INSTITUTE FOR POLITICS
DEMOCRACY & THE INTERNET
www.ipdi.org

THE VIRTUAL TRAIL

Political Journalism on the Internet

The Graduate School of Political Management
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON DC

THE VIRTUAL TRAIL

Political Journalism on the Internet

The Virtual Trail: Political Journalism on the Internet is a publication of the **Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet**, which is funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by The George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM).

Albert L. May, associate professor in the School of Media and Public Affairs (SMPA) at The George Washington University, is the principal author. The other primary contributors are Joseph Graf, visiting assistant professor in SMPA, who drafted portions of the report and conducted the quantitative analysis, and Jason Thompson, graduate research assistant in SMPA, who drafted portions and contributed to the Internet research.

The Institute is a research and advocacy initiative to promote the development of online politics in a manner that upholds democratic principles and values. One of the Institute's main goals is to help establish the Internet as a locus for trustworthy information and civil discussion of public affairs, with an initial emphasis on campaigns for elective office in the United States.

For more on the Institute's activities, please visit our Web site at *www.ipdi.org* or contact Carol C. Darr, director. For more on the Graduate School of Political Management see *www.gwu.edu/gspm*. For more on the Pew Charitable Trusts, see *www.pewtrusts.org*.

Table of Contents

Section I. Tracing the Virtual Trail

Under a desk in the Washington bureau of The Dallas Morning News, Carl P. Leubsdorf, bureau chief, has stashed a couple of keepsakes from his 30-plus years as a political journalist.

One is a portable Olivetti typewriter in a weathered case. The other is a boxy Teleram Portabubble, the suitcase-sized precursor to today's wafer-thin laptops. Faded press tags from the Reagan era still dangle from the handle.

They are quaint artifacts in a multimedia news bureau where the technological changes of recent years are pronounced. The dominant feature of this converged news operation of parent company Belo is the joint assignment desk, built for television broadcasts, banked by cubicles for newspaper reporters. Leubsdorf and his reporters regularly write for the newspaper and Belo Interactive, and appear on Belo's television stations and its Texas Cable News Network.

Even those long at the top of the profession like Leubsdorf have learned to adapt to a new environment. The veteran reporter recounted to a visitor how he uses the online search engine Google.com to square comments President George W. Bush makes against the speeches Bush made as a candidate during the 2000 campaign. He also punched up his personal database of polling highlights of presidential candidates past and present. Leubsdorf described how he enjoys interacting with readers via e-mail and offered a printout of one recent e-mail from a reader in Kerryville, Texas, who urged him to, "Keep up the good work."

There are more techy journalists, but Leubsdorf is typical in having embraced the new technology that is reshaping political journalism.

"I can't imagine having to do all this now without the Internet," he said.[1]

That is quite a statement given the sweep of his career. One of the original "Boys on the Bus," Leubsdorf is among a handful of reporters still on the beat who were portrayed in Timothy Crouse's landmark book, which chronicled how the press covered the 1972 presidential race between Richard Nixon and George McGovern.[2]

"I covered McGovern for the AP and I remember on the last day, getting off the plane and thinking he was not going to win," Leubsdorf said. "But I didn't know he wasn't going to carry a state. You know all that now, that day, before the polls close … and you can do a better job explaining what's happening."

"The Internet today is what the fax machine was for me in the late 1980s. Back then, I couldn't imagine doing my job without the fax; now I can't imagine how reporters functioned without the Internet."

-Lorraine Woellert
Political Correspondent
Business Week

Net Impact

A new command of information born of the Internet is the dominant theme we found in interviews with political journalists for this report. Whether it is the flow of political news, the latest polls or the conflicting comments of a candidate, information is now one click away. Nowhere has this sort of access had a greater impact than on coverage of campaign finance, as databases on the Web have spawned more stories

and changed the nature of reporting on political money.

After three national elections in which this new technology has been a factor, however, the experimentation and excitement have waned. The online medium has become a part of the political landscape, and many journalists are ignoring the online campaign because they are unsure of its importance. But they are also spending significant time surfing the Web and communicating through e-mail, which, for many, is overwhelming.

At the same time, the early fear that online news operations would drown sound practice in deadline pressure appears to have been overwrought. Journalists are coping better than expected. We did identify new ethical challenges, and discovered that the debate over whether journalists need to revamp their ethical guidelines continues, unresolved. Ten years after the first glimmer of this technology appeared in campaigns, much is still in flux.

Listen to another political reporter at the top of the game:

"I think the jury is still out on the Internet's impact on politics and on political journalism," said Dan Balz, political reporter for The Washington Post. "I think you've got two competing forces. There is the democratization effect for the media and the ability of voters to get information directly." On the other hand, he said, "the campaigns are figuring out how to target their message … and the Web will become another way, like radio, television or direct mail, to effectively deliver a message that will be harder for us to see and hear."[3]

We hope this study helps sort out the questions posed by Balz and others. We undertook the project through the **Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet** at The George Washington University. The Institute is funded by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and dedicated to fostering a healthier democracy online, primarily by encouraging candidates and campaigns to employ the Internet constructively.*

We recognize that many of the issues here affect all journalists, not just those who report on politics and government. We believe political journalists, however, have been particularly affected by the new technologies and will be increasingly so as political activity in cyberspace expands.

There is another reason for focusing our attention on political journalists. We agree with the characterization of Marquette University's Philip Seib: "Political journalism matters. That's not just a reporter's ego speaking. It's a hard fact about how the political system works."

Seib's framework is that journalists who cover politics have an extra responsibility to inform voters in choosing among candidates. It means airing issues and shaping the agenda. It means sorting out the serious contenders and conveying their positions. It means resisting manipulation and playing the role of an "essential referee" in testing the truth of what candidates say in their speeches, debates and television advertisements.[4]

And now it means doing all that online.

We acknowledge that trying to sort out the impact of one technology from another risks oversimplification. For instance, the speed of 24/7 cable news and proliferation of cable news and talk outlets have had effects that overlap with the dawning of the Internet. All have accelerated the rush of information. Surely, Internet tools have anchored some journalists to their desks when they should be traveling with candidates or mixing with voters. But so has C-Span, by allowing reporters to stay at home while tuning into presidential candidates in Iowa or New Hampshire living rooms. In pursuit of how the Internet has shaped and will shape political coverage, we examined the journalism literature and recent election coverage, and we examined a lot of Web sites.

* For information about the Institute, go to http//:ipdi.org.

Then we interviewed practitioners inside and outside of Washington.

We conducted more than 40 one-on-one interviews in person or by telephone, and we interviewed 271 journalists with an online questionnaire. The result is this report. We hope to show how political journalists are working online and how the Internet has changed their jobs. We show you the Web sites most frequented by journalists, and a few you might not have heard of. We also convey a bit of wisdom distilled from some of the best political writers working today. All of this is done with an eye towards the next election and our hope that, in the years to come, this information will guide political reporters online.

Cycles of Change

Changing technology has long shaped American journalism—from the telegraph to the telephone to the television. Arguably, Leubsdorf's generation has seen more change than any other, as three decades of television reshaped both candidates and campaigns. Think of the rapid pace of innovation—video mini-cams, satellite feeds, laptops, cell phones. In a sort of arms race, journalists employed new technologies, while campaigns did the same with 30-second attack ads, dial-a-meter focus groups, tarmac fly-rounds, direct mail fundraising and morphing candidate faces.

The changing technologies have affected coverage for the better and worse. For example, journalists wittingly followed candidates to flag factories and thousands of other events staged for the camera. On the other hand, since the late 1980s when attack ads began to turn elections, journalists have become the chief arbiters of truth in candidate advertisements—ad watches are now a common feature of campaign coverage.

We're probably a few cycles away before "Web watches" join the lexicon, but some scholars have argued that the Internet has already become the "biggest technological development for the reporter since the telephone."[5] We found journalists who share that view and others who do not.

"Yes," said Mark Sherman, Associated Press congressional reporter. "The ability to do research, communicate and write from my desk or my laptop is a terrific help."

"No," said Charles Babington, an editor at The Washington Post. "Compared to the phone? Not even close."

"Hard to say if it rivals the telephone," said Andrew Alexander, Washington Bureau chief for Cox Newspapers. "But it has transformed the way we report and the speed of our reporting in fundamental ways."

"Yes," said Jerry Zremski, Washington correspondent for The Buffalo News. "The Internet has utterly changed the way I do my job."[6]

A Short History

Most date the emergence of the Internet in politics to the 1992 presidential election, when the Clinton campaign began to use e-mail to communicate with reporters[7] and Jerry Brown had a campaign e-mail address for the public.[8]

But The New York Times' Michael Oreskes reminded us that the first online political community of reporters and political operatives was created with the launch of what was then the Presidential Campaign Hotline, now The Hotline, part of National Journal's Web site.[†]

"Hotline is a huge invention. It goes back so many cycles now you almost forget it was an invention of the Internet age," Oreskes said.[9]

† http://www.nationaljournal.com/

Although The Hotline was distributed largely by fax in its early years, it started in September 1987 on a CompuServe bulletin board.[10] By the early 1990s, journalists who could afford the subscription fee were routinely downloading The Hotline to start their day. Now they click to the Web site.

Journalists also used computers for more than word processors before the Web. In the mid-to-late 1980s, drawn by the power of computers to analyze data, journalists began to examine campaign finance, usually employing cumbersome nine-track computer tapes that required special equipment.[11] As we discuss later, the increase of insider political news by The Hotline and its imitators and the widespread use of campaign finance databases comes when both find their way to the Web in the mid-1990s.

The 1994 campaign spawned the first candidate Web sites.[12] But by 1996, both the presidential candidates and the major parties were launching sites and employing e-mail as attention getting, even symbolic devices.[13] Both party conventions that year saw the first extensive use of Web sites for major content when both parties posted their platforms.[14]

The mid-and-late 1990s witnessed an explosion of Web sites, including those of news organizations trying to forestall new competitors. Political coverage was an early use and major news organizations pooled their resources to create the first mega sites like Politics USA, a 1996 collaborative effort of the National Journal, The Washington Post and CNN.

The Columbia Journalism Review captured the high expectations of the time:

> A big story of this election is how the Internet is changing the political landscape as a new platform for candidate stumping, as a new source of information, and as a new medium for voter involvement; indeed, the very existence of the virtual trail has the potential to change the electoral process itself.[15]

Two years later, Gov. Jesse Ventura won an upset in Minnesota that some credited to his online campaign, particularly his use of e-mail and the Web to attract and organize young voters. President Bill Clinton's unfolding Monica Lewinsky scandal brought the Internet to the political foreground. Online upstart Matt Drudge scooped Newsweek on its own story of the brewing investigation of independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr, who also made Internet history later by publishing his report online. The scandal also featured the first major journalistic mistakes of the Internet age when news organizations rushed online with stories about the investigation that turned out to be false.

As a result, on the eve of the 2000 election, warnings came from top journalists and scholars that news organizations should rethink their strategies in dealing with the new medium, particularly as it accelerated coverage. Oreskes, then the Washington bureau chief for the Times, wrote a noted article for the American Journalism Review in a special package of stories ominously titled "Navigating a Minefield."[16] The theme was that speed was nothing new to journalism and the challenge for journalists was to "reassert our highest standards."[17] In a new book published as the election year began, Philip Sieb warned that candidates would use their Web sites to "circumvent the news media when delivering their messages to voters,"[18] and he urged political journalists to "start covering candidates' Web sites and introduce truth testing of Web content, such as has proved helpful in policing campaign ads."[19]

As it turned out, the 2000 cycle became what The Washington Post's Leonard

Downie and Robert Kaiser would call an important laboratory for the new medium, as news organizations, nonprofit foundations and online entrepreneurs launched experiments that would swell the Internet with political news.[20] Newly created online news organizations Salon.com and Slate.com drew attention with irreverent, opinionated coverage, while mainstream news organizations beefed up the staffs of their online editions and assigned reporters to cover the campaign on the Internet.

For example, Balz and other Washington Post reporters found themselves trailed by a two-person video crew from Washingtonpost.com to record their thoughts while covering the election.[21] Washingtonpost.com also joined with Slate and the Industry Standard (now defunct) to cover the online campaign with mostly young staffers or free-lancers. They produced dozens of stories for their Net Election series that ran the gamut of political trickery, campaign money raising, chat room crawling and get rich schemes by online political operatives.‡ Newspapers assigned reporters to write "Net watches" or "Web watch" columns tracking the online campaign. A major story of the primary season was Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) use of the Web to raise money fast after his victory in New Hampshire.

"The best thing about the Internet is the information that used to be available only over the phone during business hours. That's the real advantage of candidate and campaign Web sites."

