legislative goals
- And so much more

So much of that success has been directly due to their willingness to turn this first myth right on its head and realize a simple, fundamental, but powerful truth:

***Yes, what works for them WILL work for us!***

We are not talking about reinventing the wheel here. We are simply talking about finding a wheel that works for you and using it to get your organization moving!



**MYTH**

## If you build it, they will come.

**MYTH:** Once you have built your Web site, your stakeholders — be they members, activists, allies, or whomever you happen to be targeting — will find it, regularly visit it, and track down whatever information they need from it.

**FACT:** Just because you have a Web site does not mean that anyone will find it or use it. It takes consistent, aggressive, strategic outreach to connect your stakeholders or target audience with your Web site, to keep them engaged, and to ensure that it remains relevant and valuable to them.

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Pretty much everyone and everything has a Web site.

Small businesses. Charities. Schools. Libraries. Political candidates. Professional associations. Museums. States. Counties. Cities. Bands. Theater groups. Books. Actors. Colleges. Zoos. Churches. Advocacy groups. Movies. Radio stations. Hospitals. Haunted houses. Baseball teams. Summer camps. Youth groups. Hotels. TV shows. Synagogues. Sororities. Apple orchards.





And you'll never believe this, but that isn't a comprehensive list.

And different Web sites do different things:

**INFORMATION:** Do you remember the days when you would look something up in an encyclopedia or dictionary? Not anymore. These days, when you want to know something about anything, your first stop is almost always a Web site.

**SALES:** Is there anything at all that you can't buy online? In the last 15 years or so, e-commerce Web sites have dramatically increased in popularity. In fact, in recent years, there has been an explosion in online shopping, due in large part by cheaper prices, convenience and improved security and trust in payment gateways. In many cases, Web sites have become the primary selling tool for businesses of all sorts.

**RELATIONSHIPS:** Online dating and social networking have become powerful tools for building and maintaining relationships in the modern world. From the original chatrooms on platforms like AOL and Prodigy to the huge modern dating and social networking sites like Facebook, Match.com, and others, relationship-focused Web sites make up a significant chunk of Web traffic today.



**ENTERTAINMENT:** The Internet can provide hours and hours of pure entertainment, at all times of the day... just ask U.S. employers! According to one recent study, time spent on the Internet during the workday cost American corporations \$178 billion annually in lost productivity. That lost productivity certainly includes some of what we've already discussed — social networking, shopping, dating, etc. — but it also includes a great deal of time lost on entertainment sites. That includes game sites like Pogo and AddictingGames, video and movie sites like YouTube and Hulu, and many others.

And we bet that you have a Web site, as well. It may well even be an excellent Web site.

One very common amateur mistake that many associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations often make, however, is spending significant time and resources on building the site... without spending much time planning or much investment in actually getting people to the site.

It would be like building a huge, state-of-the-art shopping mall and not bothering to figure out how to actually get shoppers there. If they want something, they'll just come, won't they?



No, they won't.

Oftentimes, leadership and staff of associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations make the very understandable but severely faulty assumption that their stakeholders and interested parties will simply find them on the Web. However, that's not how it works.

But why wouldn't they just automatically come to your Web site?

After all, they are interested in kinds of issues that are dealt with on your Web site. They share many of the same professional or personal challenges, concerns, and priorities as others who should be interested in your Web site. They are the kinds of people who would likely attend the events or seminars that you promote on your Web site. They are the people who actually are or are most likely to be members, supporters, or fans of your organization. And, well, let's face it, they are the very people for whom you built the Web site!

None of that means, however, that if you build it they will come.



There are an awful lot of Web sites out there. In 2014, there were more than *816 million* registered URLs — the Web address that people use to visit a Web site — worldwide. Of those, about 180 million were actually active Web sites. That means that your stakeholders have plenty of options of where to go when they are on the Web.

It is more than just competition, though.

People are busy, and they are pulled in many, many different directions. Expecting them to visit or check in regularly with your Web site is simply unrealistic. It may be outstanding, but that doesn't mean that your stakeholders will remember to visit with any kind of regularity. Heck, they may not even know it is there in the first place!

You actually have to get people to come to your site!

There are two primary ways to ensure that you get plenty of traffic to your Web site:

- Inbound Marketing
- Outbound Marketing



And each of those covers a HUGE amount of territory.

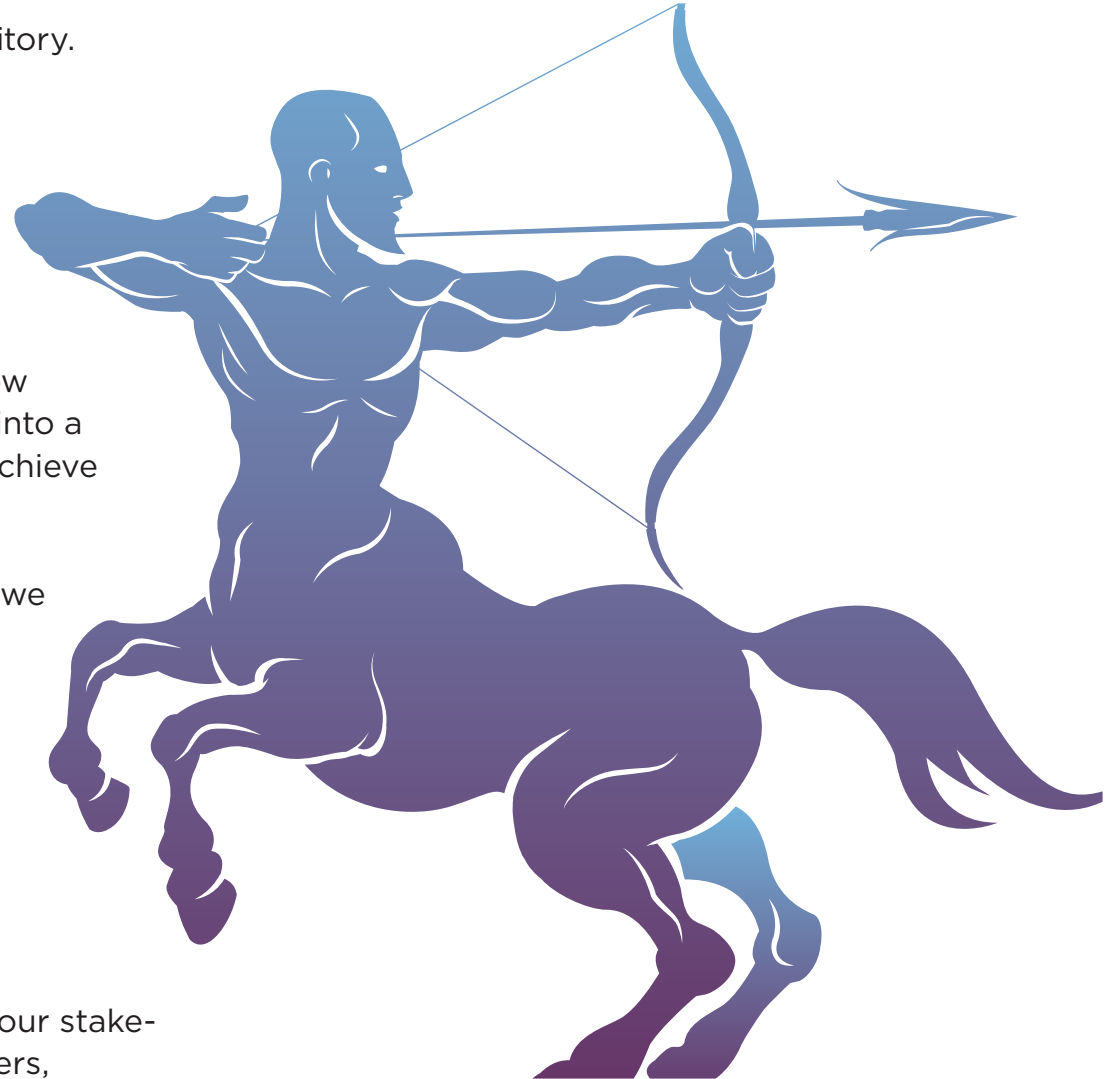
## INBOUND MARKETING

In simple terms, inbound marketing means that rather than going out and trying to find Web visitors who may be interested in your Web site and your organization, you are doing things with your Web site that make people come find you. Those things — from content to design to how you structure your site — can turn your Web site into a magnet for the right kind of visitors to help you achieve your goals.

And we say “Web site” just to keep it simple, but we are not just talking about your Web site. When it comes to inbound marketing your Web site, your social media platforms, and the whole of your online real estate all play a significant role in determining your success or failure.

So what are some keys to success when it comes to inbound marketing?

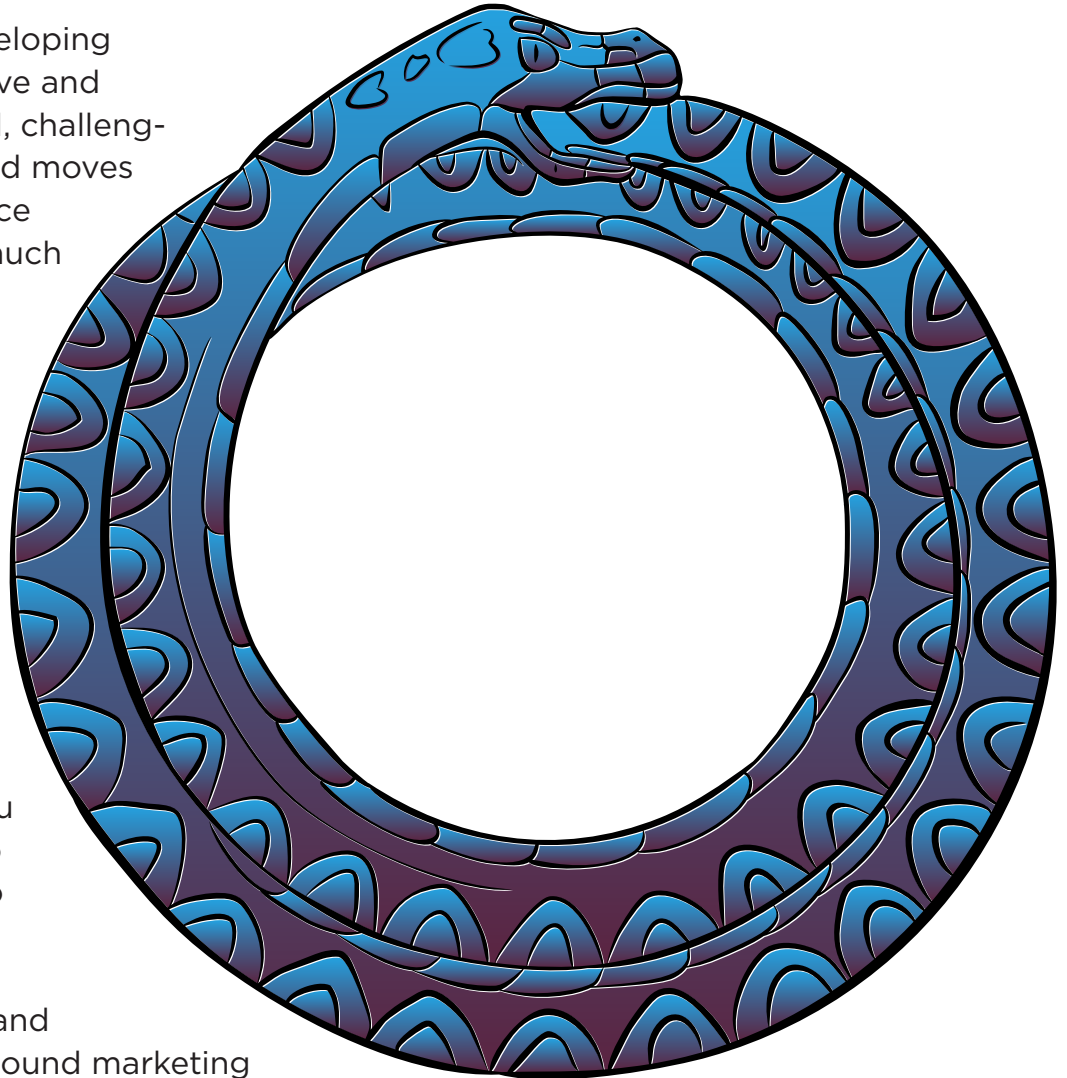
**Know Your Stakeholders.** The better you know your stakeholders — members, potential members, supporters,



activists, etc. — the more success you will have in developing information and other content that will keep them active and engaged. That means understanding their background, challenges, and priorities. It means knowing what entertains and moves them. And, importantly, it means knowing the difference between you and them. Even though you likely have much in common with the people you are trying to reach or organize, remember that you live and breathe your organization and the issues that you grapple with, and they don't. So, don't create a Web site for you... create it for them.

**Maximize SEO.** Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to a strategic approach to your Web site — and broader online community — that optimizes content for Web search engines. You may be able to figure out how good you are doing with SEO by answering a few questions. Do you use internal links to new content? Do you use meta descriptions? Do you make the most of image alt text? If you answer “no” to these questions and others like them, you may need to focus more on SEO.

**Ensure Your Site is Fast and Responsive.** The design and programming of your site significantly impact your inbound marketing





success by either encouraging or discouraging repeat visits. How many times have you tried to get to a site and still been sitting there waiting for it to load a minute later? Probably never, because after the first 10 seconds or so, you gave up and moved on to something else. People will do the same with your site, so make sure that image file sizes, page structures, and plugins are optimized for quick page loading. And remember: with each passing day, fewer people are accessing Web sites from traditional computers and more are visiting via tablets, mobile devices, etc. That means that your site better be responsive so that those users have a good Web site experience.

**Content, Content, Content.** Good content is so important that it deserves its own chapter... so we give it one! Stay tuned. But in the meantime, remember that good, relevant, valuable content will ALWAYS attract traffic to your Web site. That can take many forms: new articles, blogs, videos, and so much more! Aside from helping with SEO, active content-generation conditions users to know that there are rewards for return visits to your Web site, so they should be coming back frequently to get more great content!

**Patience, Grasshopper.** We all want immediate gratification, but that is not how inbound marketing works. Practice patience, and



after a few months you will begin to notice more traffic to your Web site, more engagement with your social networks, and a more active online community as a whole.