–Conrad deFiebre
Staff Writer, Minneapolis Star Tribune

The innovations reached beyond the Internet as broadcasters and print journalists forged unprecedented partnerships in "converged" media efforts to cover the campaign, using the Net as a common platform. Nationally, the Post and NBC News partnered through MSNBC.com. In local markets, newspapers and television stations joined in efforts such as that of the Cincinnati Enquirer and WCPO-TV, which produced a joint election guide for their Web sites.[22]

Possibly the boldest journalistic experiment of the election year was a partnership between The New York Times and ABC News to produce a daily, 15-minute webcast called "Political Points," which aired on each organization's site. At 1:30 p.m. each weekday for most of the election year, the show featured campaign reporters, commentators and politicians to discuss the day's developments. Oreskes and Mark Halperin, political director for ABC News, shared the anchor duties.

While the program might go down as the greatest journalistic effort for the fewest viewers, it remains a lesson in getting ahead of the technology. Impossible to watch on a slow connection, even on broadband, as one reviewer noted, "the sound somehow travels faster than the picture, making everyone on the show resemble a character in a Hong Kong martial arts flick."[23] Oreskes and Halperin said the audience never numbered much more than a few thousand.[24]

"In 50 years, in the Museum of the Internet, I expect there to be an exhibition about Political Points. It was a real experiment," said Oreskes. Among the lessons learned, he said, was that audio works better than video on the Web. He learned about managing a multimedia newsroom and he points to stationary television cameras that now are fixtures in the Times main newsroom and in its Washington bureau, legacies of Political Points.[25]

Halperin said the newspaper had underestimated the time and cost it takes to produce video. "Until there is a consumer demand for streaming video, a technology such that people know how to use it and find the image pleasing, stuff like that is just not sustainable as a business venture," he added.[26]

In 2000, journalism organizations also faced new competitors in political coverage as sites blossomed offering voters political news, often unfiltered by journalists.

The political Web site Web White & Blue 2000 lined up 17 co-sponsoring sites, including the big portals of Yahoo and AOL and the major news organizations.§

‡ Sixty stories from The Net Election series are archived on Washingtonpost.com: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/elections/netelection.htm
§ See http://www.Webwhiteblue.org/

The effort was largely funded by the Markle Foundation to enhance civic engagement. The ambitious site organized the first rolling national online presidential debate carried on consortium sites. It featured the candidates or their representatives responding to questions posted by citizens in October 2000. The site won praise for being innovative and substantive.[27]

At the 2000 party conventions, for-profit dot-coms rented skyboxes, threw parties and occupied enough space to dub their workstations in the convention's media facilities "Internet Alley." There was widespread anticipation that the conventions would be for the Internet what the 1952 conventions were for television—a potential "sea change in the way Americans experience political conventions."[28]

The most prominent was Voter.com, a hybrid of journalism and politics. It offered news and news analysis, discussion and e-mail newsletters, petition signups and voter registration.[29] Its contractual ties and cross-promotion with the political parties drew complaints that it was blurring its journalism with paid political puffery.[30]

Again, the content outstripped the audience. By the end of the Democratic convention, the reviews were rough. "The Democratic National Convention was all over the World Wide Web. But not much of the world watched," wrote USA Today's Richard Wolf.[31] Barb Palser, who writes regularly for American Journalism Review on the Internet, pointed to the excesses of fall 2000. "If the unsubstantial sound bite is the shame of televised election coverage, then information overload is the parallel pitfall on the Internet."[32]

A fall 2000 poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found almost one-fifth of Americans had gone online for campaign news in the election, up from just 4 percent in 1996, but more than half of those online went to the sites of traditional media such as CNN's AllPolitics, which racked up the biggest audience of the election.[33] Only 7 percent of those who went online for election news said they relied mostly on sites that specialized in politics, down from 15 percent in 1996. The falloff in use of candidate Web sites dropped to 7 percent, down from 25 percent in 1996.[34]

It was good news, of sorts, for journalists who had seen the political sites as potential threats.

"In 1999 we were worried about them," said Mark Stencel, then political editor for Washingtonpost.com. "But by the end of [the 2000] primaries it was clear they were not a threat. The political dot-coms were just a precursor, by about a year, to the implosion of all the dot-coms."[35]

Voter.com folded in early 2001 as did many of its fellows. Stencel said the election had shown that "there's clearly potential to create new voices in the political discussion," but that at least for the 2002 cycle, the "innovative stuff … will be done by the traditional media."

Soon after the election, even traditional news organizations including the leader, CNN, began cutting political staffs for online operations. And in the post-2000 era of tightening news budgets, we found a shift in attention from curiosity about cyberpolitics to, as Washington reporter Jerry Zremsky put it, "a time when the Internet is just part of the landscape."[36]

Hardwiring the News

It was this terrain we studied, interviewing journalists in two ways. First, we conducted online interviews with 271 political reporters, including some of the most prominent in the nation, many with extensive experience. The sample is heavy with Washington-based reporters. Then we talked one-on-one with about 40 journalists to

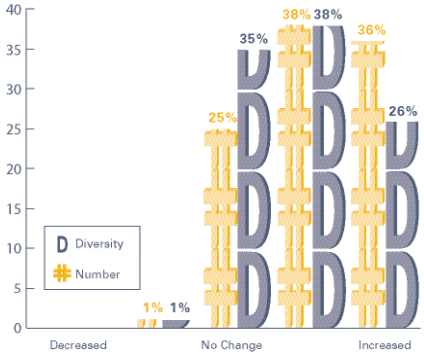


Figure 1. Has the Internet increased the number and diversity of the sources you use?

probe specifics. We were able to look at current online habits, gather advice and find out the most popular and useful Web sites and technology. (See Appendix B for a synopsis of our study, the demographics of the sample, our methodology and the questionnaire's results.)

In our online interviews, we found a strong sense that the Internet has expanded the scope of journalists' sources, in both diversity and number. Three-fourths reported that the number of sources increased and almost two-thirds of the respondents said that the diversity of sources increased.

The pace of politics has accelerated with rapid communication by e-mail and the constant deadline of online news, but not as dramatically as expected. The Internet has increased deadline pressure and the number of spot news stories many journalists must produce, and it has pulled journalists away from using the telephone. Thirty-five percent generally reported more deadline pressure and 31 percent said they must produce more spot stories. Forty-five percent reported using the phone less. However, few said they had cut back face-to-face interviewing or covering events in person.

"The Internet has speeded up everyone's life," said Sarah Koenig of The Baltimore Sun. The faster pace has not hindered accurate reporting as much as it has stolen time from in-depth analysis, she said. "The Internet moves information around so much more quickly. The risk of getting scooped is greater than 10 years ago."[37]

To some degree, respondents said, the Internet has inflated the number of rumors and bits of false information that make their way into the news. Half said there had been an increase in bogus information but half said there had been no change. Journalists also reported it is more likely for material to be digitally lifted from press releases and old news stories and then dumped into a current story.

Tools of the Trade

The most frequent uses for the Internet were reading political coverage, receiving press releases and conducting research on campaign finances. Some journalists reported they "very often" use the Internet to research candidate backgrounds (34 percent of respon-

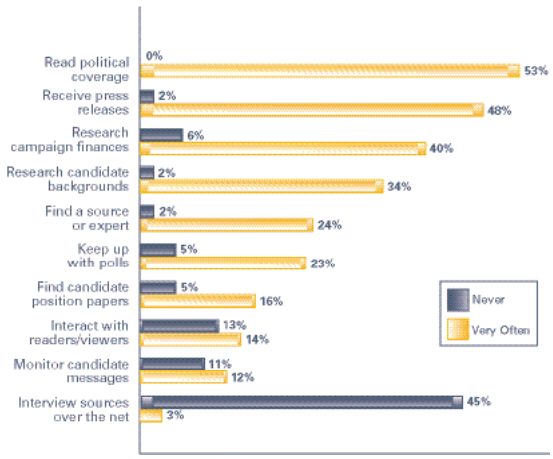


Figure 2. What do journalists do online?

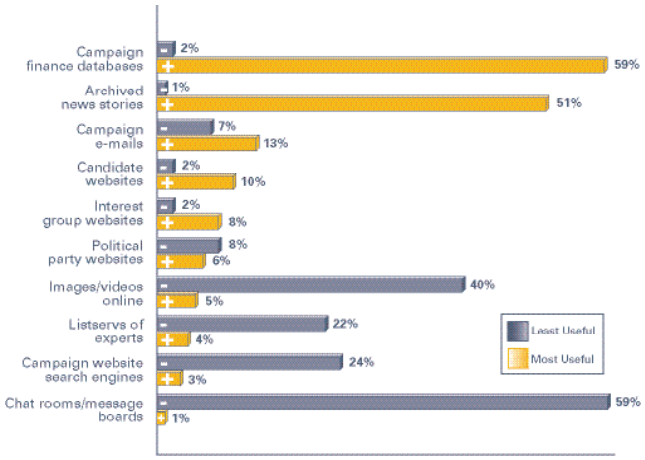


Figure 3. What do you find useful?

dents) or track down experts or other sources (24 percent). The Internet has not been widely accepted as a means to conduct interviews: 86 percent said they never or almost never interview anyone online.**

** They marked a "1" or "2" on the five-point scale.

Web-based campaign finance databases have transformed the political money beat and possibly no change in the technology has had a more demonstrable effect on what political journalists cover. When asked to rate various aspects of online political activity, respondents rated campaign finance databases as the most useful. In addition, database Web sites were mentioned as favorites more often than any other category of site. The nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, a Washington-based campaign finance watchdog group, was overwhelmingly voted the most popular Web site.

Tom Hamburger, who covers money and politics for The Wall Street Journal, remembers when, in pre-Internet days, he would attend conferences for journalists hosted by Common Cause and the center—groups trying to convince reporters to follow the political money.

"Their dream was that covering money would get to be a matter of routine when we wrote about issues or politicians," Hamburger said. "That dream has been realized, and it has transformed the beat."[38]

While using campaign finance databases is clearly the most active use of the Internet by journalists, some of the Web's most interactive features drew little enthusiasm. What is least useful? Chat rooms and message boards and online images and videos, perhaps because of slow download times despite high-speed connections.

There was some evidence that journalists have embraced the new technologies faster than voters or politicians, but tend to be passive rather than active Internet users, not using the new tools fully. For many, the online campaign flew under the radar or remained a curiosity.

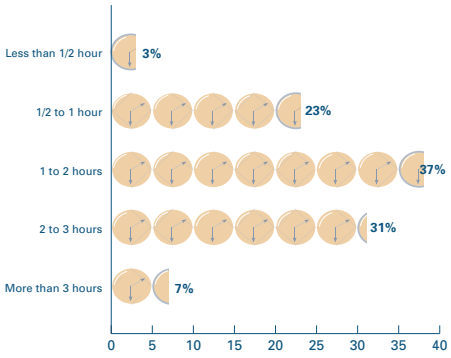


Figure 4. How much of your workday is spent reading or searching websites?

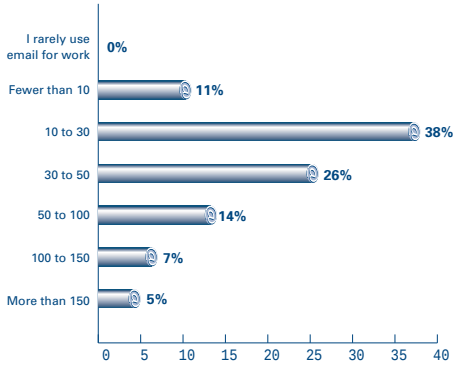


Figure 5. How many e-mails do you send and receive each day?

Networking Sources

Our sample was wired in a big way, and for many journalists, being online takes an inordinate amount of time. The data suggest that many journalists spend one or two hours online every working day. Three-quarters of our sample reported surfing the Web for at least an hour each day. Only 3 percent said they spent less than a half hour a day doing so (the lowest value they could choose).

E-mail, in particular, has become a time-consuming chore. More than half the sample reported sending and receiving more than 30 e-mails a day. For some, the amount of e-mail has exploded. A quarter of our sample sends and receives 50 or more e-mails a day (five percent reported more than 150!). The 39 editors in our sample handle more e-mail than the reporters: 54 percent average more than 50 a day.[††]

"E-mail is the biggest, most positive change, in terms of making reporters more productive, in my time as a reporter," said Peter DeCoursey, a political reporter for The Patriot-News of Harrisburg, Pa.[39] As he described it, a reporter would have simply missed the action in the Pennsylvania Democratic gubernatorial primary in the spring of 2002 if not hooked into the rapid-response e-mail between the campaigns of Bob Casey Jr. and Ed Rendell.

But DeCoursey does more than monitor the war of words. He has organized his e-mail to routinely check in with a list of about 40 grassroots party leaders across the state, and he routinely interacts with readers who can find his e-mail listed with stories and columns. When Rendell launched an effort to persuade moderate Republicans to change their party registration to vote for him in the Democratic contest, DeCoursey wrote about it with his e-mail address listed. "I got several e-mails from readers who said, 'Hey I did this,' and it gave me some good examples for the next story I wrote," DeCoursey said.

†† The difference in e-mail handled between editors and reporters was statistically significant at $p < .001$.