Remember, your stakeholder will not find you just because you want them to. It will take some work, but the results will be well worth your while.

### **OUTBOUND MARKETING**

Amongst the digital marketing elite, outbound marketing is generally looked upon with disdain. They commonly refer to it (depending on the generosity of their nature) as “traditional marketing,” “old marketing,” “interruption marketing,” or — as one digital marketing firm so delightfully put it — marketing that is “inherently obfuscated, duplicitous and full of shit.”

So take that.

However, we respectfully disagree.

Outbound marketing should absolutely play a role in your efforts to bring stakeholders to your Web site, to build your relationship with



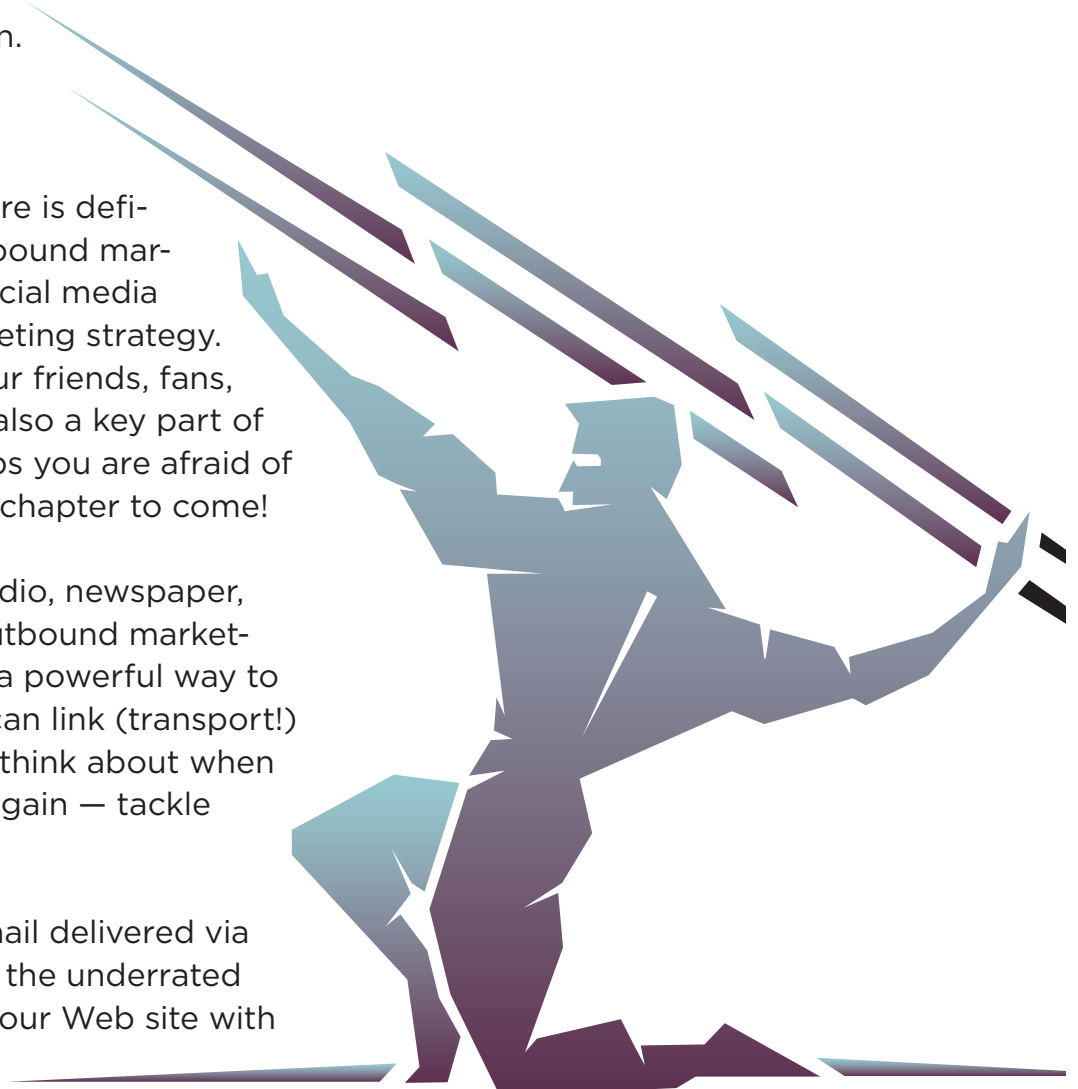
them, and to get them engaged with your organization.

There are a few keys ways to do this.

**Social Media.** We start with social media, because there is definitely some crossover here between inbound and outbound marketing. As part of your core online ecosystem, your social media platforms represent a key piece of your inbound marketing strategy. However, because you can use social media to link your friends, fans, followers, and network to your primary Web site, it is also a key part of your outbound marketing strategy, as well. But perhaps you are afraid of social media? We will help you work through that in a chapter to come!

**Web Advertising.** Advertising, in all its forms — TV, radio, newspaper, Web, and beyond — represents the original form of outbound marketing. Web advertising, in particular though, represents a powerful way to drive potential visitors to your Web site because you can link (transport!) them directly from the ad to your site. There is lots to think about when it comes to Web advertising, however, and we will — again — tackle that in much more detail in a later chapter.

**Email Marketing.** Email marketing is basically direct mail delivered via email. But it's faster, cheaper, more trackable, and has the underrated advantage of being able to link your stakeholders to your Web site with a simple click. You may already have a collection



**Chapter 2** MYTH: If you build it, they will come

of stakeholder emails that you can use, but if you don't, you can build one. Give people a compelling reasons to “subscribe” (contests, great content, insider information, etc.) and then continually send interesting, compelling content (blog posts, whitepapers, videos, event information, etc.) so that they will visit your Web site on a regular basis.

Don't listen to the elitist e-snobs: outbound marketing can and should play a role in your online efforts!



MYTH

## Success is about technology, not content.

**MYTH:** The primary driver of success in the online world is mastering and deploying technology, and content is simply necessary filler that you manage your technology around.

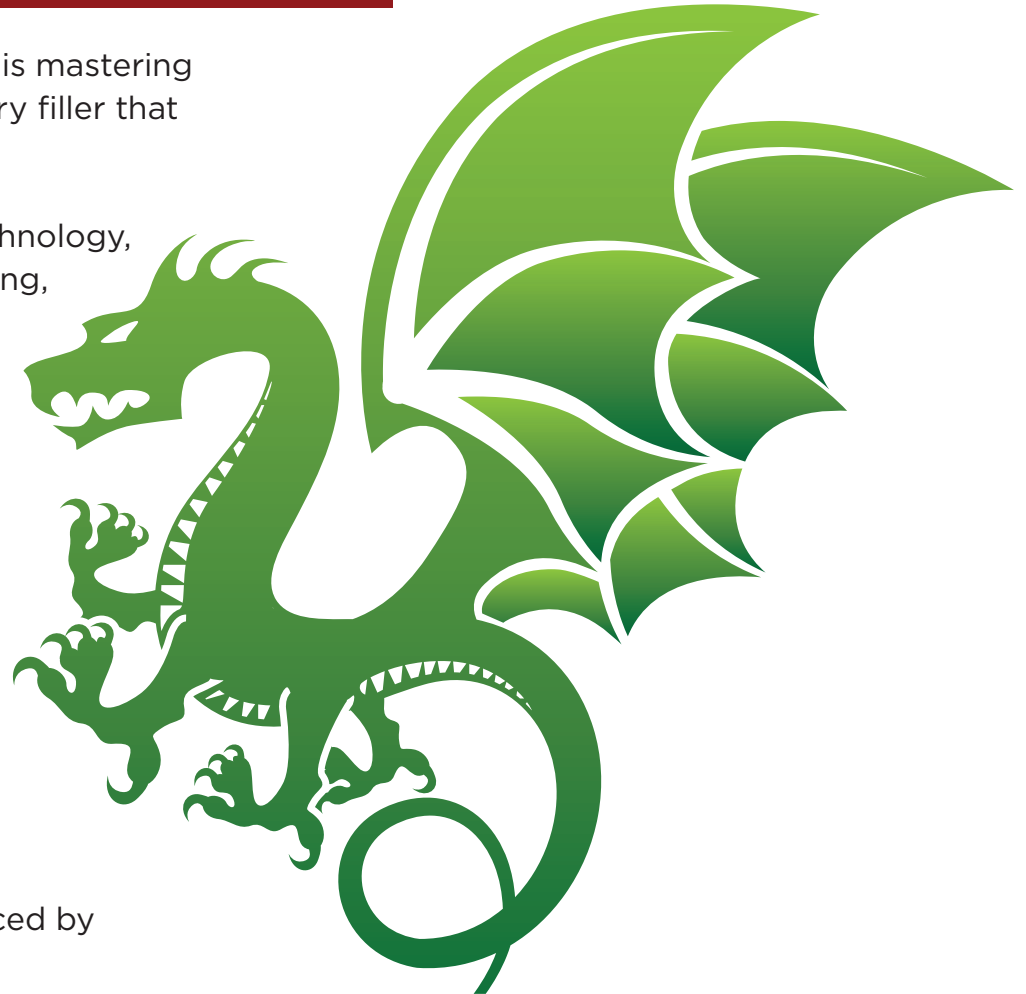
**FACT:** As in most things, content is always king. Web technology, in all its forms — a Web site, social media, online advertising, etc. — is simply a tool, and your success or failure will be driven by the quality of your message, your media, or whatever your content may be.

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Technology is just a tool.

When it comes to any discussion about how to deploy Web-based communications, public relations, advertising, organizing, or any other online strategy, it is absolutely imperative to understand that content trumps technology when it comes to importance and effectiveness of your strategy.

That said, we understand how easy it can be to get seduced by bells and whistles.



But substance matters.

The quality of content is the key to the success of any online strategy employed by associations, advocacy groups, or member-based associations. Whether you are trying to educate, motivate, or activate your stakeholders, content will be the primary driver of success or failure.

What do we mean, though, when we talk about content?

Content can be anything that you are using to populate your Web site, social media platforms, or Web-based communications vehicles. Some examples include:

- Web site copy and pictures
- Blog posts
- Tweets
- Online videos
- Web animation
- Marketing emails





- Ads
- Online learning courses
- Calls to action

And those are, of course, just a handful of examples.

Each of them, though, starts with a core message. Simply put, your message is basically how you talk about who you are and why you exist as an association, advocacy group, or member-based organization. It fundamentally communicates the key points you want to make when you reach out to your audience.

Although you might have one core, fundamental message for your organization, different messages can be developed for different purposes or communications, as well as for different audiences. A well-crafted message will target a specific audience, focus on your unique benefits, support your mission, and often include a call to action.

And message and content go hand-in-hand.

When developing content, we recommend the following basic approach:

## Thanks for sharing!

When it comes to Web content, one way to measure how engaging content is would be to look at what types of content are most shared on social media. There is no single, definitive answer — and sharing is impacted by numerous factors, not the least of which is quality! — but according to a review of the “experts” in the area, a loose consensus emerges as to what kind of content is most shared.

Here are **seven of the most share-worthy approaches to content**, in no particular order:

1. **Depth Charge.** People tend to share articles, blog posts, and other information that they perceive to be more in-depth and substantive, and they are less likely to share shorter articles.

- 1. Define and prioritize your audience(s).** What are you trying to reach with a particular piece of content? What are their needs? How does this content relate to them? And if your starting point is “This is for everyone”... then it really is for nobody.
- 2. Determine outcomes.** Is this content simply meant to educate or inform? Are you trying to impact your audience’s opinion? Are you trying to get them to take some sort of action?
- 3. Identify motivators.** Reason? Emotion? Rewards? Consequences? If you know your audience, you will know what motivates them. Use that, no matter what your desired outcome: from just getting them to access the content to getting them to take a specific action.
- 4. Evaluate creative.** What is the best way to deliver this content? Should you be funny or serious? Direct or indirect? First, second, or third person? The subject, the message, your audience, and your own personality (either as author or as an organization) all go into this evaluation and the ultimate tone of and approach to your content.
- 5. Quality counts.** Last but not least, is your copy clean, spelled right, and grammatically correct? Does your media look

## Thanks for sharing!

- 2. Image is Everything.** Pictures help encourage sharing. Make sure your content includes at least one image!
- 3. Quiz Show.** True or false: people love to take and share quizzes on social media. True!
- 4. Be Graphic.** Infographics are not only popular on social media, they are also a great, compelling way to share information and make a point with one simple image.
- 5. Don’t be List-less.** We could make a huge list of all the different lists (Top 10 lists, My Favorite lists, etc.) people share via social media, but we won’t. Just remember that people LOVE lists.

well-produced or like you shot it one-handed with your iPhone? The quality of your content is critical, so do not try to be quick or cheap at the expense of that quality.

The topic of quality deserves a bit more attention.

Although it is important that an organization like yours leverage the talents and expertise of your leadership, members, and staff, not everyone has the same abilities and capacities for communication: whether it be writing, speaking, graphic design, media development, etc. However, quality content is so important that you should consider bringing in outside help if your internal team is lacking. That does not mean that they are failing or that you need to replace anyone! Not everyone is experts at everything, so there is no reason to expect them to be.

In our more than 50 years combined experience in developing strategies, messaging, and content of all kinds for associations, advocacy groups, and member-based associations, we have come across every kind of organization with widely varying degrees of internal capacity for content development. But every organization we have ever worked with — from those with a one-person communications shop to those that boast dozens of staff in the areas of PR, internal and external communications, and advocacy — have all gotten great value from bringing in outside help from time

## Thanks for sharing!

**6. Video Killed the Radio Star.** Web videos — from talking heads to animations to quick-cutting montages and on and on — get shared. Not only that, they are also highly engaging and highly effective in terms of message delivery.

**7. What's so funny?** Have fun with content! Make it funny and playful and engaging, and people will want to share.

And remember: variety is the spice of life! If you find something that works, go back to it, but try not to get caught in a rut taking the same approach every time! Try new things, mix it up, and connect with different audiences by using different strategies.

to time (even if we do say so ourselves!).