We heard a lot of similar anecdotes. While many journalists praised this line of communication with their audience and the politicians they cover, it has clearly become a burden to many. Three-fourths agreed they are "sometimes overwhelmed by the number of e-mails" they receive.

"It constantly threatens us with information overload," said Chuck Raasch, national political reporter for Gannett News Service. Raasch performs "triage"on e-mail, deleting a third unopened, opening two-thirds and reading about a third of that.

"I've told sources a number of times that if they really want to get my attention, send me a fax. We don't get many faxes today."[40]

Much of what we heard in follow-up interviews was impressionistic, subjective and difficult to quantify.

Leubsdorf, for example, emphasized the information gathering aspect of the Internet. "It is a quick way to do a lot of business. … You are more informed and you certainly have easier access to information." But he added, "It also leads to much more judgmental coverage. And it is so easy to draw a conclusion." He voiced concern that polling information is not only more readily available but more misused, particularly by television, in emphasizing only horse race numbers.[41]

He disagreed, however, with another complaint we heard frequently—that the immediate availability of political news and reporters' fixation on it has exacerbated the "pack journalism" that Crouse portrayed in *The Boys on the Bus*.[42]

"I always thought that was something of a phony issue," he said. Instead, Leubsdorf offered a different take: That the Internet's accessibility in gathering and airing political news has had a democratizing effect on the political press corps.

"The playing field has been leveled some … it is not quite as exclusive," Leubsdorf said.[43]

We tried to test for such perceived effects of the Internet on coverage.

Of the respondents to our online interviews, a third said the Internet has increased their use of polling data. But two-thirds said there had been no change in their use of polls. Reading political stories online ranked at the top in terms of frequency of use.

Does that translate into more consensus reporting—pack journalism? Anecdotally, we found journalists who argued that it did, including some in unexpected quarters.

James A. Barnes covers national politics for the National Journal, which also owns The Hotline.

"I read The Hotline and it has real value, but my concern about this kind of insider news written for a thousand insiders is that it leads to a homogenous result and a group think," Barnes said.[44]

What prompted Barnes' remark was a new Hotline wannabe that popped up in 2002 on ABCNews.com. The Note, a daily political memo by the network's political unit that once circulated privately, is now posted daily on the ABC News Web site.[‡‡] It is the latest of the political news sites to blossom on the Internet while others have withered, a phenomenon we examine.

On the whole, we found most journalists welcome the new online environment, but some bemoan it. Another veteran of Leubsdorf's generation, Muriel Dobbin, national correspondent for McClatchy Newspapers, voiced what we heard from a few others.

"The Internet will never replace personal reporting. Unfortunately it seems to be moving in that direction. It encourages laziness," she said in an online interview.

‡‡ See: http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/ politics/DailyNews/The_Note.html

In a follow-up interview, she explained. "The capacity for research is fantastic. But with it and the television, it is possible to do a great deal without leaving the office, never going to a briefing, or a hearing." The result, she said, was "a loss of texture and a loss of human drama. I covered the Watergate hearings and you could watch them on television but it was nothing like being in the room."[45]

Predicting the Future

No camera crew is following the Post's Balz this year. Web, White & Blue is in mothballs, and ABC News and The New York Times have gone their separate ways. There are no teams of young reporters scouring cyberpolitics for stories. Most of the major news organizations that pushed the limits of the Internet in 2000 have dialed back in 2002, although they continue to use their Web sites for archiving stories and launching electronic voter guides.

"As a television reporter, [I find] the primary value of the Internet has been to save time, by giving me access to data and background information at my desk. . ."

-Daryl Huff
News Reporter, KITV-4 Honolulu

At the time of this report, AOL Time Warner was launching Election-guide2002.com. The site was to bring together news and commentary resources of corporate sister organizations CNN, Time and Fortune, and the voter directories of the League of Women Voters and Capital Advantage, a publisher and Internet firm that specializes in zip-code-driven campaign directories.[46] Otherwise, news organizations, after getting ahead of the public and the technology in 2000, appeared to be taking a breather in 2002.

What 2002 experimentation we did find had an "insider" thrust to it, suggesting the political story of the Web will have more to do with "niches" than mass audiences. One example is the effort by the ABC News political unit to publish a Hotline-like insider Note. CBS's political unit has answered with its own daily file of political news on CBSNews.com under the label of "Washington Wrap."[§§] "We call it Hotline lite," said Dotty Lynch, senior political editor in CBS's Washington bureau, who is now writing a weekly column on the site, aimed at the political insider audience.[47]

In the same vein, another development has been the growing popularity of Web logs, or blogs: One-person sites that often air commentary on politics. Former New Republic editor Andrew Sullivan's "Unfit to Print" blog is one of the best known, but there are hundreds across the political spectrum.[***] In June, MSNBC launched daily blogs by its columnists devoted to media, politics, technology, international news and entertainment.[‡‡‡]

Because 2002 is a mid-term election when all political activity is diminished, it is too early to predict what interest will rebuild for 2004. Some believe the Internet in politics and journalism has entered a more subdued phase. It is also a year when coverage of terrorism and war has shifted journalistic priorities.

"I'm not sure 2000 will happen again anytime soon. I don't think you are going to see a lot in 2004," said Eric Owles, senior producer for The New York Times online political pages. Owles, who started his online journalism career in 1996 as an intern for PoliticsUSA.com, noted the Internet has been compared to television in the 1950s, before it emerged to have a major impact on political journalism. Even that might be a stretch, Owles said. "I don't think the Internet has played a decisive role in a campaign yet," he said.[48]

Probably few monitor political coverage more closely than Craig Crawford, executive publisher of The Hotline, essentially a daily digest of what's being covered.

§§ See http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/02/26/politics/main502099.shtml
*** See http://www.andrewsullivan.com/
‡‡‡ See http://www.msnbc.com/news/OP_Front.asp

"There is less coverage of that stuff out there," said Crawford. "There were a lot of gee whiz stories in 2000, about the Internet campaign … and we certainly have gotten beyond the gee whiz phase."[49]

Gannett's Raasch said, "We're in a different place, it's now more mature. … The next phase is covering more what the campaigns are doing on it." And he's not sure how long it will take journalists to get more serious about doing that. "It is just like television. It took us too long to recognize the importance of attack ads and the need to do things like ad watches. Attack ads really started in the late 70s and we were two or three cycles behind in catching on. Same thing with the Internet."[50]

Old Sign Posts

A search of Hotline's archive and Nexis did find coverage of the Web in the spring of 2002 and some of the stories suggest the Web is fitting into some old storyline grooves. Establishing a site has become a telltale sign of a candidacy, much as opening an office or filing a campaign committee for fundraising was in the past. Vermont Gov. Howard Dean signaled his interest in running for president in 2004 by launching a Web site,[51] as did Robert Reich in beginning his Massachusetts gubernatorial race.[52]

Launching a Web site has become the new staged event. Instead of just holding a news conference, both political parties have taken to launching attack Web sites to draw attention—not always showing originality. The National Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee launched Torricelliduck.com when they wanted to attack Democratic Sen. Robert Torricelli of New Jersey for "ducking questions about his ethics."[53] The North Carolina Democratic Party posted a Doleduck.com against Republican Senate candidate Elizabeth Dole for dodging debates.[54] Less humorously, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported on a new Internet version of the old whisper campaign when a candidate for Congress in Georgia withdrew after opponents circulated e-mails about his personal life.[55]

There is a sense among some journalists that they need to shift from following a virtual campaign trail to searching a new political back alley. Campaigns increasingly use the Internet to organize supporters and raise campaign funds with targeted e-mail, much like the direct-mail pioneers of the conservative movement in the late 1970s. The godfather of political direct mail, Richard Viguerie, has called e-mail the new form of "alternative media" that is largely "below the radar."[56] Also, the Federal Election Commission has exempted many communications on the Internet from regulation under the new McCain-Feingold campaign finance law that takes effect for the 2004 election. Some predict it could become a new conduit for soft money spending.[57]

As Gannett's Raasch put it, "the Web has been for show, but the e-mail campaign is making a difference … [and] it's really hard to monitor."[58] The Post's Stencel was more pointed: "There are a lot of things that have gone uncovered—direct mail, for example. The [Internet] is now the great uncovered form of political communication. It's a hard as hell … story to cover."[59]

But it is a story journalists will cover, and to do that journalists must overcome one of the Internet's pitfalls—its data overload can cause journalists to become "more passive, more receivers than gatherers."[60] In covering the online campaign, we think journalists should become more active in using Internet tools. As we described early in this report, journalists are using the Internet to enrich their coverage, particularly in monitoring campaign finance and researching stories. One reason for that,

some journalists said, is the tools have made their job easier as well as more productive. We heard this over and over.

For example, Jim Morrill, a political writer for the Charlotte Observer who is covering the Senate campaign of Elizabeth Dole, gave an example of how the Internet was improving the coverage. An early story in the campaign was Dole's shift from more moderate positions on gun control when she was a candidate for president to a more conservative stance as she tries to succeed Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC). Morrill used the Internet to document how her position on guns changed.

"When Dole flip-flopped on gun control, it was very easy to go to the Web and find out what she said in Iowa in 1999 on guns, and in New Hampshire." Then he asked the question of himself: "Would have I done that story before [the Internet]? It would have been harder, and if it was harder, would have I done it?"[61]

The Web as Reporting Tool

We suggest the Internet is more than a labor-saving device, and we found that many political journalists use it in what we consider a "passive" way—monitoring their competition, employing searches and reading press releases. Only more experienced users take an "active" approach, which will help them cover the under-the-radar campaign on the Web. Our findings suggest that as political reporters gain experience on the Internet they move toward more "active" uses—using the Web more as a reporting tool and less simply as a research tool.

We broke down the sample of 271 journalists to see how more experienced Internet users might use the Web differently than less experienced users.[§§§] Not surprisingly, in eight of 10 categories the experienced users reported greater Internet usage, particularly in following polls, monitoring campaigns online and interviewing sources over the Internet.[****] Perhaps most interesting is where there were no differences—receiving press releases and researching campaign finances. In other words, even the journalist with little Internet expertise must go online to get press releases and cover campaign finances. Campaign finance research could be considered a more active, investigative approach, but it is the ease of tapping campaign finance data on the Web that has made the sites so attractive.

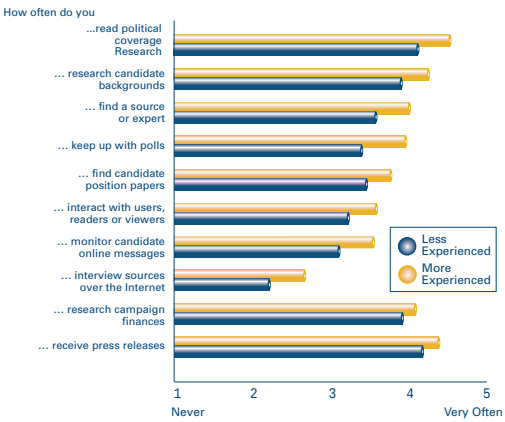


Figure 6. Comparing Internet novices and experts.

Experienced users are also feeling the effects of the Internet more strongly. They are more likely to report greater deadline pressure and more spot news stories. They are also more likely to report less face-to-face interviewing and in-person coverage.[††††]

There are some tools that no one finds useful, regardless of their expertise—chat rooms and images or videos online. (This is somewhat surprising because of the efforts of some Web sites, such as C-Span and the broadcast networks, to broadcast live events online and to post extensive video archives.) Online listservs of experts and campaign Web site search engines also scored low for usefulness, but in our one-on-one interviews we found a number of experienced reporters who claim both tools are very useful. Reporters also get more specific in monitoring the Web as they gain expertise; veteran users turn to candidate and other political sites more often.

§§§ We broke the sample into three groups by expertise, as determined by responses to questions about e-mail and Web usage. The figures display a comparison between the low usage group (n = 106) and the high usage group (n = 83).
**** All the stated relationships were statistically significant at $p < .05$.
†††† Both relationships statistically significant at $p < .05$.

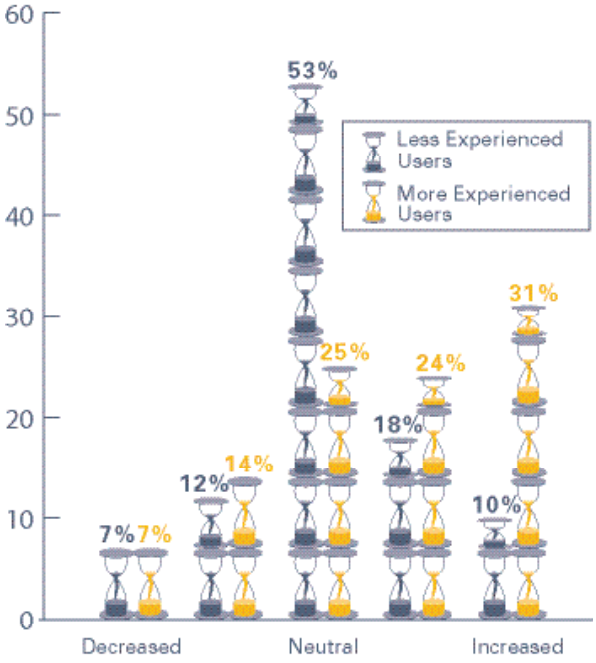


Figure 7. Has the Internet increased deadline pressure?