Some advantages of turning to outside consultants or professionals now and then include:

- Leveraging skills or expertise that you do not have on your immediate team
- Getting an outside perspective on your members or issues
- Accessing new strategies or tactics that have been successfully implemented for other similar organizations
- Allowing your internal team to focus on their strengths or on their day-to-day responsibilities while having outside help to develop and implement a special project or campaign
- Obtaining an objective, independent audit or evaluation of your team or your full communications or member engagement program



In our experience, however, it is critically important that —

even if you bring in outside help on a project, campaign, or even on an ongoing basis — you ensure that your outside team maintain good communication with your internal team, that they take advantage of the internal experience and understanding of the organization, and that you partner with people who respect and make an effort to engage your internal team. That approach will bear the most fruit for you, your organization, and your mission in both the short-term and in the long-term, as well.





MYTH

## You can't reach your members efficiently on the Web.

**MYTH:** There are very few ways to communicate with and engage your members, and the online mechanisms — email, social media, a Web site — can reach just a tiny fraction of your stakeholders, especially compared to traditional avenues like a hard-copy newsletter, snail mail, etc.

**FACT:** Reaching and engaging members through your connected online community is becoming more efficient and effective every day, and the wide range of tools and tactics at your disposal means that you can radically improve your member engagement program.

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Resistance is futile.

In our business, we began working with associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations during the very early days of the dramatic rise of Web-based marketing, advertising, and communications. And in our experience, the most painful — and most resisted! — transition that organizations like yours have gone through has been the transition from traditional member communications to digital member communications.





But the bottom line is:

- Traditional member communication is more expensive.
- Traditional member communication is less effective.
- Traditional member communication is less likely to result in action.

Worse still, traditional member communication appeals to *yesterday's* stakeholders, activists, and leaders in your organization... and completely misses the boat when it comes to the stakeholders, activists, and leaders of *tomorrow*. And if you don't start connecting with *those* folks soon, you may lose them.

So what is “traditional member communication” any way? Think about hard copy newsletters or member newspapers. (Or their ugly cousins, the PDF or scanned versions of the exact same thing!) Think about mailers and postcards. Think about robocalls or telemarketing. Those are the strategies that associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations have been utilizing for decades upon *decades* to communicate with and engage members.



Not very inspiring, is it?

Regardless, time after time we have heard from clients and partners in this market space, the following rejoinders to our pleas to move beyond these antiquated methods:

*"But ALL our members open our mail automatically when they see it's from us."*

*"When our members get our newsletter (or newspaper), the first thing they do is read it cover-to-cover."*

*"Our members don't consider it telemarketing when it comes from us."*

*"Our members don't really go online."*

*"Advertising and marketing techniques that work on other people just won't work for our members."*

Allow us to respond.

False.

False.



False.

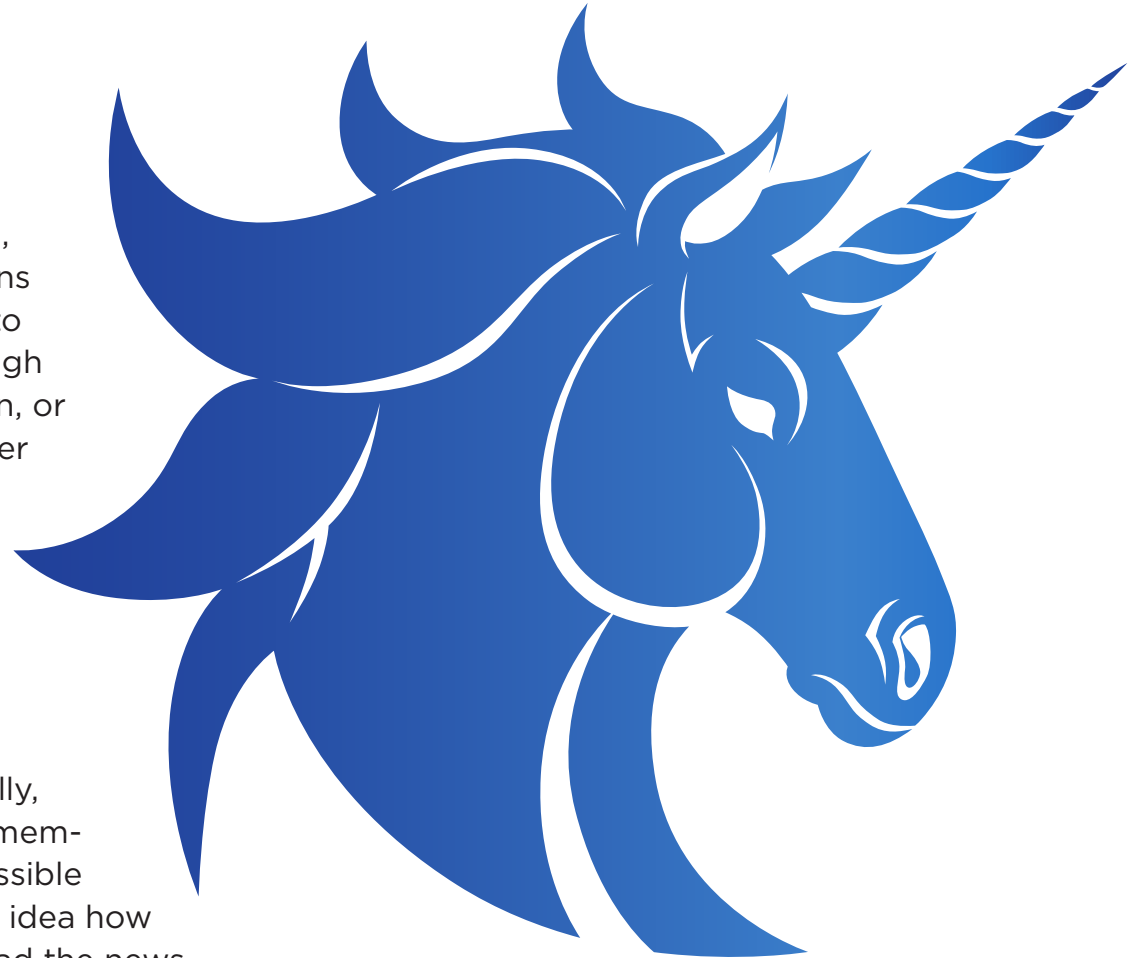
False.

And false.

Sure, nearly all (actually, probably *all*) associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations at least dip their toes in the water when it comes to online member communications. Some do it through social media, primarily through Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter. Others may send “eblasts” to their member email lists. And many consider their Web site to be (and in some cases it is) a primary form of member communication.

But the question is: how many members actually see or engage with those communications?

One of the primary advantages (at least emotionally, though certainly not functionally) that traditional member communication offers is that it is almost impossible to measure and verify. Because you really have no idea how many members opened the snail mail you sent, read the newsletter, or listened to the robocall message that landed in their



voicemail, you have the luxury of assuming that *everyone* did!

Or perhaps you have given members a survey and asked them to feedback on how often they engage with those communications? And perhaps the results came back great!

Of course, if we are to believe everything that people tell us in surveys, then we can assume that advertising doesn't work on anybody, that every American 18 and older votes, and that the average person watches only PBS, C-Span, and the Documentary Channel on TV. (P.S.: They are so well-watched that one of them no longer exists!)

By contrast, everything about online member communications can be verified, measured, and analyzed.

But that does not even get at the original myth. The original myth says that you just can't reach your members effectively on the Web.

Where does this myth come from?

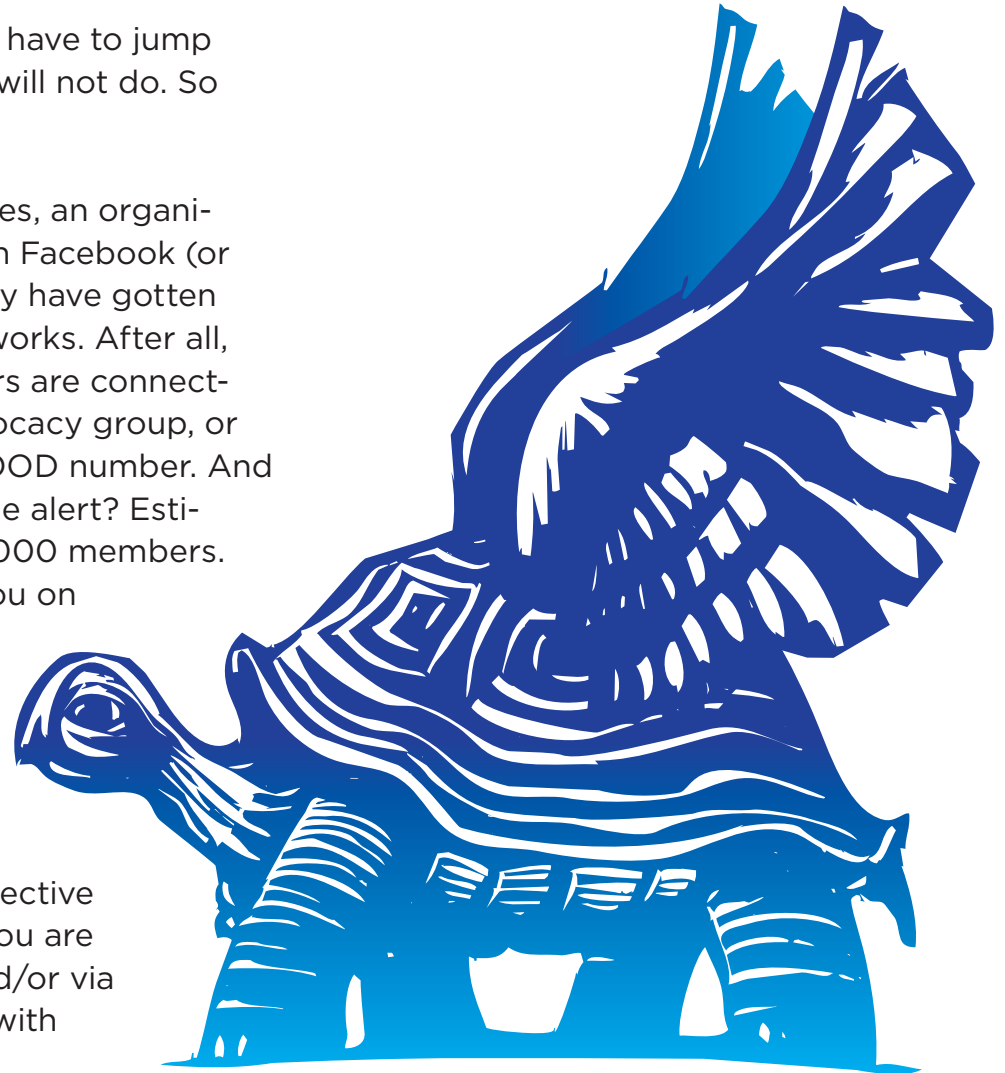
It starts with the fact that your Web site is wide open to anyone, and so any proprietary or exclusive content that you would hope to share there would be available for all to see. And, if you put



member-specific content behind a “wall”, members will have to jump through hoops to verify their identity, which many just will not do. So that is one problem.

Another common myth involves social media. Oftentimes, an organization will post an alert or other piece of information on Facebook (or pick whatever other platform) and feel content that they have gotten the word out to members. But that is not quite how it works. After all, what percentage of the average organization's members are connected to an organization? For an average association, advocacy group, or member-based organization, 10% would be a pretty GOOD number. And then, of that 10%, how many people will actually SEE the alert? Estimates range from 13% - 17%. So, let's say you have 120,000 members. Best case scenario, 12,000 of them are connected to you on Facebook, and maybe 2,040 total have seen your alert. All of a sudden, your great attempt at member communication has only reached 2,040 of 120,000 members: 1.7% of your membership! Not too good, is it?

And then there is advertising. We have already extolled the virtues of online advertising, but is that really an effective way to communicate with members? After all, even if you are able to highly target your online ads geographically and/or via demographics, interests, and other targetable factors, with



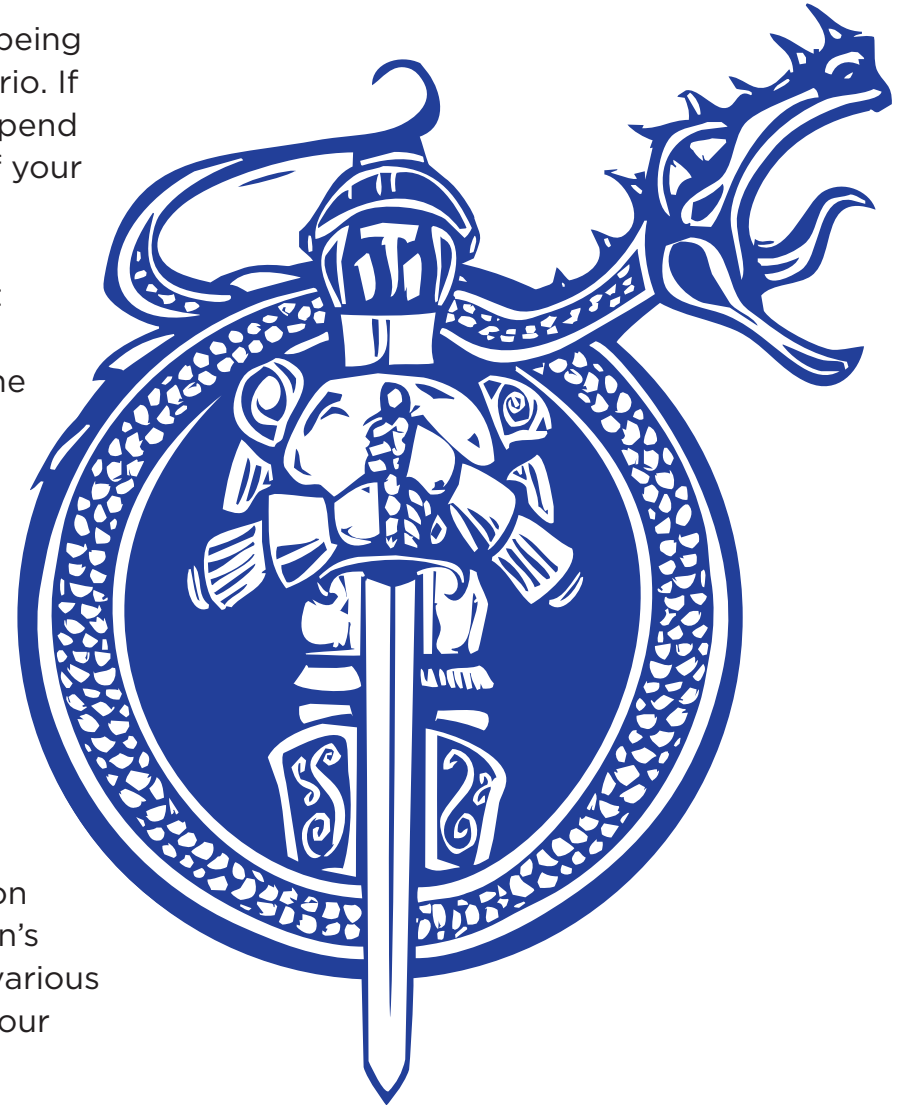
basic Web advertising your end audience is still going to end up being 99.5% non-members and maybe 0.5% members, best case scenario. If you have a \$50,000 Web advertising budget, are you willing to spend just \$250 hitting your members... and waste the other \$49,750 of your budget on people who are irrelevant to you?