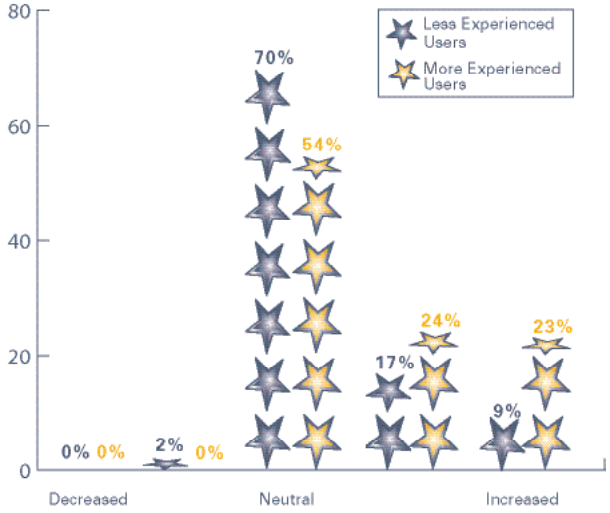


Figure 8. Has the Internet increased the number of spot news stories you produce?

So while journalists have put the Internet to good use in researching stories and expanding the number and diversity of sources, we think in time they will grow more experienced in using the Internet and more prepared to cover the online campaign. But journalists alone won't determine whether the Internet becomes the virtual campaign trail. A common complaint of our respondents was that the candidates have offered them little beyond a barrage of e-mails. Web sites are often no more than promotional news releases that ignore the needs of a reporter, they said.

"I do think you make a point that we should monitor them closely," Adam Nagourney, chief political correspondent for The New York Times, said. But, he added, "They are not intended to help reporters. They're intended to be advertisements, essentially. Most of the time they are saccharine and vapid."[62]

Another complaint we heard was that campaigns forget the simple things—like clearly designating on the site a contact with a telephone number that a reporter can use to call for corroboration. "I don't trust any material that is not easily verifiable by talking to an actual person," said Hank Silverberg, who covers politics for WTOP Radio in Washington. "Journalism, at its roots, is still one-on-one, person-to-person contact."

Some also said they might find television advertisements archived on sites useful, but campaigns tend to post only glowing positive ones, not the ads they use to hammer opponents. Journalists noted that few campaigns have followed the model of the Bush campaign in 2000 when it disclosed contributions on the campaign Web site. And only a couple of the journalists we interviewed said they had ever encountered a candidate in a chat room, something they would feel compelled to cover. Finally, they came back to the hard reality of politics and journalism—until convinced that the Internet helps decide elections, journalists and politicians will put their resources elsewhere.

"It's not so much a story because it's not much of a factor," said Matt Cooper of Time magazine, "but that will change."[63]

[1] In-person interview with Carl Leubsdorf, The Dallas Morning News Washington bureau chief, Washington, Feb. 2, 2002.
[2] Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), pp. 19, 21, 24, 25, 327-28.
[3] Telephone interview with Dan Balz, political reporter, The Washington Post, Washington, May 6, 2002.
[4] Philip Seib, *Campaigns and Conscience: The Ethics of Political Journalism* (Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 1994), pp. 1-9.
[5] John V. Pavlik and Steven S. Ross, "Journalism Online: Exploring the Impact of New Media on News and Society," Chapter 6, from *Understanding the Web: Social, Political, and Economic Dimensions of the Internet*, edited by Alan B. Albarran and David H. Goff. (Ames : Iowa State University Press, 2000) p. 123.
[6] In fall 2001, when developing a questionnaire for our study, four Web-savvy Washington journalists from different orientations helped us by responding to an 84-question preliminary questionnaire. They were: Charles Babington, now a Washington Post editor who covered the 2000 campaign for Washingtonpost.com; Mark Sherman, now a congressional reporter for the Associated Press who covered the 2000 McCain campaign for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution; Andrew Alexander, Washington bureau chief of Cox Newspapers, and Jerry Zremski, Washington correspondent of the Buffalo News.
[7] Wayne Rash Jr., *Politics on the Net: Wiring the Political Process* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997), p. 38.
[8] Kevin McDermott, "The Web Snares More Candidates Than Ever this Year," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 7, 2000, p. A1.
[9] In-person interview with Michael Oreskes, assistant managing editor for electronics, New York Times, New York, March 15, 2002.
[10] In-person interview with Doug Bailey, co-founder of The Hotline, Washington, May 9, 2002.
[11] Telephone interview with Brant Houston, executive director of Investigative Reporters & Editors, Columbia, Mo., May 13, 2002.
[12] McDermott, "The Web Snares More Candidates Than Ever this Year."
[13] Rash, *Politics on the Net: Wiring the Political Process*, pp. 18-19.
[14] Ibid, pp. 47-48.
[15] Frank Houston, "The Virtual Trail," *Columbia Journalism Review*, Jan/Feb. 1996.
[16] Michael Oreskes, "Navigating a Minefield," *American Journalism Review*, November, 1999.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Philip Seib, *Going Live: Getting the News Right in a Real-time, Online World*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p.9.
[19] Ibid p. 11.
[20] Leonard Downie Jr. and Robert G. Kaiser, *News About the News: American Journalism in Peril* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), p. 214.
[21] Balz interview.
[22] The Future of News Project, "Local Web News: Case Study of Nine Local Broadcast Internet News Operations," Radio and Television News Directors Foundation, report released Spring 2002, p. 21.
[23] Scott Shuger, "Net Election: Are Web Deals Good News for Newspapers?" *The Industry Standard*, May 10, 2000.
[24] Oreskes interview and in-person interview with Mark Halperin, director of the Political Unit of ABC News, New York, March 15, 2002.
[25] Oreskes interview.
[26] Halperin interview.
[27] Barbara Palser, "You Want Politics? You Got it," *American Journalism Review*, December, 2000.
[28] Steve Fox, "New Media Conventions: 1952 vs. 2000," Washingtonpost.com, July 31, 2000.
[29] Karen A. B. Jagoda et. al, "Measuring the Effectiveness of the Internet in Election 2000," published by the E-Voter Institute, January, 2001, p. 80.
[30] Rebecca Fairley Rainey, "Two New Web Sites Cover Political Races," The New York Times, July 17, 2000.
[31] Richard Wolf, "Building a Real Audience Is Still Illusory," USA TODAY, August 18, 2000.
[32] Palser, "You Want Politics? You Got It."
[33] Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Internet Election News Audience Seeks Convenience, Familiar Names," survey conducted during October and November among 4,186 online users, released December 3, 2000.
[34] Ibid.
[35] In-person interview with Mark Stencel, vice president of global strategy and partnerships for Washingtonpost.Newseek Interactive, on February 8, 2002.
[36] Preliminary questionnaire.
[37] Telephone interview with Sarah Koenig, reporter, The Baltimore Sun, Baltimore, June 3, 2002.
[38] Telephone interview with Tom Hamburger, reporter, The Wall Street Journal, Washington, May 30, 2002.
[39] Telephone interview with Peter DeCoursey, political reporter, The Patriot-News, Harrisburg, Pa., May 24, 2002.
[40] In-person interview with Chuck Raasch, national political writer, Gannett News Service, Washington, April 10, 2002.
[41] Leubsdorf interview.
[42] Crouse, *Boys on The Bus*, p 7-8, 15, 23, 196, 287.
[43] Leubsdorf interview.
[44] Telephone interview with James Barnes, national political writer, *National Journal*, Washington, May 22, 2002.
[45] Telephone interview with Muriel Dobbin, national correspondent for McClatchy Newspapers, Washington, May 16, 2002.
[46] Telephone interview with James Vaughn, AOL's director of government and politics, Washington, June 3, 2002. The site, launched in August, is http://www.electionguide2002.com.
[47] In-person interview with Dotty Lynch, senior political editor, CBS News, Washington, April 19, 2002.
[48] Telephone interview with Eric Owles, senior producer, The New York Times on the Web, New York, May 3, 2002.
[49] In-person interview with Craig Crawford, executive publisher of The Hotline, Washington, May 9, 2002.
[50] Raasch interview.
[51] Unbylined, Associated Press, "Dean's Pac Web Site Up and Running," Montpelier, Vt., December 6, 2001.
[52] Unbylined, Patriot Ledger News Services, "Reich for Governor' Web Site Launched," Boston, January 3, 2002.
[53] Barbara Fitzgerald, "Let the Games Begin, Or, Politics as Usual," The New York Times, March 31, 2002.
[54] N.C. Democratic Party new release, Dole Ducks Web site launched, May 14, 2002.
[55] Jim Galloway, "E-mail smear tactics surging, Georgian drops bid for Congress," The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, May 12, 2002.
[56] Richard Viguerie, remarks, Politics Online Conference, The George Washington University, May 20, 2002.
[57] Thomas B. Edsall, "FEC to Allow Soft Money Exceptions," The Washington Post, June 21, 2002.
[58] Raasch interview.
[59] Stencel interview.
[60] Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001) p. 76.
[61] Telephone interview with Jim Morrill, Charlotte Observer political writer, Charlotte, June 10, 2002.
[62] In-person interview with Adam Nagourney, chief political correspondent, The New York Times, New York, March 15, 2002.
[63] In-person interview with Matt Cooper, deputy Washington bureau chief, *Time*, Washington, November 19, 2001.

"E-mail is the biggest, most positive change, in terms of making reporters more productive."

–Peter DeCoursey
Political Reporter
Harrisburg, Pa., Patriot News

Section II. Beyond the Beltway with E-Mail

At first, Stephen Thomma, chief political correspondent for Knight-Ridder Newspapers, dreaded the notion that his e-mail address would adorn his stories in the chain's 34 newspapers.

"We thought we'd be flooded with e-mails," said Thomma. "But that didn't happen and it's been a pretty pleasant experience." What he thought would be a chore has become a mechanism to connect with individual voters across the country, tapping one of the interactive facets of the Internet.[1]

In recent years, more news organizations have made staff e-mail addresses publicly available in print and even linkable online. But interacting with viewers and readers remains, for many reporters, a daunting prospect given the crush of time and the drumbeat of e-mail from campaigns, interest groups and spammers. Interacting with readers and viewers scored low among the ways political journalists use the Internet, though connecting to voters is a core assignment for this group of journalists. Only 34 percent of those completing our online questionnaire reported they often interacted with readers or viewers, and only half of that group said they did it "very often."[2]

As we followed up with one-on-one interviews, we found the more prolific e-mail users valued interaction with readers. A few told us that answering reader e-mail could get burdensome and all said they received occasional hate e-mail. But Thomma was a good example of turning the practice into a reporting tool.

He became a convert during the 2000 campaign, when his e-mail address first appeared with his stories. Excluding spam, Thomma said he gets about 10 e-mails a week from readers who offer reasoned responses to what he writes. After he responds, he selectively adds to a panel of citizens that he has built and that he taps when he wants to get voter input from beyond the Washington Beltway.

"I found that people who respond are very often thoughtful and I put them aside," he said. He has built a list of 30 to 40 names with e-mails and phone numbers and will periodically sample the group's opinion.

"I'll send a list of questions on XYZ and see what I get back. It's usually pretty interesting." But he added two caveats: First, he doesn't treat the responses as a representative survey, only as illustrative viewpoints. Second, if he gets a response he wants to use, Thomma said, "I'll close the deal with a telephone interview."

Other journalists told us similar stories, some enthusiastic and some cautionary.

Tom Baxter, a political columnist for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, recalled his worse experience on the Internet, which "really taught me a lesson." A reader had complained about one of his columns, which bears his e-mail address.

"I try to respond to every semi-reasonable e-mail. But this guy had a few points and I took the time for what I thought was a long, thoughtful reply. The guy sent it to a friend, who sent it to a friend, until it ended up with a left wing Web site, who then sent it to about 3,000 people." He found himself bombarded by angry

e-mail responding to his response, which he thought had been a one-on-one conversation with a reader. "The lesson is, e-mail is not private like a phone call … and nothing replaces the old telephone."[3]

But the trend is for newspapers, at least, to connect their staff to readers via e-mail. Contact information is most commonly found on columns or OpEds, though newspapers, particularly midsize to large metropolitan papers, often list a reporter's e-mail address in their byline or in a tagline and link a reporter's byline in the online edition.[4] Some metropolitan newspapers put prominent links on their Web sites to entire newsroom rosters.[5]

The largest dailies are moving slowest, in part out of fear of their large readerships inundating their staffs. USA Today gives readers the ability to send "Feedback" e-mail through standardized forms, or send e-mail to a generic editorial address. The Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post offer lists on their sites, though neither regularly links bylines or provides addresses on article pages. The New York Times makes reporters' contact information available, but not easily accessible. A series of links takes a reader to a page explaining, "How to Contact the News Staff," a process that requires sending a request e-mail to a generic address in order to receive an automated response containing the "e-list" of Times staffers who have agreed to publish their e-mails.