All of those concerns have been perfectly valid as recently as just the last year or two, but advances in technology and emerging strategies in various Web platforms have dramatically changed the member communication landscape for associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations. That change has resulted in a new era of opportunity in which your member communications and engagement program can immediately become more cost-effective, more efficient, and more powerful.

The key is a combination of aggressive capacity building and innovative Web advertising techniques.

First and things first, though. What is *capacity*?

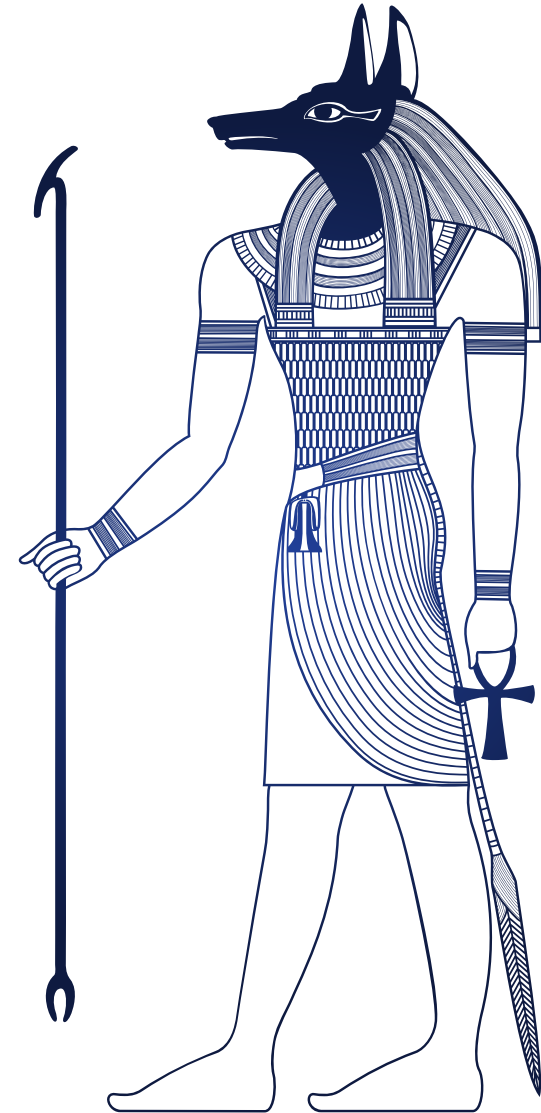
We think of capacity — specifically, online member communication and engagement capacity — as a measurement of an organization's ability to effectively reach and engage members online through various tools and strategies, many of which we have already discussed. Your capacity might include:



- **Email Addresses:** the number of member emails you have for your email marketing list;
- **Fans & Followers:** the number of people you are connected to through your social networks, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. (assuming that most are members);
- **App Users:** the number of members with smartphones who have downloaded and use your customized organizational app; and
- **Text Numbers:** the number of cell phone numbers you have for members who have “enrolled” in your text alert program (OK, technically not an “online” tool, but the ability to link members directly from a text to their smartphones to your Web-based platforms make this all of a piece).

OK, those are the easy ones, but what about capacity that comes from online advertising strategies? Stuff like:

- **Retargeting:** Remember when we talked earlier about retargeting, that thing that happens when you visit a Web site and a “cookie” is added to your computer or other device “marking” you for future advertising? Well, think about how that might work for members. Let's say you DO have a members-only, protected area of your Web site... or let's say you have a page that's “hidden” and only members

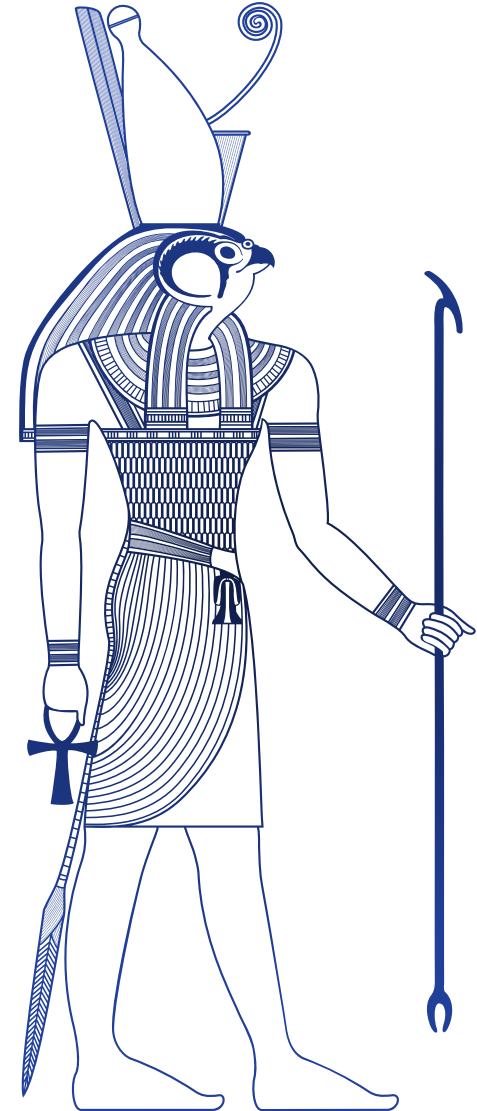




can get there through a special link or other technique. Well, every member that visits you there can be “marked” and added to your members-only retargeting list... and then used later for targeted, members-only advertising! The number of member “cookies” you gather is part of that capacity, as well.

- **Members-Only Advertising:** We just talked about how you can build a members-only advertising group through retargeting. But that's not the only way. For instance, many social platforms now allow you to set up custom advertising lists in various ways. One way that would be a huge asset for you would be to take your member email list, for example, and used that to identify members who may be on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Then, you can add those social-media-using members to a custom advertising group — a group that consists ONLY of your members — and advertise exclusively to that group! And it just isn't social media that allows you to do that. A similar process — and opportunity — exists for most Web advertising: search, display, Web video, and on and on! These custom groups are also a part of your capacity.

One more word about these custom advertising groups, or — as we like to think of them — members-only advertising groups. These are extraordinarily powerful tools for expanding your capacity and improving the efficiency of your online member engagement program. Can you imagine having the power and flexibility — not to mention the metrics and



analytical capacity — of Web advertising... and ALSO be able to ensure that you are not spending a single penny on anyone but your own members? How amazing is that?

Think about the example we used earlier!

Remember our \$50,000 Web advertising budget? \$250 for members and \$49,750 for everyone else? Well, through new members-only advertising strategies, suddenly you can spend \$50,000 of your \$50,000 budget reaching members... and NOTHING will be wasted on non-members.

That one strategy alone represents a revolution in member engagement for associations, advocacy groups, and member based organizations. If you are not doing it — or don't starting doing it soon — you are not doing your organization justice.

The same can be said of online member engagement in general. Its power and potential are practically limitless, and unless you are taking full advantage of the tools and tactics at your disposal, you are likely spending more and achieving less than you could be otherwise.



MYTH

## Social media is a snake pit.

**MYTH:** Social media presents so many perilous snares, traps, and pitfalls — including hostile voices and predatory rivals — that it can be far more trouble than it is worth.

**FACT:** For an association, an advocacy group, or a member-based organization, social media can be the most valuable piece of real estate in your connected online community, and you should not let it scare or intimidate you.

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The era of social media commenced with incredible excitement, optimism, and zeal. The potential for connecting people with shared backgrounds, interests, and values — across states, across countries, and even from one corner of the world to another — was quickly understood and enthusiastically embraced. In almost the blink of an eye, social media revolutionized the way people communicated, engaged with each other, and even viewed themselves.

For associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organi-



zations especially, social media was almost instantaneously recognized as a powerful tool to connect individuals with common cause and to expand and empower organizations and movements.

But somewhere along the line, and in dramatic fashion, something changed. The excitement and zeal with which organizations — both for-profit and nonprofit alike — greeted the rise of social media quickly transformed to restraint, and then caution... and then dread.

Anecdotal — and in many cases apocryphal — tales of embarrassing incidents, awkward confrontations, and damaging episodes emerged and fed the snake pit myth. Antagonistic “trolls” that hijacked a page and vexed an organization. Devious competitors that infiltrated a social community and poached customers or members. Accidental or impetuous postings by an organization’s staff that led to embarrassment or required significant time and precious resources to resolve. All of a sudden, the free-wheeling, informal nature of social media — which initially made it such an attractive and powerful engagement tool — was something that spawned misgivings and doubt.

So, is social media something you should fear?



Nonsense!

The truth is that for an association, advocacy group, or member-based organization, the initial reaction was 100% correct. Social media is, indeed, a game changer for the better. Social media provides opportunities to find and engage with potential members, supporters, or activists. Social media can help strengthen your relationship with your members or other stakeholders. And social media can provide a basic infrastructure for rapid communication and powerful netroots activism.

But how?

First of all, you probably already know WHAT social media is, but you may not know all the forms it takes.

Like many people, you probably think of social media as Facebook or Twitter. And, as a professional, you also likely think of social media as LinkedIn. But what about YouTube? Pinterest? Meetup? Vine? There are literally *hundreds* of highly-trafficked social media sites around the world. Don't worry, though: you don't have to be part of all of them. But creating an active, engaged social media community (or communities!) can be a transformative strategy for your association, advocacy group, or member-based organization.

## Top 11 Social Media Sites | as of May 2015

1		<b>Facebook</b> 900,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
2		<b>Twitter</b> 310,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
3		<b>LinkedIn</b> 255,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
4		<b>Pinterest</b> 250,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
5		<b>Google Plus</b> 120,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
6		<b>Tumblr</b> 110,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
7		<b>Instagram</b> 100,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
8		<b>VK</b> 80,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
9		<b>Flickr</b> 65,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
10		<b>Vine</b> 42,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors
11		<b>MeetUp</b> 40,000,000 Unique Monthly Visitors

OK, that's all well and good, but how do you leverage the power of social media on behalf of your organization? What should your basic approach be? Here are a few simple tips to get your organization pointed in the right direction when it comes to social media.

- **Establish your social media presence!**

First and foremost, do not be afraid of social media! If you haven't yet, take the plunge and set up a LinkedIn group. Build a Facebook page. Create an organizational Twitter handle. One way or another, you already have the basic building blocks that you'll need to get started. Whether it is a brochure about your organization, a Web site, or just a guiding document, you likely already have and use basic language and messaging about your organization, core images, etc. That's all you need to get started!

- **Cultivate an active, engaged community!**

We will talk more about cultivating an active, engaged social media community when we discuss capacity building, but in basic terms, cultivating your community just means getting "fans" for your Facebook page, "followers" on Twitter, etc. You can do that organically (inviting friends and colleagues to "like" your page, for instance). Or you can employ paid strategies (paid social ads that are designed to reach and engage social media



users most likely to be interested in your organization or issues). And once you have them, keep them engaged! Use interesting or creative content. Solicit opinion and feedback. Encourage sharing and activism. And give things away!

- **Use social media to promote AND invigorate your live events!**

For organizations like yours, social media can be a primary — and very, very low-cost! — driver of attendance at live events. As you grow your social community or communities, you are establishing an audience of members, stakeholders, and/or sympathetic activists who are the prime audience for your annual convention, seminars, or other live events. You can use many of the strategies that we talk about in this book to reach them and promote your events. And once the event is in full swing, encourage attendees to share their event photos on Instagram, to share short videos on Vine, to live-tweet on Twitter, and to blog about it on their favorite platform.

- **Speaking of blogging... blog!**

For some reason, the idea of blogging tends to intimidate even seasoned professionals, but an organizational blog is a great





way to keep your Web content up-to-date, to react to recent news or emerging issues, and to maintain regular — though not necessarily precisely scheduled — communication with your stakeholders. Regular blogging also allows you to demonstrate your leadership within your industry, to engage members and potential members, and to ensure more effective search engine optimization (SEO), which will facilitate more Web traffic to and time spent on your Web site.

- **Encourage leaders and members to us social media!**

Media and social media are not the same thing. Media — whether a TV or radio ad, a billboard, or even your Web site or online ads — is a speech. Social media is a conversation. That means you need others to participate! You may have someone on your team who is responsible for posting to Facebook, composing tweets, etc. But that should not be the only “voice” in your social media community. Empower leaders to participate in discussions and share content. Encourage members or stakeholders to actively engage with the organization itself and the rest of your social media community. Maybe even form social media teams — composed of leaders, staff, and/or rank-and-file members — to stay engaged with social media, start conversations, and make sure there is a robust conversation going at all times! The more you keep your social



media community interested and engaged, the more likely it will be that your social media will come to life and be an asset to your organization.

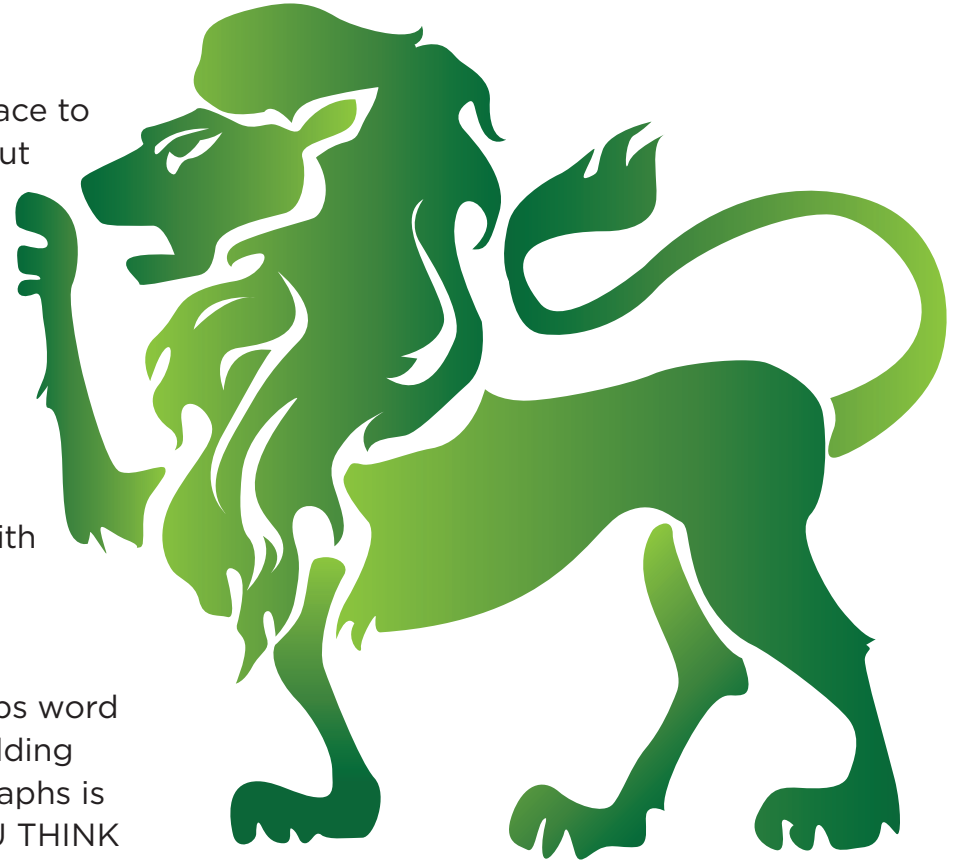
Those are some simple strategies that you SHOULD embrace to create and maintain an effective social media presence. But what should you avoid when it comes to social media? Here are our **top 7 DON'Ts for social media**, in no particular order.

- **Please, please, please don't beg!**

It is fine to ask for likes, shares, retweets, and more from time to time, but don't overdo it. Pretty soon, you will be ignored. Share what you think is interesting or important, and let the community decide what to do with it.

- **YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHOUT!**

Writing in all caps reeks of amateurism. Using an all-caps word now and then can help it stand out or substitute for bolding or underlining, but writing all-caps sentences or paragraphs is downright lazy and annoying. ARE YOU MAD? DO YOU THINK WE CAN'T HEAR YOU? OR DO YOU JUST NOT KNOW HOW TO TURN THE CAPS BUTTON OFF?



- **Don't be lazy with grammar or spelling.**  
Speaking of amateurism, bad grammar and misspellings reflect poorly on your organization. Just because it is social media does not mean you should be lazy.
- **Give peace a chance.**  
There are people who engage in social media to stir controversy, pick fights, and offend others. These people are called trolls. They don't need any encouragement, so don't give them any. Don't get involved in social media fights. Let your community deal with it, and if someone is truly being offensive or inappropriate, you can block them.
- **Not everything deserves a hashtag.**  
Enough said.
- **Don't get tag crazy.**  
"Tagging" your friends or fans in photos can be a great way to recognize them and showcase your page or content on their social media walls. However, it can also violate their privacy and create conflict or issues. When in doubt, get someone's permission before tagging them.
- **Don't repeat yourself over and over and over and over again.**  
In case you missed that, we said don't repeat yourself over



and over and over and over again. Understand? Don't repeat yourself over and over and over and over again. Sharing and re-sharing and re-sharing again the same tweets and photos and messages will not only turn off your social media community, it likely will impact how certain social media platforms treat you.

- **Resist the robot revolution.**

There are a number of interesting tools available to help streamline and automate your social media management. However, don't discount the value of the human touch. Too much automation can weigh down your social media platforms. Keep content fresh and original as best you can... and stop the robots from taking over the world.

- **Don't be an absentee landlord.**

Setting up your social media platforms is just the first step. You have to use them to be effective. Even if you have an active, engaged community on a platform like Facebook, that does not mean you should leave all the work to them. Stay active, stay engaged, and maximize your social communities!

- **Don't spread yourself too thin.**

As we noted earlier, there are literally hundreds of social media platforms out there, and dozens of them are high-profile and



highly-trafficked. That doesn't mean, though, that you have to use them all. Figure out which ones are best for you and your stakeholders, and focus on those.

The most important don't of all, though, is this:

**Don't let the social media myths and horror stories scare you!**

For an association, advocacy group, or member-based organization, social media provides a whole new world of opportunities. Seize those opportunities and your organization will be all the stronger for it!



MYTH

## Traditional media is more effective than online advertising.

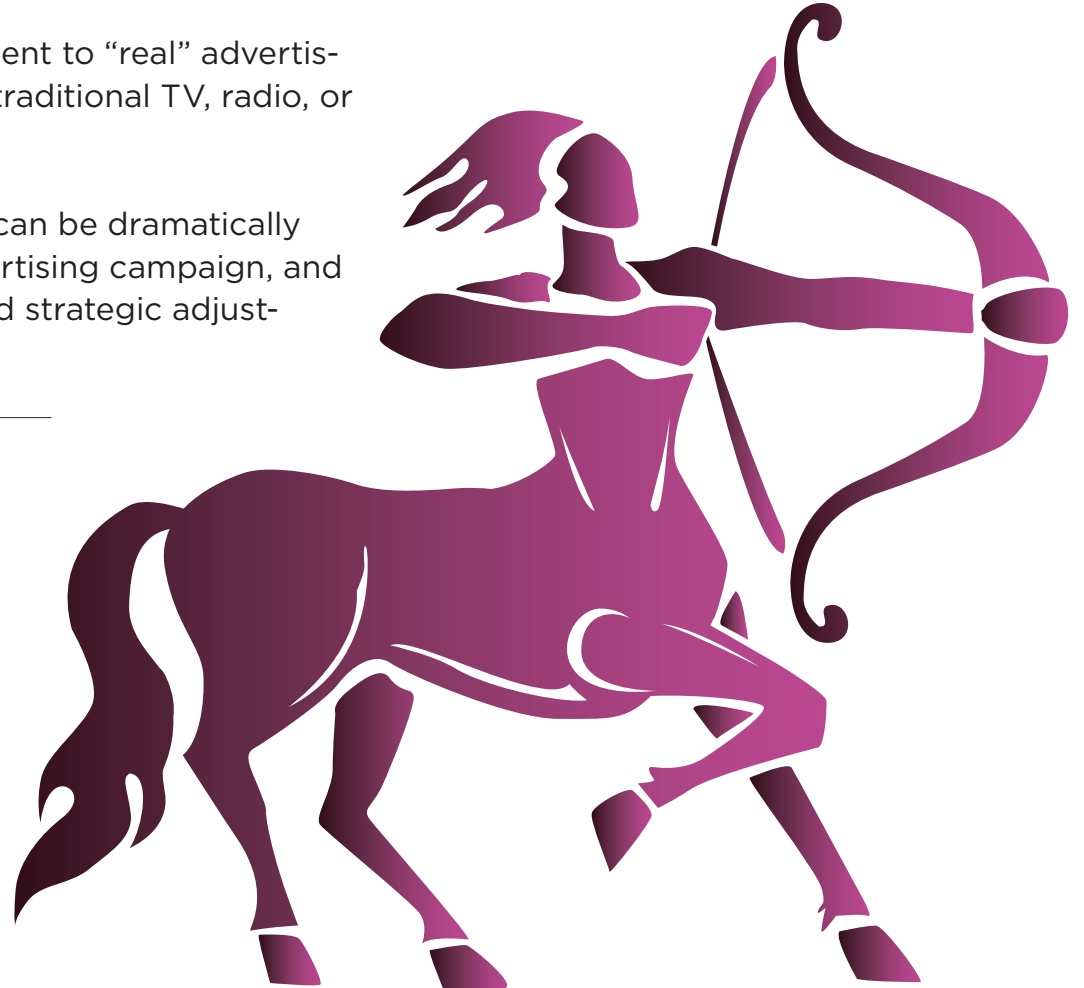
**MYTH:** Online advertising may be a nice complement to “real” advertising, but it is not nearly as effective or powerful as traditional TV, radio, or print advertising.

**FACT:** A smart, strategic online advertising effort can be dramatically more efficient and effective than a traditional advertising campaign, and offers much more flexibility in terms of creative and strategic adjustments, follow-up, and action conversions.

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Of all the myths out there about Web communications and online engagement, this is the one that has been the most carefully cultivated and aggressively perpetuated by competing interests. As their last refuge to combat the increasing diversification of ad budgets and marketing dollars, traditional media reps have invested significant time and energy into trying to marginalize online media.

It is a battle they cannot win.



Web advertising, online media, and the whole range of paid online communications has emerged as a significant threat to traditional media outlets — television, radio, newspaper, outdoor, etc. — because of the dynamic, highly-efficient nature of Web advertising. And it is those traits, precisely, that make Web advertising such an appealing option for associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations.

But first think about how old the traditional media industry is! Print ads began to appear in weekly newspapers in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first radio stations in the 1920's brought the first radio ads that same decade. And the rise of commercial television in the 1950's gave rise to, well, TV commercials. Those three types of old media dominated the “modern” advertising industry right up to and past the turn of the new century.

And then the world changed.

Newspapers have become an endangered species as more and more people look elsewhere for their news. Broadcast radio stations as we used to know them have begun to fall away one by one as huge radio groups pick them off and people turn to alternatives like Pandora, Spotify and satellite radio. And though television remains the 800 pound gorilla in the advertising room, its audience has continued to splinter over time. First it was from the alternative broadcast networks that challenged the domination of the big three networks. Then came





the explosive rise of cable TV. And now, finally, people are finding new and more convenient ways to consume video and programming: YouTube, Hulu, Netflix, and an infinite emerging collection of online channels and options. Standard Media Index reports that *\$1.1 billion* in national TV spending migrated online during the 2014-15 TV season.

All of a sudden, online advertising is not a complement to traditional media but a viable alternative.

But what is online advertising? And why is it perfect for your organization?

Online advertising takes a handful of standard forms, some of which resemble traditional advertising and some of which are completely native to the Web. A few of the primary options for online advertising include the following:

### **Search Advertising**

Search advertising is one of the most fundamental forms of online advertising and the form most unique to the Web. Search advertising is really a highly targeted form of advertising, because people are actually typing in keyword phrases that are relevant to your organization or issues before clicking on your ad-



vertisement. This can bring a flood of relevant traffic to your online real estate very quickly. And search advertising is driven primarily by what is called cost-per-click (CPC) advertising, which means that you only pay for an ad when someone actually takes the active step of engaging with the ad... or clicking on it.

### **Banner Advertising**

In many ways, banner advertising resembles the oldest form of traditional advertising: newspaper ads. Banner ads are very simple. In essence, a banner ad is some sort of banner — oftentimes a rectangle or square — with a snappy headline and some sort of engaging, compelling image that appears on a Web site. When someone clicks on the banner, they link to your Web site or some other Web property that provides them with more information about your organization or — better yet — gives them an opportunity to take some sort of action. Like search ads, you can generally buy banner ads on a CPC basis, or you can buy them based on how many impressions (times your ad appears in front of someone). Impression-based ad buying is based on a cost-per-thousand impressions (CPM).

### **Web Video Advertising**

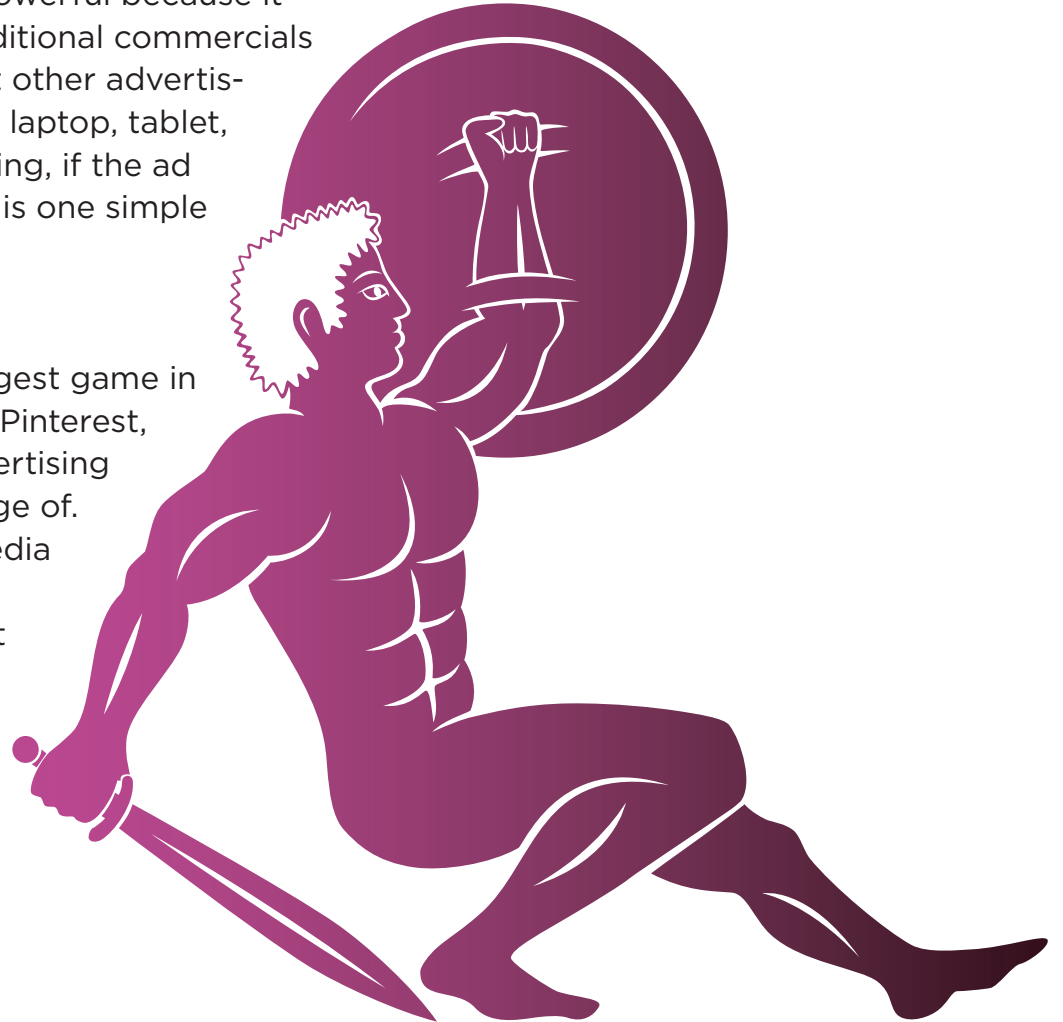
Like banner advertising, Web video advertising evolved from traditional advertising: the kinds of ads you once saw only on television



have now migrated to various Web video platforms like Hulu, YouTube, and others. This form of advertising is particularly powerful because it combines the urgency and storytelling ability of traditional commercials (combining audio and video stimulation in ways that other advertising cannot) with the in-your-face immediacy of your laptop, tablet, or mobile device. And, unlike traditional TV advertising, if the ad engages or motivates the viewer, all that is required is one simple click to find out more or take action.