"One unexpected and valuable effect is e-mail comments from readers. For a Washington-based reporter writing for dozens of newspapers around the country, it is often illuminating and always helpful. . ."

-Steve Thomma
Chief Political Correspondent
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch puts reporter e-mails on news stories longer than eight column inches, said Jo Mannies, political reporter for the paper. "So far, I haven't been inundated with e-mail," she said.

That's not to say she doesn't get a lot of e-mail or that answering it doesn't consume a reporter's time. Mannies returned from two weeks out of the office to find 400 e-mails waiting. "You're expected to go through all of them," but in this case only a "handful" came from readers, whom she felt compelled to answer. "We are strongly encouraged to reply to readers in a respectful way. That also means at the time, you are not doing other things."[6]

One aggressive example of trying to use e-mail to engage readers in political coverage we found at the Charlotte Observer. The newspaper routinely will run notices to readers inviting them to e-mail or telephone in questions for candidates who are coming to town. The newspaper asks the candidate on the readers' behalf and includes responses in its coverage of the visit.

Jim Morrill, a political writer for the newspaper, said the problem was too few reader responses, not too many. On the day we talked to Morrill, a U.S. Senate candidate, Democrat Erskine Bowles, visited the city, welcomed by the preceding day's newspaper inviting questions for him. "I got two e-mails and one phone call," said Morrill. "I think it's great and I wish I got more responses."[7]

[1] Telephone interview with Stephen Thomma, chief political correspondent, Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Washington, May 24, 2002.
[2] Responded four or five on a five-point scale from "never" to "very often."
[3] Telephone interview with Tom Baxter, political columnist, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta, May 30, 2002.
[4] For examples, see the San Francisco Chronicle (http://www.sfgate.com/chronicle); the Minneapolis Star-Tribune (http://www.startribune.com).
[5] For examples, see Philadelphia Inquirer (http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer); Fort Worth Star-Telegram (http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw); Chicago Tribune (http://www.chicagotribune.com).
[6] Telephone interview with Jo Mannies, political reporter, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Louis, June 7, 2002.
[7] Telephone interview with Jim Morrill, Charlotte Observer, Charlotte, June 10, 2002.

Carl Cannon's cubicle is what you'd expect of a busy White House correspondent—a stew of books, reports, press releases, newspapers and magazines.

What isn't a mess is Cannon's computer. He has organized 4,000 e-mails into about 40 folders in Microsoft Outlook, the popular e-mail software. There's a folder for "Karl Rove," the White House aide; another labeled, "Bush—1st European Trip;" some cover broad topics, "Criminal Justice;" "Bush Pool Reports," and then there's—"Cheney Health."

"They go back to '98, but I need most of them," said Cannon, who works for the National Journal. "It's a whole private library."[1]

Like three-fourths of the journalists we interviewed, Cannon is sometimes overwhelmed by e-mail. His answer is not, however, simply to hit the delete button, but to organize and use the technology actively. "I had 6,000 until I got a nasty note from the IT people. And they've told me to get rid of another 1,000 or so."

Cannon has saved press releases, interviews and factoids, but he also uses his e-mail files as a ready address book. He demonstrated by searching for his visitor's name and popping up the e-mail requesting an interview. "Why bother typing it into an address book?" he asked.

A veteran reporter who has covered national politics since the late 1980s for Knight-Ridder Newspapers, The Baltimore Sun and now the Journal, Cannon falls into the high use category of our respondents. He reports sending and receiving more than 100 e-mails per workday, which was the case for 12 percent of our sample. But he belongs to an even more elite group—3 percent in our study—who told us they "very often" use the Internet to conduct interviews.

"I'm not pretending e-mail is the same as a conversation," Cannon said. "There are times when I will use the quotes from e-mail, and there are times you need to talk to someone, for some gut reason."

But often, particularly when interviewing scholars or others who feel comfortable with the medium, Cannon finds e-mail comments more thoughtful and eloquent. For some sources, he said, e-mail might not work well. For example, he has never tried to interview a candidate by e-mail.

To prove his point, he popped another name into his search engine to produce a screen full of comments from one of his regular sources. "She's better on e-mail, the quotes are better," he said.

Cannon estimated that he still does about half his interviews in person or by telephone, but up to 20 percent of his interviews are done entirely by e-mail with sources he has never met in person. Cannon said they are almost always sources he searches out, not someone coming over the e-mail transom.

He has constructed his own lists of sources whom he periodically queries. For example, he has followed the effort of the Bush White House to keep some presidential papers out of the hands of journalists and scholars. Cannon recounted how he built a list of about 10 scholars who are pushing to open the records. He periodically queries the group to check developments or seek comment.

While Cannon has the luxury of working for a weekly magazine, some reporters called e-mail interviewing too slow and unreliable for daily journalism. "It's like talking by telegram," said Muriel Dobbin of McClatchy Newspapers. "It is absolutely sterile."[2] Also, broadcasters noted that it is hard to turn an e-mail into a sound bite or compelling video footage.

But some journalists are using e-mail to gather quotes and information without calling the practice interviewing.

"I wouldn't say I do interviews, but I get information," said Adam Nagourney, chief political correspondent for The New York Times. Nagourney, a self-described "multi-tasker" and heavy e-mail user, said he frequently fires off e-mails to sources to check a quote or a fact as he is writing a story. "It is critical for checking information on deadline," he said.[3]

We also found little conformity in how journalists treat e-mail. They disagree on the ground rules for attribution. More than four of 10 respondents to our online questionnaire said it was inappropriate to fail to alert readers that an interview was conducted via e-mail, but a quarter of our respondents said it was appropriate to omit e-mail from the attribution. A full third of our sample were neutral on the issue.

"Everyone is doing their own thing," said Cannon. "There are no rules, yet."[4]

Absent a standing agreement with a source, is an e-mail to a reporter always on the record? We thought so, but we found different views. Several journalists said they sometimes get e-mail from campaign aides or congressional staffers with "off-the-record" or "on background" in the header. Given that such ground rules are normally negotiated between a source and a reporter, most journalists would not be honor bound to adhere to the header, though some would do so voluntarily.

Matt Cooper, deputy Washington bureau chief of Time, said he gave most e-mails from sources an "assumption of privacy;" if he wanted to use a quote, he would talk to the source by telephone or in person. "I don't think there is any substitute for a phone call," he said.[5]

But Cannon said, "I just treat it all on the record but partly that's that's because of my beat." All e-mails in and out of the White House are archived and sometimes subject to disclosure. "I think you've got to act like it is something that will show up on the front page of The New York Times."[6]

On the day we visited Nagourney in the Times' newsroom, his screen was stacked with unopened e-mail. "Off-the-record," said the header of one note from a campaign manager. Asked if that was good technique, the reporter replied, "He should do that." He paused, then added, "But the rules are sort of mushy."[7]

[1] In-person interview with Carl Cannon, White House correspondent, *The National Journal*, Washington, April 12, 2002.
[2] Telephone interview with Muriel Dobbin, national correspondent, McClatchy Newspapers, Washington, May 16, 2002.
[3] In-person interview with Adam Nagourney, chief political correspondent, The New York Times, New York, March 15, 2002.
[4] Cannon interview.
[5] In-person interview with Matt Cooper, deputy Washington Bureau chief, *Time*, Washington, November 19, 2001.
[6] Cannon interview.
[7] Nagourney interview.

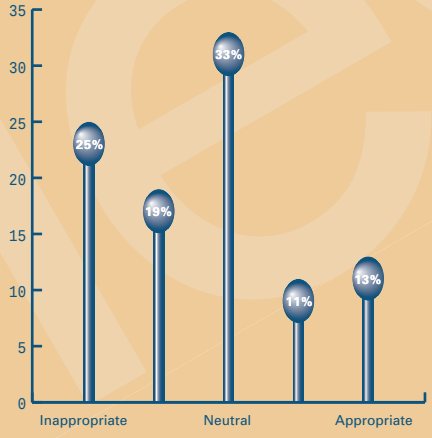


Figure 9. A reporter conducts an interview by e-mail, but does not point this out in the story.

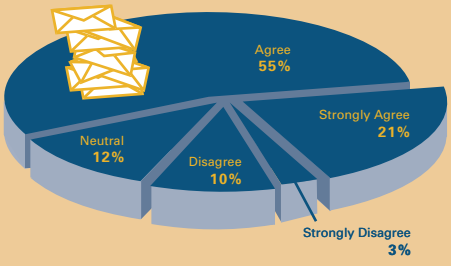


Figure 10. I am sometimes overwhelmed with the number of e-mails I receive.

Cannon Tips

At our request, Carl Cannon e-mailed us some tips for interviewing by e-mail:

* If it's someone you don't know, preface your question to the source by introducing yourself and your news outlet. Also explain, if appropriate, why you are asking this particular source for his or her thoughts.

* Be friendly, without being familiar. Without belaboring the point, let the source know that the answer is on-the-record. I usually say something like, "I'd like your thoughts for inclusion in my article." And, usually later in the e-mail or perhaps in a subsequent e-mail, I'll ask them for their exact title and whether they use a middle initial.

* Word your questions quite precisely; this isn't a verbal interview, so you don't have the advantage of altering the tone or your question in mid-sentence in response to a disapproving grunt.

* If you are planning to use a quote that the source has previously given, ask them if it was accurate. Usually, they will amplify on it for you.

* Do at least a minimum amount of research: For instance, if the person is a scholar, find out where they teach, what department they are in, what books they have written, and, if it's relevant, allude to something like that in your question. It will show the source you're serious about learning the issue, not just fishing for a provocative quote.

Section III. Following the Money

"I would not be able to function without on-line access to campaign finance reporting, both state and federal information."

-Janell Cole
Capitol Correspondent
The (Fargo, N.D.) Forum

Students in the University of Maryland computer lab dropped data from the Federal Election Commission's Web site into their spreadsheets, crunching the dollars that candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives raised for the 2002 midterm elections.

They practiced capturing contributions, sorting donors, and then exploring the secrets of another Web site: www.opensecrets.org. "It is one lens through which you look at politics," Sheila Krumholz told her students. "And it is an important lens."

Krumholz is research director of the Center for Responsive Politics, and her pupils that March morning in College Park were 15 journalists learning how to follow the money on the Internet. Most were reporters based in Washington for newspapers across the country—The Austin American-Statesman, The Detroit News, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, just to name a few.[1]

They are just a few of the hundreds of political journalists who have latched onto Web databases of political money and, in doing so, show how technology can change the coverage of campaigns and government.

"The whole idea of tracking money and politics hit the ignition point when the Web came along," said Larry Makinson, a former journalist and now senior fellow at the center, a Washington-based campaign finance watchdog group that has become the darling of journalists.[2]

Six in 10 of the journalists who answered our online questionnaire rated campaign finance databases a "most useful" aspect of the Internet, scoring them highest on the usefulness scale we posed. When we asked them to name favorite Web sites, campaign data sites (both federal and state) were the largest generic grouping, surpassing even news sites. The center's opensecrets.org was the runaway favorite named by the journalists. The FEC's Web site was the third most mentioned and Politicalmoneyline.com, another campaign finance site, placed fourth.

According to campaign finance experts and journalists, not only has the number of stories about campaign finance grown significantly because of the Web, but the nature of those stories has changed. The money candidates raise and spend is an old storyline, and political money has long been grist for investigative reporters. The adage to "follow the money" captured Deep Throat's instructions to Watergate reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. What's new is that it has become routine to address campaign financing in stories about politicians' behavior, not only as candidates but as lawmakers and chief executives. Interest group politics is now often framed in money terms. The reason for the new approach: Records of contributions and expenditures, once hidden in paper archives or inaccessible to any but those conversant with mainframes, are now a mouse-click away.

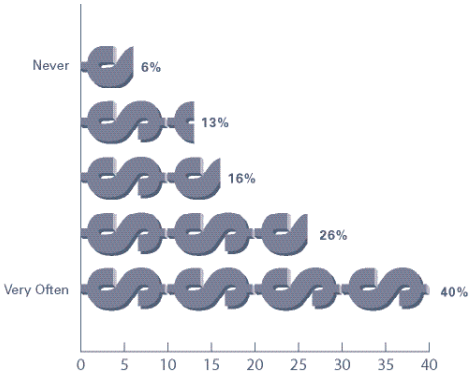


Figure 11-1. How often do you research campaign finances on the Internet?