### **Social Media Advertising**

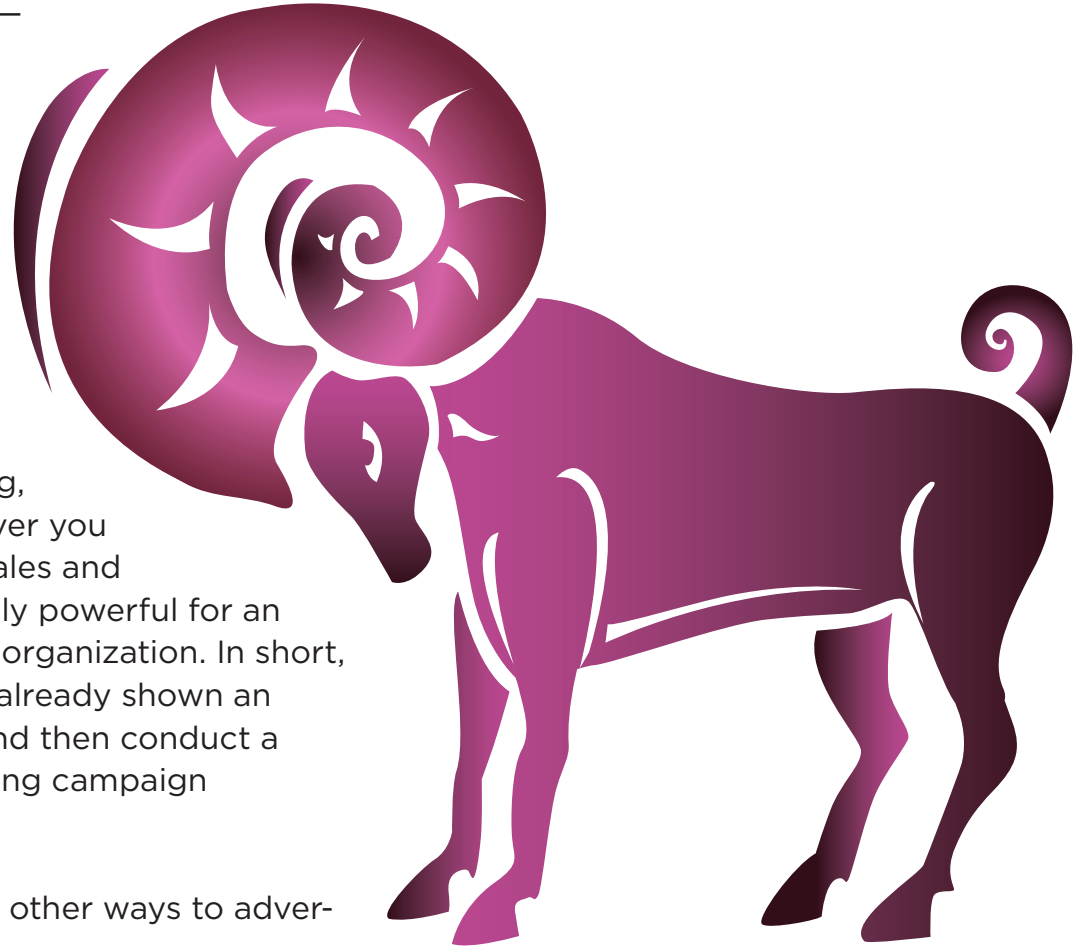
When it comes to social media, Facebook is the biggest game in town. However, other platforms — Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, and more — may present alternative advertising opportunities that you may be able to take advantage of. While the jury is still out on the efficacy of social media advertising for sales and product marketing, the nature of social media aligns perfectly with the most common advertising needs of associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations. From cause marketing to membership or capacity building to branding and beyond, social media advertising in all its forms has emerged as a highly efficient, highly effective option for organizations like yours.



## Retargeting Advertising

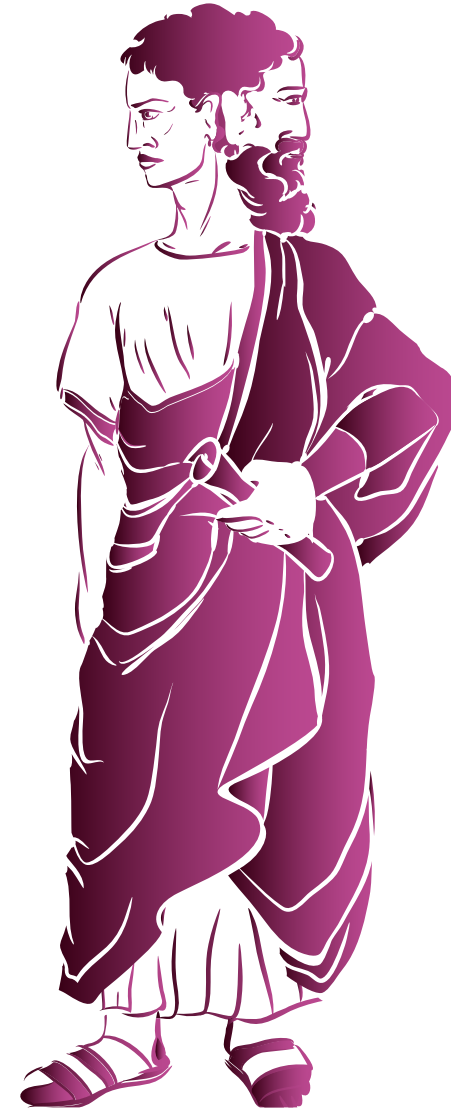
Have you ever gone to a hotel's Web site, checked the room rates, and then — whether you booked a room or not — noticed ads for that hotel everywhere else you go on the Web... urging you to complete your booking, introducing a new sale or special, or simply inviting you to visit them again soon? We bet you have, and it means that you've been "retargeted." Retargeting advertising — or remarketing, as it is sometimes called — occurs when you visit a Web site or some other type of online presence, and a "cookie" or code is added to your computer or other device "marking" you for future advertising, allowing that advertiser to serve you ads wherever you go on the Web. The power of this strategy for sales and marketing should be self-evident. But it is equally powerful for an association, advocacy group, or member-based organization. In short, it allows you to identify those people who have already shown an interest in your organization, your issues, etc., and then conduct a highly focused, extraordinarily efficient advertising campaign targeting only those people.

In addition to these, there are, of course, several other ways to adver-



tise online — direct-site sponsorship, newsletter advertising, affiliate marketing, and more — and the best option for you should be driven by your immediate strategic needs and your long-term objectives and goals. No matter which road you travel, though, online advertising offers distinct, unique advantages that set it apart from traditional advertising. Some of those advantages include:

- **METRICS:** Nielsen, Arbitron, and other traditional media ratings and analytic tools pale in comparison to the real-time, comprehensive metrics offered by online advertising. That real-time access to an ad’s or campaign’s performance not only allows you to monitor and judge its effectiveness, but also allows you to make real-time, money-saving creative or strategic adjustments on the fly to maximize the impact of what’s working... and to stop wasting resources on what’s not working.
- **TARGETING:** For traditional electronic media, broadcast television has always been considered the “blunt force” instrument to reach a wide, inclusive audience, while radio and then later cable TV was used more for audience segmentation and targeting. Web advertising, however, has changed the game in terms of targeting. Precise demographic targeting. Audiences based only on declared interests. Geotargeting not by the TV market or 30-mile radius, but down to zip+4 code and even narrower. The retargeting approach outlined above. And that’s just the starting point.



- **PRICING:** Unlike traditional media, there are a wide variety of ways that you can buy Web media. There are the CPC and CPM options outlined above. In other cases, you can place ads based just on how long you want them to run. Whether it's one of those options or another, the pricing option you choose can and should be based on your specific strategic needs.
- **BUDGET:** Depending on the size of the market, a traditional TV campaign could cost hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. A Web video campaign in that same market — using the same ad — could cost a fraction of that by precisely targeting only the specific audience most likely to respond to the ad. Likewise, a multi-million nationwide traditional media effort is likely not in your budget. But could you afford a nationwide, multi-channel online buy that serves your precise needs and helps you fulfil your goals? Absolutely. And you can always simply just turn the campaign “off” when you've reached your goal or hit your budget ceiling!

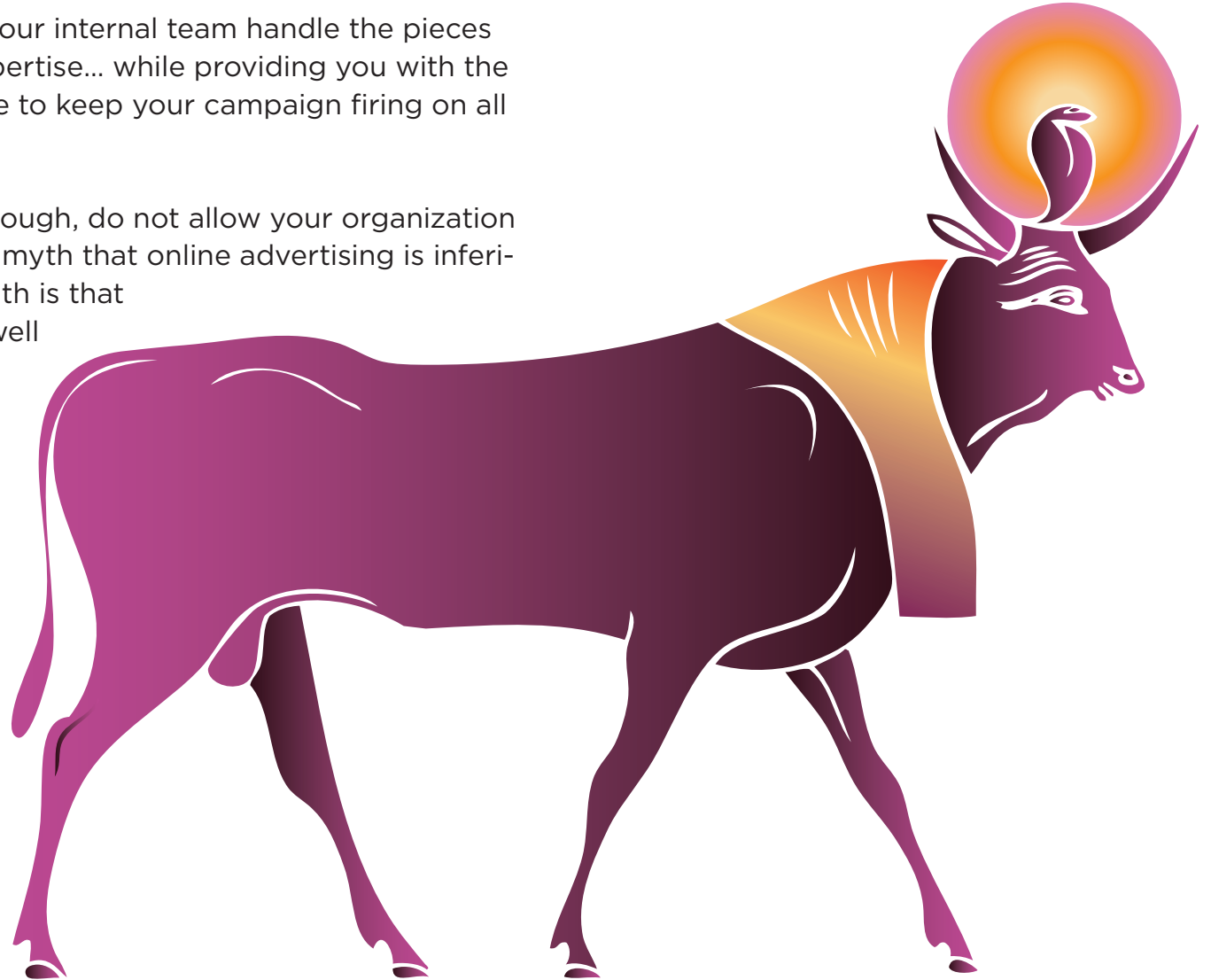
Online advertising is a powerful, dynamic tool that is custom-made for cost-conscious organizations like yours.

And, like many types of advertising and marketing, there are absolutely ways to do-it-yourself; and there are times when you will want to turn to full-time media firms that specialize in this sort of advertising. The best of them, though, will help you find a way to maximize



your resources by letting you and your internal team handle the pieces that leverage your strength and expertise... while providing you with the service and guidance that they have to keep your campaign firing on all cylinders.

Regardless of which way you go, though, do not allow your organization to be limited in its approach by the myth that online advertising is inferior to traditional advertising. The truth is that a Web-based campaign may very well be exactly the right fit for you.





## MYTH Netroots activism doesn't matter.

**MYTH:** Online activism has less potential, value, and impact than “real world” activism, and can be significantly more difficult to harvest.