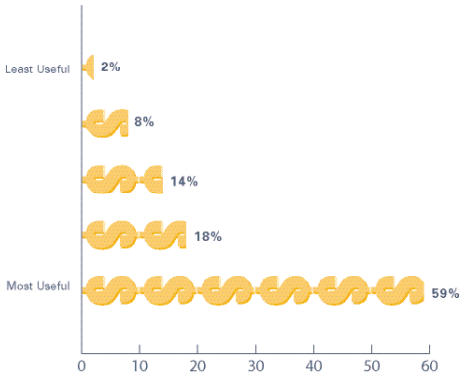


Figure 11-2. How useful are campaign finance data bases?

A Campaign Finance Revolution

Bob Biersack, deputy press officer at the FEC, recalled how before the FEC launched its Web site in 1996, the agency's public records office was crowded near deadlines, as reporters lined up to examine incoming finance reports. Now, he said, "It's quite comfortable in there. Nobody has to come in anymore."[3]

The FEC has kept computerized records since its inception in the mid-1970s, but they became accessible to the public only in the mid-1980s, from a computer bulletin board that cost $50 an hour for downloads. Or the data would be sold in nine-track mainframe tapes. Biersack said only a "fairly narrow group" of reporters was interested.

"Now you see campaign finance stories everywhere. It has become a standard part of political reporting," he said. "It is an example of what we thought the Web could do in a lot of areas, but in this area it has lived up to its potential."

One of those early reporters was Jonathan Salant, a 25-year veteran of the Associated Press who has reported from Washington. Salant recalled how only 10 years ago it was difficult to gather, clean and analyze data that now can be captured in minutes.[4]

Salant won a National Press Club award in 1991 for an in-depth story on how the New York congressional delegation raised money. He downloaded the data on a nine-track tape, and traveled to an AP office in Syracuse, NY, to use a tape reader. He spent a week cleaning the data.

"Now, I can call up the center's site, plug in the congressman's name, and hit a button," he said. "For those of us who have covered this over the years, we can do more with less. It makes it easier."

Another pioneer in using computers to analyze data was Brant Houston, now a professor at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and executive director of Investigative Reporters & Editors, Inc. The IRE also has a campaign finance site,[5] and partners with the center to offer training sessions like the one at the University of Maryland.

Houston recalled trying to sort contributions on 3x5 cards and how the computer-assisted reporting projects of the 1980s often focused on campaign finances, including building in-house databases at some newspapers.

"We've always been pretty good at reporting the money in the campaigns," Houston said. "It is after the election that we haven't. We've been relatively good about covering the *quid* but not been as good at covering the *pro quo*." The ability to group and track contributions on the Web was a "tremendous leap forward," he said. "We're now ahead of the game. We have the sophisticated data that can follow the money after the election."[6]

Houston noted the Web is not the only reason for more press attention on the subject. The story has been fueled by the explosion of unregulated soft money in federal elections in the 1990s, the Clinton administration scandals, the battle for campaign reform in Congress, the presidential campaign of John McCain and the political largesse of Enron.

Open Secrets

The Center for Responsive Politics has focused on the influence of contributions in federal elections since 1989. Its 1,300-page book, *Open Secrets*, detailed interest group donations to members of Congress for the 1988, 1990, 1992 and 1994 elections. In 1996, the center launched its Web site by putting material from the book online and

accessing FEC data, which it cleaned and organized for easier use by reporters and members of the public. The result was a dramatic spike in press attention to the center's numbers.

Press mentions of the center doubled in 1996 from the year before to 1,692, according to the center's tracking of press attention in the Nexis database. By the 2000 election, the press mentions doubled again to 3,741 and halfway through 2002, press mentions stood at 1,947. Traffic to the center's site also doubled from an average of about 4,000 unique visitors a day in November 1999, the earliest numbers available, to 8,000 visitors a day in May 2002. A survey of site visitors in spring 2000 found that a quarter of the visitors were journalists.[7]

Here are just three stories plucked from Nexis that typify how journalists employ the center's data:

- When the Congress shelved campaign reform legislation and its ban on soft money in 2001, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported how the political parties were raking in soft money earlier that summer based on the center's tracking of those contributions.[8]
- When an Associated Press medical writer reported President Bush's nomination of a new surgeon general, the 17th paragraph contained a sentence attributed to the center that the nominee and his wife had each given Bush $500 in the 2000 election.[9]
- Using the center's zip code tracker, the Greensboro (N.C.) News and Record spotlighted the city's downtown zip code and big givers like Lorillard Tobacco. The paper declared the zip code the most politically generous in the state.[10]

"The Internet is a valuable backstop, a sort of *aide-memoire*, allowing journalists quickly to check claims / quotes / figures etc. that don't seem quite right. . ."

-Cragg Hines
Washington Bureau Chief
Houston Chronicle

While the center is the most prominent, it is only one example of reform-minded groups or entrepreneurs who have built Web databases to serve journalists and others interested in campaign finance.

One of the oldest is Politicalmoneyline.com, which started out as www.tray.com in Tony Raymond's house. Raymond, who built the original FEC site, and his partner, Kent Cooper, were long-time employees of the FEC who later worked for the center but left after a falling-out.[11] Another entrepreneur is journalist Dwight Morris, who works as a consultant for large news organizations and other groups.[12] Reform groups that also maintain campaign finance databases are Common Cause[13] and the Center for Public Integrity,[14] which have focused on tracking soft money.

Sites that cover state races also have blossomed as a handful of nonprofit groups emulated the center. State election officials have built government sites on the FEC model. Most state government sites can be accessed through links on the FEC site.[15] And there is a clearinghouse for state campaign financing based in Helena, Mont.—the National Institute on State Money in Politics.[16]

Kent Cooper recalled how press interest in the databases skyrocketed in the spring of 1997 when national files of soft money givers were suddenly available to reporters across the country looking to localize the Clinton scandals. Cooper, then executive director of the center, said the result was a "feeding frenzy on donors." At the same time, he noted, many news organizations who kept their own campaign finance databases were abandoning them, at least for following federal campaign money, in favor of using outside groups or companies like his.

By the summer of 1999, The New York Times' Leslie Wayne took notice of what she described as a technological advance that changed the political discourse. "Where political races once focused primarily on personalities, partisanship and

issues, an awareness of—and concern over—the role of money in politics has grown. In large part, technology is driving and accelerating the debate by providing more and more information."[17]

The story cited experts who speculated that the new visibility of political money was an underlying reason advocacy groups and rich individuals now sought to avoid the disclosure rules of federal election law through independent "issue" campaigns and other means.

Since the 2000 election, the use of these databases by journalists appears only to have gathered steam as the Congress grappled with reform legislation and the Enron scandal added a new dimension to heavy political giving. At the center of that story was the Center for Responsive Politics, which deserves a closer look.

CRP—Information or Advocacy?

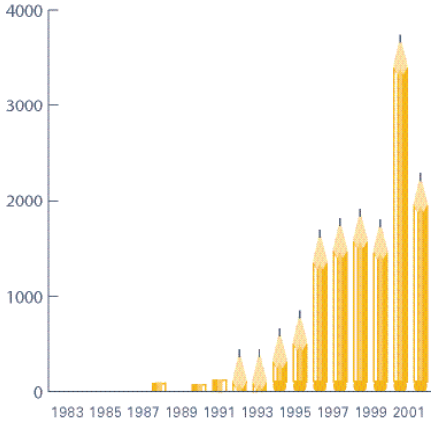


Figure 12. Center For Responsive Politics Press Mentions

The center was founded in 1983 by two senators, Democrat Frank Church and Republican Hugh Scott, as an organization to foster congressional reforms. One of its early reports was on the financing of the 1984 presidential election, and by the late 1980s CRP had turned almost exclusively to tracking campaign contributions to federal candidates and trying to connect the money to governmental decisions. The center is a modest operation with staff of 17 and a budget of less than $1.5 million a year. It has been funded primarily by grants from large foundations such as Joyce, Ford, Carnegie and Pew, which funded our study.[18]

Over the years, the center's leaders have insisted that it is not an advocacy group, shying from the reformist label that might color its motives and data. Former and present employees of the center, and journalists who have covered it closely, said there have been internal struggles between playing a stronger advocacy role and sticking with the less sexy role of providing data. The center has issued reports critical of Republicans and Democrats alike, and its larger mission is to inform the public, not just serve the press.

Larry Noble, CRP executive director and a former general counsel of the FEC, said despite the center's desire to appeal more directly to the public, "our major customer is the press." Maintaining credibility with journalists constrains what the center will do.

"We're nonpartisan and we're not a campaign finance reform advocacy group, while we definitely have a view about how money buys access." For example, Noble said CRP has not endorsed any of the reform legislation before Congress. There is a certain fig-leaf quality to that argument because, in May 2002, an arm of the center intervened before the FEC to oppose regulations that it said would weaken the soft-money ban in the McCain-Feingold legislation.[19]

CRP has been the target of criticism by some conservatives who disagree over the role of money in politics. Cooper and Raymond criticize the center,[20] portraying it as an interest group that deserves more skeptical treatment by journalists. Center officials shrug off the criticism as a mix of competitive sniping and lingering bad blood after Raymond and Cooper's 1997 departure.[21]

Several top journalists said they recognized a reformist patina to the center but they had found its data reliable.

"The center has really tried to steer clear of advocacy," said Wayne of the Times. "Clearly they are for campaign finance reform, but I don't see them going beyond that."[22]

Tom Hamburger, who covers money and politics for The Wall Street Journal, said, "At the Journal, it is now a matter of course to go to the center. They are good

and free. They are not foolproof, but I do not detect any bias in the numbers that they provide." Of the claim that they are not reform advocates, Hamburger said, "They are nonpartisan and they are out to expose the influence of money in politics … [and] Noble and Makinson are rent-a-quotes for the need for reform."[23]

Dotty Lynch, who runs CBS News' political unit in the network's Washington Bureau, said, "They think that the way to reform politics is through the media, to make these linkages." But she routinely goes first to the center for campaign finance information. "We've worked with them long enough. I've found them to be reliable."[24]

Driving the News?

> "The Internet makes lazy reporters lazier and energetic reporters more productive."
>
> -John LaPlante
> Capitol Bureau
> The Advocate, Baton Rouge, La.

The secret to the center's success with journalists goes beyond its easy-to-use Web site. The staff, which includes several former journalists, has been adept at anticipating the needs of journalists and alerting them with e-mailed story ideas that weekly reach about 3,600 journalists.[25] The center also has done what others have shied from doing—grouping individual and political action committee contributions into industrial or ideological blocs of money that can be tracked and correlated to issues.

The CRP's use of e-mail to catch the attention of journalists and draw them to a Web site is a textbook example of the power of the Internet as a political communication tool.

For example, the center was out front on the Enron story, sending out its first e-mail alert on Enron on Nov. 9, 2001, detailing political giving by the corporation and its executives. Through the middle of March 2002, the center issued five more alerts on various aspects of Enron's campaign contributions or lobbying expenses.[26]

From November 2001 to March 2002, 162 newspaper stories on Enron contributions cited CRP data, according to the Nexis database. They ranged from national news organizations reporting on the contributions Attorney General John Ashcroft received from Enron as a senator to how much members of congressional committees investigating Enron had collected from the company and its executives. Local newspapers detailed Enron contributions received by congressmen or senators from their states.

"We knew that journalists would be interested in this, and we hit it on the head," said Steven Weiss, CRP communications director. "I don't want to say we drive the coverage. Campaign finance is a story before a reporter calls us."[27]

The center also attracts journalists by doing something the FEC won't do and others shy from doing—categorizing the money and making some assumptions about the motives of donors. The architect of the system is Makinson, who started tracking contributions to the Alaska legislature in the mid-1980s when he was a reporter with the Anchorage Daily News armed with an early Macintosh computer. He published his first *Open Secrets* book based on the Alaska work and brought the approach to Washington in the late 1980s, trying to sell it to major news organizations. Instead, he landed a job with the center and has been developing the system ever since.[28]

Makinson said he learned early that the contributions of easily recognized political action committees told only a small part of the story because of the widespread practice of corporations, industry groups and interest groups to bundle individual donations to augment PAC contributions. Makinson developed a system of coding individual contributors based on the occupations listed by givers and the contributions of nonworking spouses of givers. ("Homemaker" is one of the top occupations listed in FEC records.)

"We make judgments," Makinson said.

Sometimes the judgments are based on patterns of giving. For example, the

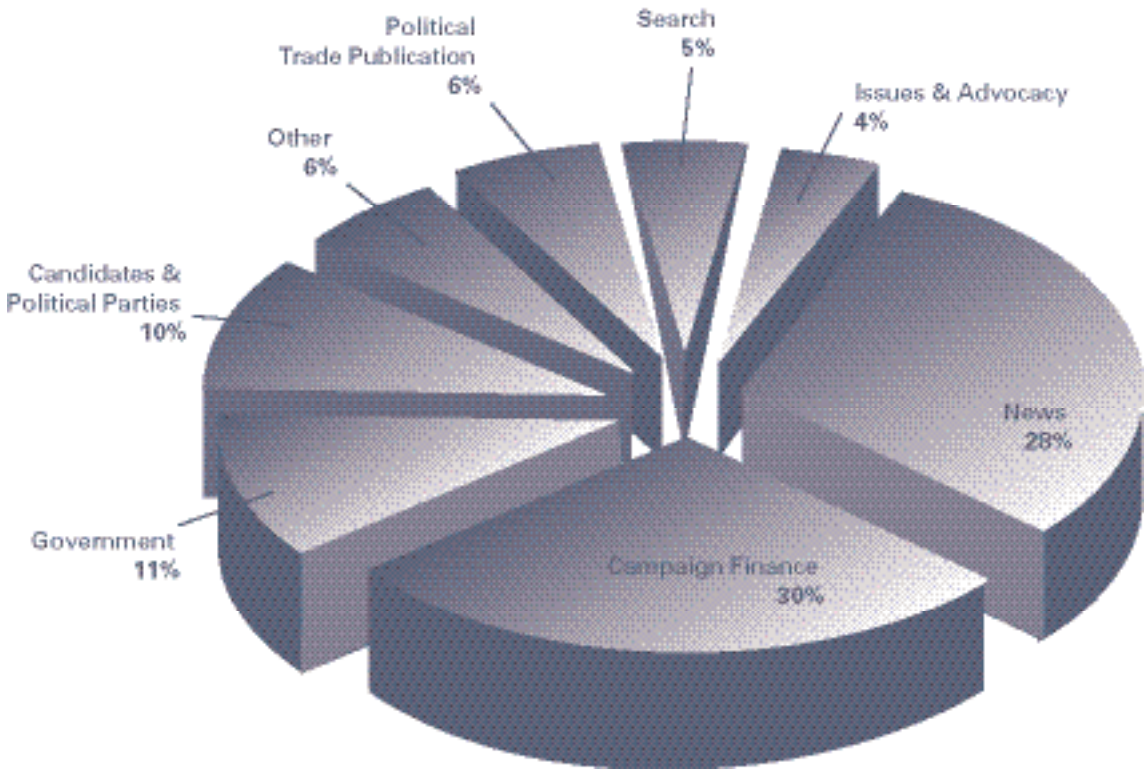


Figure 13. Journalists' Favorite Web Sites (By Category)

center "triangulates" giving by individuals to paint profiles of ideological groups such as those on the environment, abortion or gun control or those concerned with international matters such as support for Israel. It works this way: If a contributor gives to a PAC, say the National Rifle Association, and then gives to a congressman who also gets money from the NRA, or from another PAC with the same agenda, the individual's contribution is counted as gun lobby money.

Categorizing the giving of multi-interested corporations follows a similar assumption of patterns. The contributions of large, diverse corporations are parsed depending on the committee assignment of the recipient. For example, a contribution from Boeing to a congressman who sits on the Armed Services Committee is scored as a defense industry contribution, while a contribution from the same corporation to a congressman who sits on a transportation committee is scored as a transportation industry contribution. The result is easy-to-use profiles of the sources of a congressman's money or the contributing profile of a corporation or interest group.

To critics of the center, this amounts to mind reading.

"The lumping of individual donors into classes, we've always found is a stretch," Cooper said.[29] "Maybe there are a fair number of single-issue people, but there are a lot of reasons why people give, and to code them one way because of their employer, when you lock 'em in like [that], you might be doing a disservice."

The FEC's Biersack sounded a similar note. "There is a fair amount of subjective judgment there … drawing a conclusion of knowing the motivation of the giver. They are probably right half the time, probably more than half the time, but they are not right all the time."[30]

Center officials said they are conservative and miss more than they count. "We are pretty accurate," Noble said. "I think we are very reflective of the reality of political giving."[31]

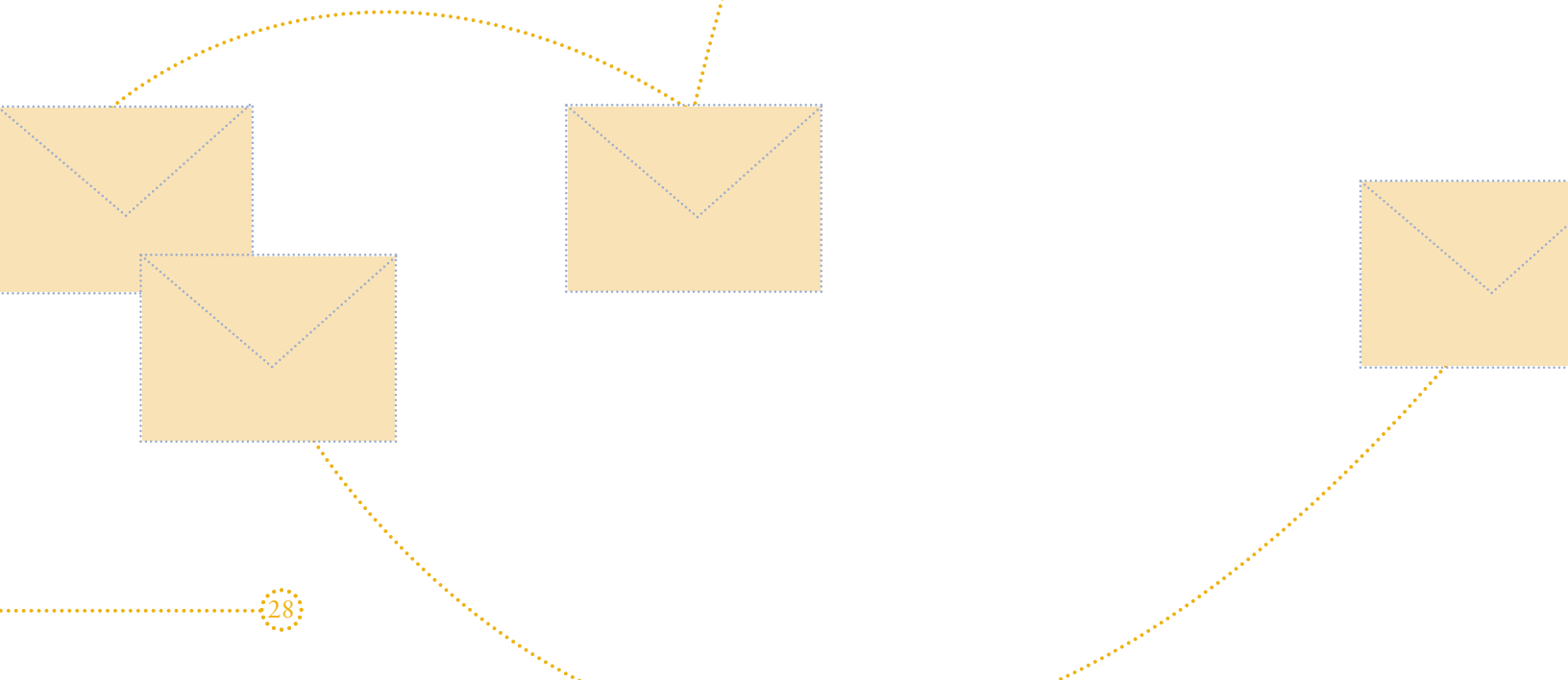
The center is upfront about its techniques. Krumholz's lecture to reporters at the Maryland seminar touched on the criticism, and she admitted the center probably undercounts labor contributions. A member of the United Auto Workers could be counted as an employee of Ford Motor Corp. under the coding by occupation, she said. "The vast majority of the folks giving money are not rank and file. They are not secretaries, they are not mechanics."[32]

Journalists who work the money beat generally agreed with the CRP approach to categorizing the money, but it's unclear if many journalists who use these data know much about the coding debate.

Asked if journalists relied too heavily on these databases, IRE's Houston said, "It concerns me, and yes, we've been urging reporters to do their own work. Get their hands into the data." Regardless, he said, "The center really fulfills a need for people who have no time to do their own analysis. People can quibble with some of the center's coding, but they do make the FEC data easier to use."[33]

"The categories?" said The Wall Street Journal's Hamburger. "You have to be aware of how they do it. It can be problematic. Their first goal is to call attention to this money and to make it easy to get to. You can go to any of these sites and crunch numbers. But you can't stop there. The numbers are just indicators that take you to the story with more reporting."[34]

[1] The "Money in the Midterm" seminar was held March 22-23, 2002, sponsored by the Center for Responsive Politics and the Center for American Politics and Citizenship at the University of Maryland.
[2] Telephone interview with Larry Makinson, senior fellow of the Center for Responsive Politics, Washington, May 28, 2002.
[3] Telephone interview with Bob Biersack, deputy press officer, Federal Election Commission, Washington, May 28, 2002.
[4] Telephone interview with Jonathan Salant, reporter, Associated Press, Washington, May 6, 2002.
[5] See campaignfinance.org.
[6] Telephone interview with Brant Houston, executive director, Investigative Reporters & Editors, Inc., Columbia, Mo., May 13, 2002.
[7] Telephone interview with Susi Alger, IT director, Center for Responsive Politics, Washington, May 29, 2002.
[8] George Edmonson, "Parties Keep Raking in Soft Money," The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, November 1, 2001.
[9] Lauran Neergaard, "Bush Settles on Nominees for Surgeon General and Head of National Institutes of Health," Associated Press, March 26, 2002.
[10] Alex Wayne, "Lorillard Leads City Donations," Greensboro News & Record, April 21, 2002.
[11] In-person interview with Tony Raymond and Kent Cooper, vice presidents of TRKC Inc, which operates Politicalmoneyline.com, Washington, April 12, 2002.
[12] See http://www.dwightlmorrisandassociates.com
[13] See http://www.commoncause.org/laundromat
[14] See http://www.publicintegrity.org/dtaweb/home.asp
[15] See http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/cfsdd/cfsdd.htm
[16] See http://www.followthemoney.org/
[17] Leslie Wayne, "Following the Money Through the Web," The New York Times, August 26, 1999.
[18] In-person interview with Larry Noble, executive director, Center for Responsive Politics, Washington, April 11, 2002.
[19] News Release, "FEC Watch Encourages Federal Election Commission Not to Reopen Soft Money Loophole," FEC Watch, a project of the Center for Responsive Politics, May 30, 2002.
[20] Raymond and Cooper interview.
[21] Makinson interview.
[22] Telephone interview with Leslie Wayne, reporter, The New York Times, New York, May 6, 2002.
[23] Telephone interview with Tom Hamburger, reporter, The Wall Street Journal, Washington, May 30, 2002.
[24] In-person interview with Dotty Lynch, senior political editor, CBS News, Washington, April 19, 2002.
[25] Telephone interview with Steven Weiss, communications director, Center For Responsive Politics, Washington, May 28, 2002.
[26] Archives, Money in Politics Alerts, Center for Responsive Politics, See www.opensecrets.org/alerts/index107.asp.
[27] Weiss interview.
[28] Makinson interview.
[29] Raymond and Cooper interview.
[30] Biersack interview.
[31] Noble interview.
[32] Money in the Midterm seminar.
[33] Houston interview.
[34] Hamburger interview.



Section IV. The Top Ten Favorite Web Sites

This top ten list was compiled from responses to our online questionnaire. Each journalist was asked to name three favorite sites.

"With the Internet, it is much easier to read newspapers from other parts of the country to get a feel for how similar issues are being addressed in other states."

-Byron Henderson
Producer / Correspondent
Louisiana Public Broadcasting

1. Center For Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org

By far the most popular destination among respondents, the Center for Responsive Politics gives journalists timely and useful information that is easy to find. More than one in four journalists named this site as a favorite, and Opensecrets.org alone comprised 13 percent of all Web sites mentioned.

"Opensecrets is a fast, easy way to find where the money is coming from, as well as where it's going," said Ted Byrd, a reporter for the Tampa Tribune.

The Center for Responsive Politics is a non-profit, non-partisan watchdog group that tracks money in politics. Its Web site has helped revolutionize how reporters access Federal Elections Commission data with a database that can be searched in a variety of ways. The center does what the FEC can't do and other databases shy away from doing: Categorizing industry and interest group giving. Some of their categorization techniques require assumptions about motives of donors, such as spouses of corporate executives. Reporters should familiarize themselves with the techniques, but the site offers varied breakdowns of contributions to federal candidates—alphabetically, by industry, or by listing the top ten most-active groups. Users can search for information by state, zip code, candidate and donor.

And the searches are quick. It takes two minutes to learn that during the 1998 election cycle, the National Auto Dealers Association gave $10,500 to Sen. John Warner, (R-Va.), and $5,000 to Sen. Harry Reid, (D-Nev.).

There is information on lobbyists and interest groups, the latest on finance-related legislation, a searchable index of congressional committee members and a breakdown of federal campaign finance laws and regulations. For the overwhelmed user, a "virtual tour" aids in navigating through a sea of complex information on this site.

Financial information on the site comes from mandatory filings with the Federal Election Commission. The site is free.