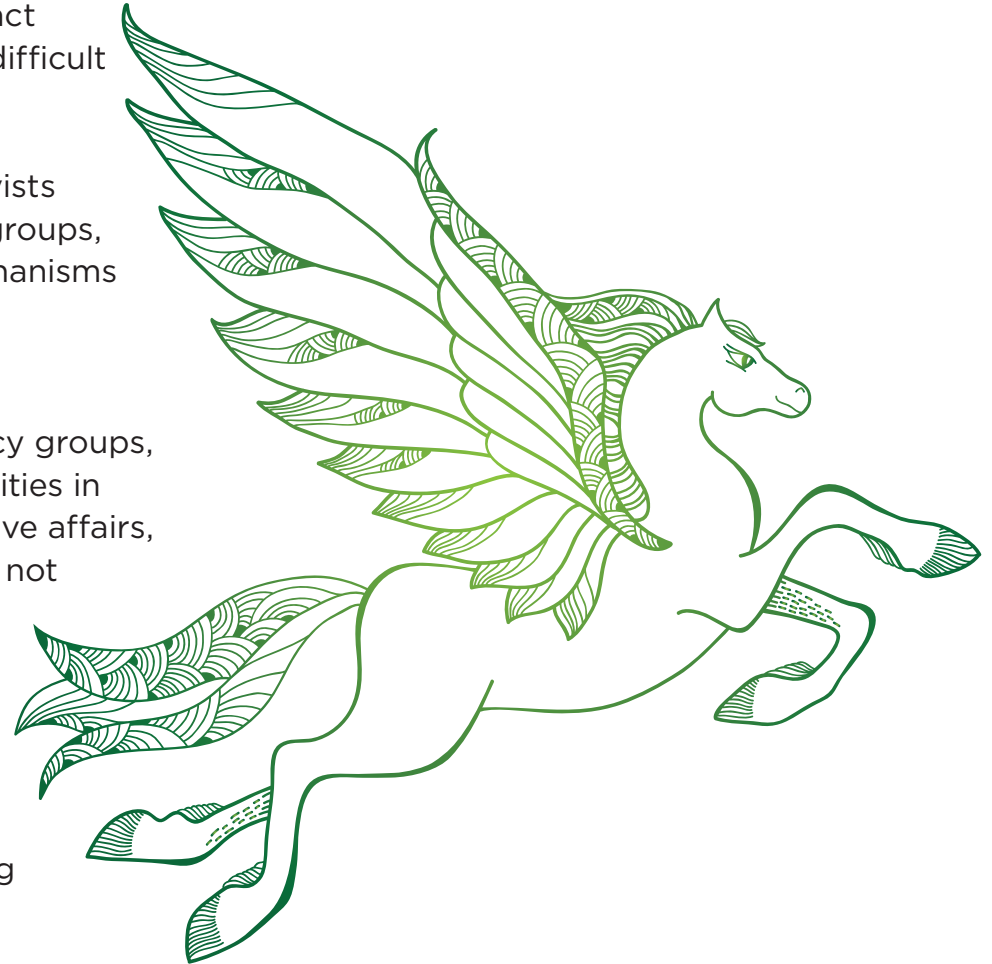
**FACT:** Engaging, cultivating, and deploying netroots activists will be the next great frontier for associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations, and the tools and mechanisms necessary to conquer that frontier are already available.

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Most — though not necessarily all — associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations have interests and priorities in various areas of public policy, local or higher-level legislative affairs, and sometimes even down and dirty politics. And most, if not all, have occasion to inform, engage, and mobilize their stakeholders around those issues.

How about you?

Well, if you are not maximizing the potential of your online community to support those efforts you are missing a huge opportunity.

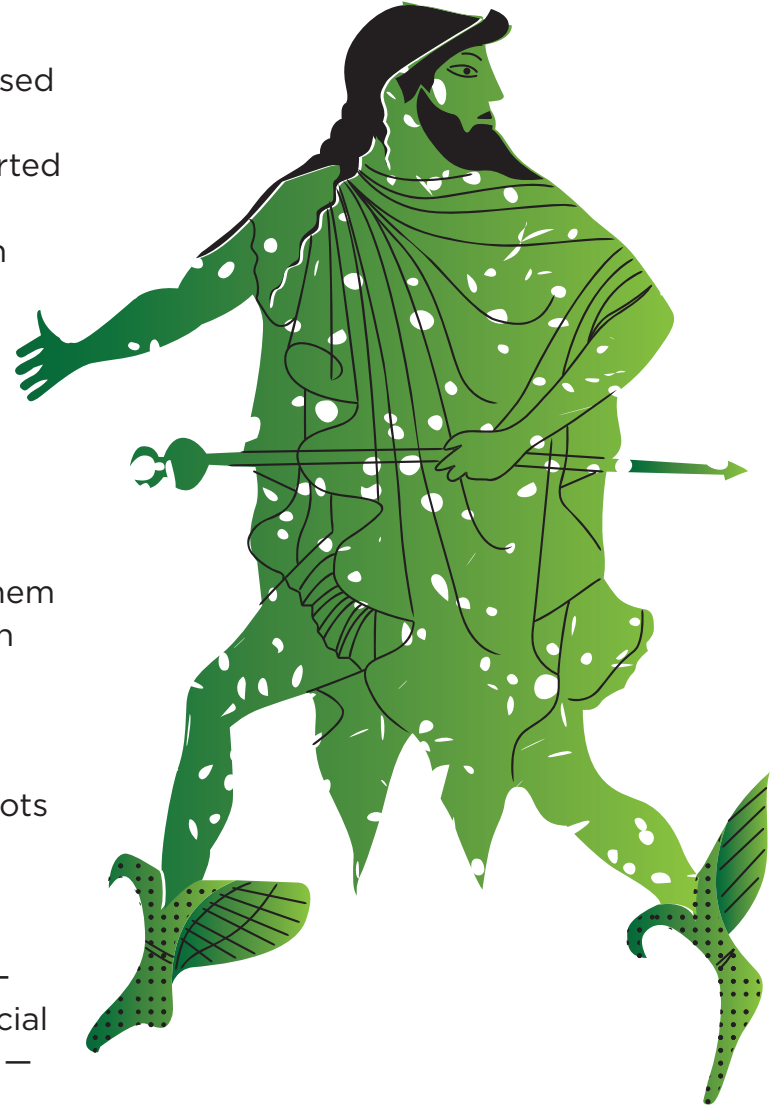


For many, the first thing that comes to mind when they think about netroots activism is the Web site MoveOn.org, a progressive Web-based political action center that is primarily known for raising millions of dollars for progressive politicians and organizations. MoveOn.org started as a small email group with the purpose of gathering signatures on a petition related to the impeachment hearings of President Bill Clinton in 1998, but it quickly grew, employing a variety of techniques to engage and deploy progressive activists in support of issues, politicians, and organizations. It was among the first — and has grown to be one of the most recognized — examples of a Web presence specifically focused on advocacy and netroots action.

On the other side of the ideological spectrum, the National Rifle Association boasts a first-class netroots activism engine that helps them remain one of the most politically powerful advocacy organizations in America.

In our own experience working associations across the country, we have even developed our own, highly-efficient, highly-effective netroots advocacy engine, which we simple call the Member Action Center (MAC).

The idea behind our Member Action Center is to provide for our partners a dedicated Web presence (though often tied intimately to a social media platform) that facilitates member action — netroots advocacy —



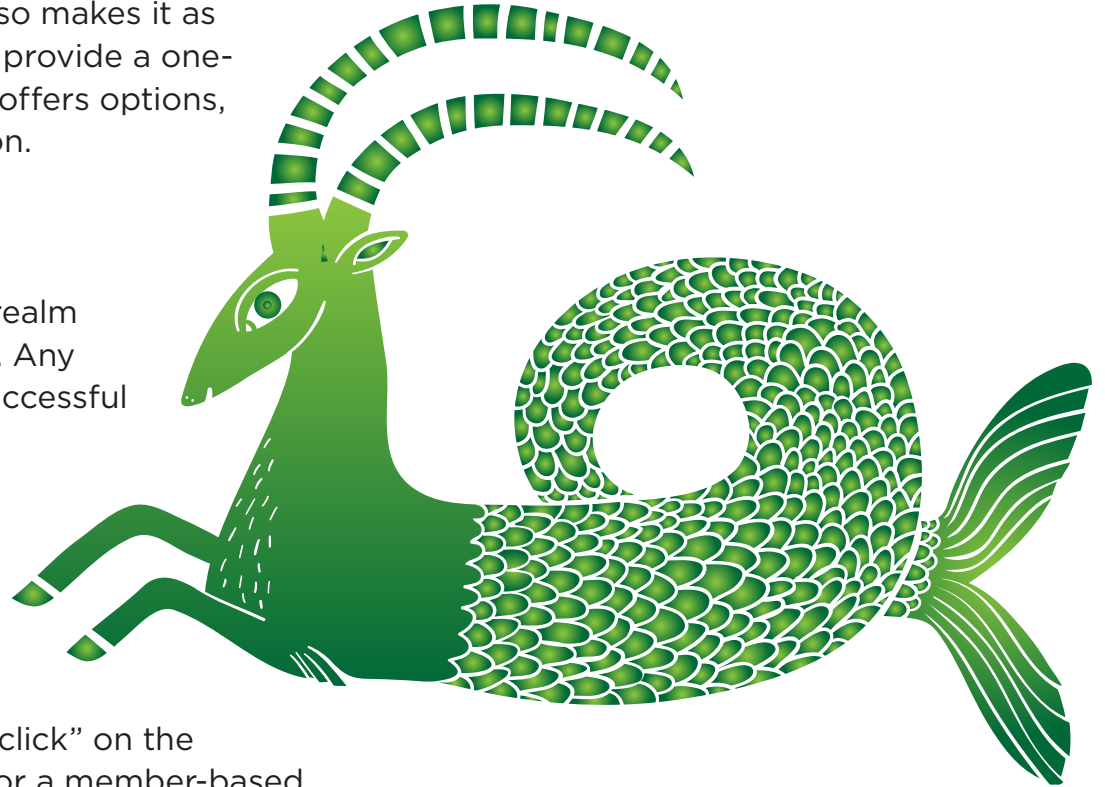
in a way that not only encourages that action but also makes it as easy on the user as possible. The core concept is to provide a one-stop (read: one-click!) action center that motivates, offers options, and — most importantly — removes barriers to action.

Why is this so important?

In the modern world — and especially in the digital realm — people have extraordinarily short attention spans. Any barrier to action can be the difference between a successful “conversion” and a lost opportunity.

But what is a “conversion”?

In net-speak, a conversion is a specific action that you have identified for a Web user (a member, stakeholder, etc.) to take via your Web platform. In a sales situation, a conversion could be that final “click” on the “BUY NOW” button that completes a transaction. For a member-based organization, a conversion could be the final step towards confirming that they have joined the organization. At a more simple level, a conversion could be the one click that sends you a user’s email address to add to your email marketing list. And for an advocacy group, a conversion might be the “SEND NOW” click that sends their lobbying email to their local legislator or Congressperson.



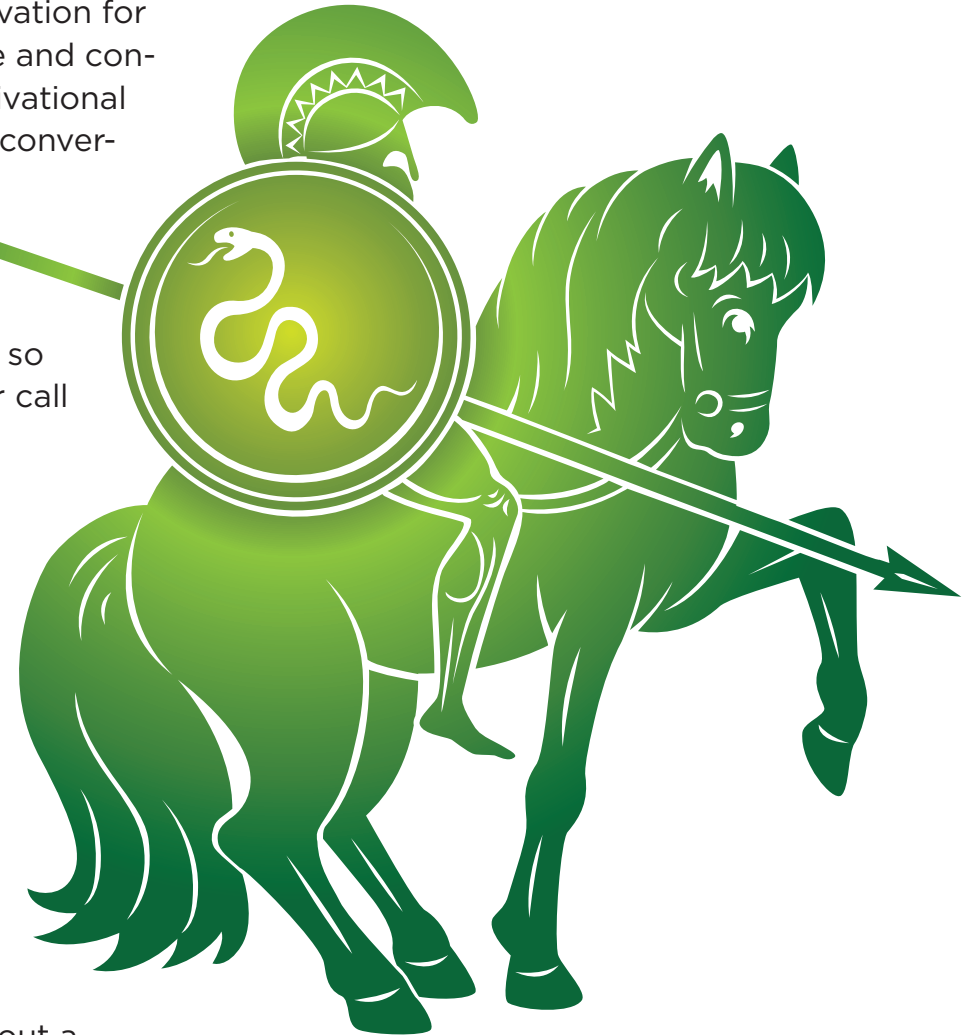
Like many things we are discussing, though, conversions rarely just happen. They require you to have prepared the ground and guided your Web user through the process to the conclusion (conversion!) you desire. Because, if you don't, you will likely lose a significant number of potential conversations along the way!

Some common reasons why people “drop out” of the process before completing a conversation include:

- **Pants on Fire!** The primary reason that potential conversions are lost is because the prospect (your member or stakeholder) feels that they have been lured into the process under false pretenses. We call this the *Liar! Liar! Pants on Fire!* problem. In essence, this means that once they start the process toward conversion, the user discovers that the end action is not what they originally thought it was. This is fine for users who simply have sought you out on their own: they simply drop out and move on. However, it becomes a significant problem for you if you have made an effort to get someone to your action center or conversion portal under false pretenses. Perhaps your online ad, email marketing, or other inducement overstated, misrepresented, or simply caused confusion. Now, not only will the user drop off and not move forward toward conversion, but even worse: you have damaged your reputation or brand with that stakeholder!



- **I'm SO unmotivated!** Motivation is, well, the primary motivation for converting a prospect to action. That means that your site and content quality — and your ability to find and exploit the motivational triggers of your stakeholders — are a major factor in final conversions. Why is this issue important? How does it affect your stakeholders, personally? Will there be benefits or consequences based on the success or failure of your initiative? Are you appealing to reason or emotion? Motivation is key to conversion, so make sure that there is something motivating around your call to action.
- **Are those hurdles in my way?** Which is easier: jogging around a running track or running around the same track and leaping over hurdles every 10 yards or so? Obviously, most of us would prefer to do it without the hurdles. In fact, many of us probably wouldn't even try to jump over the hurdles. It is the same thing when it comes to trying to convert action on your Web site. When it comes to encouraging conversions, make sure that conversion options are front and center: don't make people click all over your site to find them. Link the motivators — your talking points, your video, or whatever you are using — DIRECTLY to the conversion button, rather than keeping them in different areas. And don't require someone to fill out a



lengthy form or provide too much information before they “close” the deal. Those are just a few common hurdles that get in the way of conversions. Bottom line: get the hurdles out of the way so that your stakeholders have easy running to the finish line!

There was a long time in which Web sites were considered purely informational, but that is no longer the case. Conversions matter!

Especially for an association, advocacy group, or member-based organization, online conversions — online action! — matter considerably. Some common “conversions” that our partners have prioritized include:

- Signing new members or member renewals
- Sign-ups for conferences and seminars
- Participation in online learning courses
- Signing an online petition
- Taking a Web-based pledge



- Emailing or faxing lawmakers
- Calling their governor
- Adding their email to an e-Activist list
- Downloading e-advocacy smartphone apps
- Sharing information on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn

And those are just a handful of examples, and we'll bet the house that at least a few of them apply to your organization.

Let's get back to the original myth, though. Is netroots advocacy ineffective?

At the core of this myth are a few instances of “conventional wisdom” that are more platitudes than they are actual facts.

***Elected officials don't pay any attention to letters or emails anymore,*** naysayers claim, ***unless they get tens of thousands of them.*** Not true. As professionals who have worked with plenty of elected officials, we have seen first-hand just how aware lawmakers are of the communications that they and their offices receive. They pay attention, and it affects their decision-making.





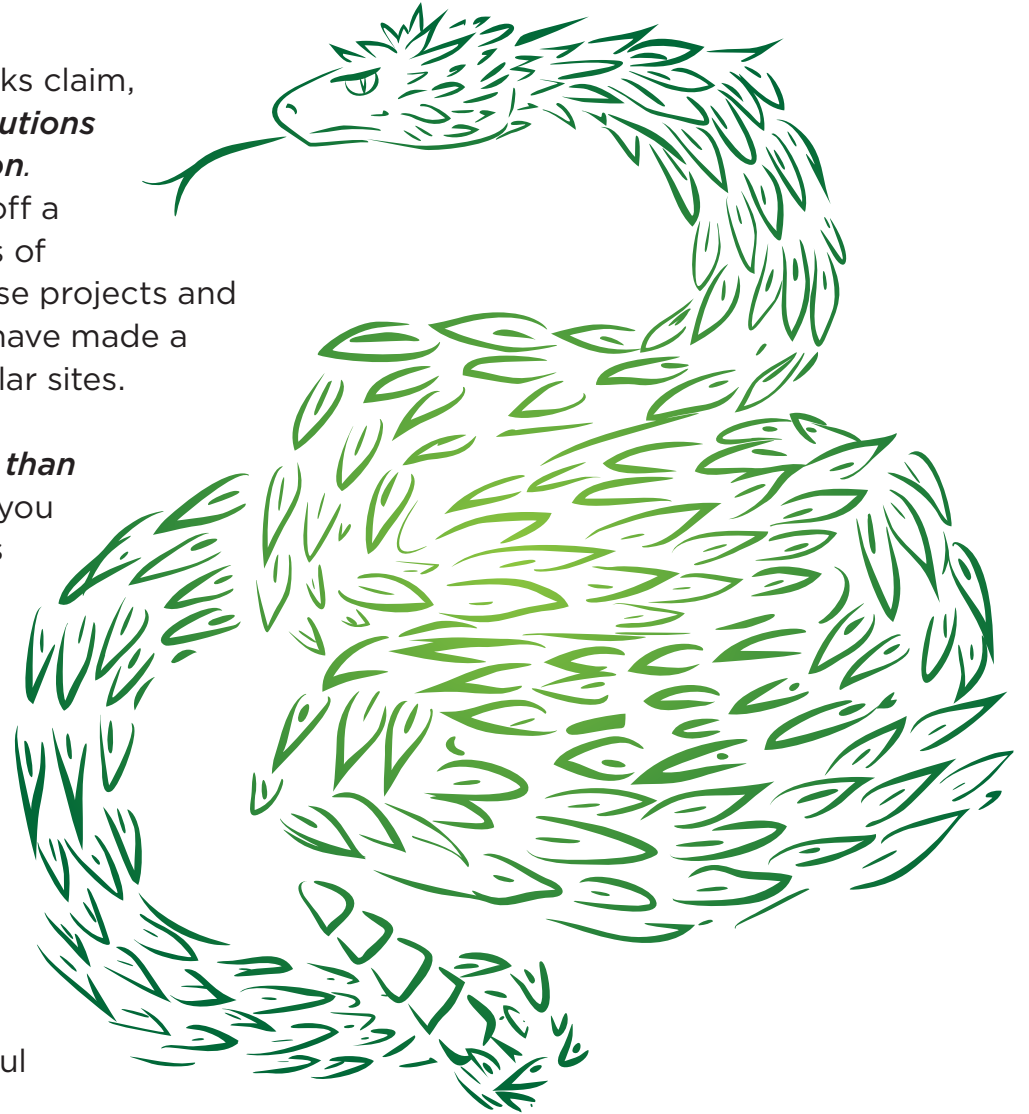
***Online fundraising doesn't work***, many of these same folks claim, ***because people need to be asked personally for contributions directly from the candidate or a leader of an organization.***

Really? Tell that to the presidential candidates who fire off a provocative email to their supports and watch as millions of dollars roll in over the next 24 hours. Or to the folks whose projects and causes are funded by complete strangers because they have made a compelling case on Kickstarter, GoFundMe, or other similar sites.

***A real personal, face-to-face, makes much more impact than the faceless masses online***, they say. Perhaps. But while you might be able to get hundreds of people to hop on a bus with 3 days of lead time to attend a rally, you can probably get thousands — or tens of thousands, depending on the size of your organization — to call their Senator or sign a petition in just a matter of hours.

Like anything else, the power of e-advocacy depends upon how well you do it and the specific strategies you employ. According to one recent study from the University of Washington, “digital activism” (as they call it) can be highly effective. Some of their findings include:

- “Digital activism campaigns tend to be more successful



when waged against government rather than business authorities. There have been many activist campaigns against corporations, but they don't seem to have succeeded as well as those that had governments for a target.”

- “Effective digital activism employs a number of social media tools. Tweeting alone is less successful... and no single tool in the study had a clear relationship with campaign success.”
- “Governments still tend to lag behind activist movements in the use and mastery of new social media tools. They sometimes use the same tools... but it's always months after others have tried them.”

Believe us: the conventional wisdom is wrong, and netroots advocacy works.



## CASE STUDY: NYSUT Member Action Center

In our business, we have had the fortunate opportunity to work with one of the largest state-based associations in the country: New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Just a few years ago, recognizing that their online lobbying and member engagement efforts needed a significant boost, they asked us to develop for them an engine for e-activism.

Based on NYSUT's specific needs, we developed the NYSUT Member Action Center (MAC) as a Web-based hub for netroots action, harnessing the power of one-click online activism and social media engagement to deliver a powerful, unified message.

The NYSUT MAC — along with dedicated social media presences on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube — were developed prior to the 2012 New York state legislative session. Its purpose: to cultivate and engage a community of netroots

activists primarily composed of NYSUT members, but also including non-member activists who would be interested in the association's core issues: education, healthcare, and protecting working families, among others.

The initial primary goals of the NYSUT MAC were to:

- Provide an easy, action-focused Web center for NYSUT members that would maximize action-conversions and facilitate ongoing netroots activism.
- Increase NYSUT's online engagement capacity: members (and friends!) who could be regularly and cheaply engaged to cyber-lobby and take action on behalf of the association.
- Begin to cultivate an engaged social

## CASE STUDY: NYSUT Member Action Center

networking community of politically-focused members and other friendly activists.

Before long — and with the addition of several other innovative tools along the way that improved efficiency and effectiveness — the NYSUT MAC became one of the most powerful member action tools ever developed for an association, advocacy group, or member-based organization.

Within months, several hundred thousand actions had been converted, and member engagement capacity had been radically increased by tens of thousands of individuals.

And since then:

- Millions of action-conversions have been facilitated by the NYSUT MAC.

- The association's capacity for e-activism has grown exponentially.
- Hundreds of thousands of individuals — potential e-activists — have been drawn to the site.
- Literally millions of potential allies — New York state lawmakers, local officials, educators, parents, voters, etc. — have been touched by some element of NYSUT's e-activism, social media messages, video messages, emails, and on and on and on.

In short, the association's power has been enhanced, its members are more engaged, and its capacity for netroots activism has been transformed.

## About the Authors

Chris Micklos, Glenn Chung, and Jay Sapiro have been business partners for 20 years. Their firm, Visuality, was founded by Chung as a one-man operation back in 1995: a computer graphics firm riding the forward edge of the desktop 3D graphics wave (remember all those spinning logos?). After just a couple of years, Chung abandoned the convenience of rolling out of bed and into the office, but in partnering first with Sapiro and then with Micklos, their team quickly outgrew the converted porch at the back of his house. In 1998, Visuality moved to a custom-designed studio space with room for offices, TV/radio production and postproduction, and a place to hold client meetings without taking over the kitchen table.

Today, with offices in Madison, WI, and Boston, MA, Visuality has grown into a full-service, concept-to-completion media strategy, consulting, and production company serving clients across the country.

Throughout their partnership, the team of Chung-Sapiro-Micklos has taken the most pride from helping clients and partners overcome obstacles, seize opportunities, and succeed. They have helped member-based associations and organizations grow, connect with their members, and realize their goals. They have helped businesses build strong brands. They have helped shape public opinion on some of the most important issues of the day. They have helped advocacy groups and coalitions win important legislative victories. And they have helped choose leaders at every level of government.



## About the Authors

In recent years, though, their focus has grown even sharper on the world of associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations and helping them navigate and exploit Web-based strategies to both engage members and impact the broader communities around them.

More information about how they and their team can help associations, advocacy groups, and member-based organizations can be found at:

[associations.visuality.com](http://associations.visuality.com)

Sapiro, Micklos, and Chung wrote *Unshackled!* in the hope that their experience — accumulated over two decades of successful work with some of the top member-based organizations in the country — could be of benefit not only to their clients on a day-to-day basis, but also to the broader community within which they have been able to work.

**Glenn Chung** | [glenn@visuality.com](mailto:glenn@visuality.com)

Glenn Chung is the Director of Design and New Media at Visuality and has extensive practical experience designing broadcast graphics, computer animations, Web sites, print graphics, and interactive computer-based presentations.

Chung holds a Master's of Business Administration degree in Operations Management and Quantitative Analysis from the University of Wisconsin School of Business. From 1993 to 1996 Chung provided comprehensive strategic, marketing, and business planning services to a variety of business clients ranging from start-ups and sole

## About the Authors

proprietorships to larger companies.

In 1995 Chung founded Visuality as a computer graphics firm. Visuality provided services to clients like Cellular One (now U.S. Cellular), the Dean Foundation, the Laborers, and the Operating Engineers, and won awards for the quality of its work. From those beginnings, Chung has shepherded the growth of Visuality into a national leader in full-service, concept-to-completion media consulting and production.

### **Jay Sapiro** | [jay@visuality.com](mailto:jay@visuality.com)

Jay Sapiro is Visuality's President. In addition to consulting with clients on brand and media development, Sapiro serves as Visuality's Executive Producer for all electronic media productions.

Sapiro holds a Master's degree in Advertising from Miami University. Prior to joining Visuality, Sapiro was the President of a media production firm, where he also served as Executive Producer and Director. During that time, he worked with many leading organizations, businesses, and political candidates.

Sapiro's work at Visuality has been recognized by the American Advertising Federation, the American Association of Political Consultants, the National Education Association, the International Television Association, and the Design Council of America, among others. He has been recognized by In Business magazine as a top executive in their "2009 Executive Register" and a recent "40 Under 40" list which features the leaders of tomorrow.



## About the Authors

Sapiro is a member of, or holds positions with, the American Association of Political Consultants, the American Society of Association Executives, the Madison American Advertising Federation, the Media Communications Association International, and the United Way of Dane County.

### **Chris Micklos** | [chris@visuality.com](mailto:chris@visuality.com)

Chris Micklos is Visuality's senior strategist, working with clients through message development, strategic planning, and direct consulting.

Micklos holds a Master's degree in Political Communication from Boston's Emerson College.

Prior to joining Visuality, Micklos served as spokesman and communications strategist for Wisconsin's Senate Majority Leader. He has also worked as a strategist/advisor for a number of other sitting elected officials and political candidates in states across the country, including those holding or running for the offices of Mayor, State Representative, State Senate, Congressman, and Governor.

Micklos is a member of the American Association of Political Consultants. He has taught political communication in the University of Wisconsin system, and has frequently appeared as a pundit on public affairs programming. In addition, his writing on politics has appeared in a number of state and national publications, including Campaigns & Elections magazine.