2. National Journal & Hotline www.nationaljournal.com

What opensecrets.org provides for finances, NationalJournal.com provides for political coverage. An offshoot of National Journal, a political weekly published since 1969, NationalJournal.com offers political content and serves as a gateway to the National Journal Group's publications, including the well-known Hotline.

The grandfather of online news digests, The Hotline first appeared in 1987 to "cover the coverage" of the news media. A daily digest of political news inside and outside the Beltway, Hotline has become a must-read for newsmakers and journalists.

According to site editor and associate publisher Troy Schneider,

NationalJournal.com averages about 80,000 unique visitors a month. Approximately 7,000 to 8,000 of those visitors come from U.S. House and Senate offices.

"We provide a depth of insider political coverage that really isn't available anywhere else," Schneider said. "Lots of Web sites out there provide excellent coverage of campaigns and Congress, but all of our publications combine to offer more of that in a more appealing way."

The other publications include Congress Daily, Technology Daily and American Health Line, each of which provides specialized news. The downside is that this wealth of content does not come cheaply. NationalJournal.com is restricted to National Journal Group publications subscribers, and one's degree of access depends upon the type of subscription.

The basic way to get access is by subscribing to National Journal magazine, which costs $1,499 per year and includes access to parts of the Web site. Daily publications go upward from there. The Hotline costs "in the neighborhood of $4,500," Schneider said.

Online features include campaign ad spotlights, the Web version of *The Almanac of American Politics*, daily buzz and pundit columns, a comprehensive and regularly updated candidate and campaign guide, book reviews, poll trackers and more. Content from the Cook Political Report is also available.

"In 1987, this was really the only way to quickly find out what coverage was appearing in Iowa, and what other pundits around the country were saying," Schneider said. "Anyone can find that now, so The Hotline had to evolve. The Internet was absolutely a watershed event for our company, and on the whole we've benefited."

3. Federal Election Commission www.fec.gov

Much of the information that journalists use Opensecrets to find originates with the FEC, which maintains a popular Web site of its own. Rarely did respondents mention this site without mentioning Opensecrets.org or Politicalmoneyline.com (No. 4 of our Top Ten).

"They have a lot of the same information with slightly different ways of presenting it," said Frank Lockwood, Washington correspondent for the Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader. "And sometimes one will have information the other won't have yet, so it just makes sense to check more than one."

The site is colorful, clean and easy-to-use, with standard drop-down navigation. Compared to other sites devoted to campaign finance data, the FEC offers the basic information, but fewer options for slicing and dicing the money. The site does, however, allow reporters to find the hardcopy filings of reports online, allowing corroboration of data. Starting in this election cycle, electronic filings of House of Representatives candidates are almost immediately available and can be downloaded with modest technical expertise. That means the site has the most current information.

The "Elections and Voting" section has election rules, dates, results and special reports. There are also links to state election and campaign finance sites as well as a "how-to" guide for researching public records.

4. Political Money Line www.politicalmoneyline.com

Politicalmoneyline.com takes raw FEC data, cleans it up and posts it in a variety of ways, allowing users to track and analyze money in politics. The site also includes federal lobbying information in its online database. If it sounds similar to

OpenSecrets.org, it should. Men who previously worked at both the FEC and the Center for Responsive Politics direct politicalmoneyline.com, but the site is far from being an OpenSecrets.org clone.

One difference is PACtracker, an Internet-based subscription service that monitors financial activity of federally registered political action committees. The site also keeps close tabs on the so-called "527" soft-money committees of members of Congress with an extensive donor database. In addition, Politicalmoneyline.com claims to be the only place that provides monthly charts that analyze national party soft-money donations.

"The sites are comparable, but the breadth of information on [Political-moneyline.com] is greater," said Jerry Zremski, the Washington correspondent for The Buffalo News.

While parts of the site are free, a large amount of information, including the lobby industry databases, is for subscribers only. A base subscription starts at $2,500 per year and can run up to $20,000. PACtracker costs $1,995.

"We have most of the major and mid-level news organizations who are paying good money for access," said Kent Cooper, vice president of TRKC, the site's parent company. "We aren't lacking for media market at all."

Politicalmoneyline.com can also be accessed at www.tray.com, or through www.fecinfo.com, as the site was previously known.

5. The Washington Post www.washingtonpost.com

6. The New York Times www.nytimes.com

The two most popular news sites among our respondents are the two most popular online newspapers.

"The Web sites for the Post and the Times offer the same thorough coverage and commentary that readers get in the print edition," said James Lynch, a senior staff writer at The Gazette in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Both sites are deep in terms of content, offering users the same information available in the print editions as well as video, message boards, feature packages and breaking news updates throughout the day. For the Post, which lacks national distribution, unlike the Times, the Internet has expanded the paper's reach.

The Tampa Tribune's Ted Byrd, who once lived in Virginia, now scans the Post every day from his office in Florida. "The Post and the Times are just must-read papers," he said. "You've got to read those two for national and political news."

The papers offer more online. Both sites exploit the bottomless news hole with content that rarely finds room in print, such as texts and transcripts, and both organize content thematically in addition to the standard divisions of nation, world, business, sports and features. Each site updates throughout the day. The Times often links to other sites on the Web relevant to an article. The Post rarely takes users outside its own site.

Though each site offers daily and weekly e-mail products, the Times goes a step further with the "Times News Tracker," which allows users to customize e-mail alerts—and choose how often they are sent. The Post has "mywashingtonpost.com," which allows readers to customize content.

Both sites are free but charge for archives. The Times offers a week's worth of articles at no cost, but beyond that articles cost as little as 80 cents or as much as $2.50. The Post offers 14 days of free articles, then charges on a similar price scale—from 80 cents to $2.95.

The Post has a partnership with Congressional Quarterly, which provides coverage of local races across the country. Other features include poll data, live discussions and video with newsmakers and Post reporters. The Times offers a comprehensive database of issues and legislation in Congress, as well as candidate and campaign listings, supplied by Capitol Advantage. Both sites have a zip code search that connects users with local information.

7. CNN www.cnn.com

CNN.com was one of the first nationally recognized news operations online. It consistently ranks at or near the top of most-visited news sites. On election night in 2000, CNN.com drew the most eyes. The global appeal of CNN and its parent company, AOL Time Warner, gives the site tremendous reach and makes it especially attuned to the demands of the 24-hour news cycle.

While lacking the long, contextual articles of the Post and the Times, CNN excels at providing the kinds of interactive and multimedia features associated with the Web, including a vast "video stories" page. On-air reports are repackaged online, embellished with links and more information. The CNN Web site mirrors the cable channel with frequent updates and a reliance on developing stories throughout the day. "Breaking news" e-mail alerts are available, but they are sent less frequently than "breaking news" is trumpeted on-air.

The "All Politics" channel is now branded as "Inside Politics," mirroring the network's daily roundup of political news. The section does not offer the same depth as its competition, but a quick and dependable search function with free archives helps make up the difference. Political news from *Time* magazine is prominently linked on the page.

8. ABC www.abcnews.com

Television news networks face a problem with online content that newspapers do not—keeping it original. While newspapers feed bylined content to their Web sites, broadcast sites are often at the mercy of wire services or must depend on an online staff to write and report. ABCNews.com, an appealing and well-contained site, manages to do both, but it is also getting a lot of traction from its political feature, The Note.

More than half of the respondents who named ABC as a destination mentioned The Note, a daily look at political news, with an emphasis on national news. Links to source material are provided and the piece is normally spiked with a dash of attitude more commonly found on webzines like Slate. According to Mark Halperin, the director of ABC News' political unit and one of the three writers, the daily digest was originally an internal memo circulated to news staff and a few close sources before it began running as an online feature in early 2002.

As for the rest of ABC's site, video and audio reports are plentiful, including in-depth webcast pieces featuring ABC personalities, while personalized pages can be generated on the fly through a zip code search.

9. Rough and Tumble www.rtumble.com

For everything you want to know about California politics, this is the place to go. Started in the early 1990s by longtime television journalist Jack Kavanagh, Rough and Tumble began as an in-house resource that was soon shared online. According to Kavanagh, the site attracts approximately 10,000 page views per day.

Rough and Tumble follows the Hotline-style format offering a brief synopsis of a news item, then providing a link to the full story (or links, if the story is large enough to be covered in multiple California newspapers). The digest is confined to two pages and an archive that stretches back about a week. The site is straightforward and easy to use, which is just how Kavanagh intends it to be.

"For an awful lot of people who use the Web, technology is not their friend," Kavanagh said. "My goal is to get information as quickly and as easily as possible to people who use it."

Those users are not confined to California. Most of the mentions on our questionnaire came from California journalists, but Kavanagh said an online survey showed that he's getting readers from outside the state—including the offices of most members of California's congressional delegation in Washington.

Kavanagh runs the site himself, starting at 4:30 a.m. to have it updated by 6 a.m. Pacific Standard Time. Funding comes from ads and individual contributors and reporters' names are always listed with links to their stories. "Nothing on this Web site is unattributed," Kavanagh said.

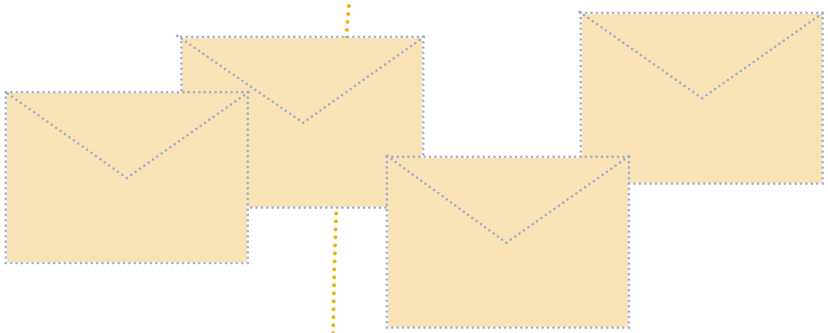
10. Project Vote Smart www.vote-smart.org

Billing itself as "the last trusted source for political information," Project Vote Smart is perhaps best known for its National Political Awareness Test, a survey sent to candidates for public office asking questions on their policy positions. Once gathered, that information and much more can be found on this Web site.

The downside is that the Web site is not pleasing to the eye or terribly easy to navigate. Given the organization's small budget and reliance on volunteers and interns, however, the focus is on content, not presentation.

(The Web could be avoided altogether by calling a hotline and asking a researcher to help gather and send information directly to you.)

In addition to position statements, visitors can get biographical information on thousands of candidates and elected officials, follow the status of legislation and download fairly detailed data on state-level elections and ballot measures. The Web site provides links to numerous issue and advocacy groups and collects and posts political performance evaluations from special interest groups, though such postings are made without regard to issue or bias and may include partisan material.



Journalists suggested a lot of good Web sites, and we came up with our own short list. The information on sites we chose had to be clearly presented, fairly current and the layout easy to use. Simple criteria, but not many Web sites meet them.

FOR SOURCES

ProfNet - www1.profnet.com

This site bills itself as the place "where sources and journalists meet" by allowing reporters to query a nationwide network of academics and experts. ProfNet boasts a keyword-searchable database that profiles thousands of information sources on practically any topic. ProfNet provides biographies and expert qualifications of individuals. Registration is required, and fees are charged based on the type of organization and number of searchable categories desired. ProfNet is a subsidiary of PR Newswire.

"One interesting note is the way [the Internet] has decreased the isolation of being 'in the bubble' with presidential campaigns."

-J. Scott Orr
Staff Writer
The (Newark, N.J.) Star-Ledger

FOR ARCHIVES

U.S. News Archives on the Web - www.ibiblio.org/slanews/internet/archives.html

This site is an updated list of newspaper archives on the Internet maintained by the News Division of the Special Libraries Association, a trade group of librarians and researchers. Did the subject of your story formerly live in Cincinnati? No problem. Check the list to learn where The Cincinnati Enquirer keeps its archives and how to get in. This site opens archives of newspapers all across the country, though most of those newspapers now charge a nominal fee for access to archived materials. On the downside, U.S. News Archives is not a well-designed site. Users are likely to find some dead links and outdated information.

FOR SEARCHES

Google - www.google.com

Many journalists listed Google as a favorite site, and for good reason. A lightning-fast search engine, Google is quick, easy to use and generally returns more relevant results than its rivals by scanning the text of Web pages, not just keywords. Google also uses the number of links to a page as a way to deter mine its "value." The site also claims to cover more than 2 billion URLs and will only return pages that include all of the requested search terms (logically, the order in which words are typed affects results). You won't find the bells and whistles and "community" feel of other search engines, but you'll find what you're looking for, if it's out there.

FOR POLITICAL NEWS

C-SPAN - www.c-span.org

Though it did not make our journalists' most favored lists, C-Span unearths a trove of political news and information to be read or watched. Video links to daily programs and events are prominently displayed while press conferences, speeches and other news items are available here for a short time. And of course, congressional action can be viewed live on your desktop. Other news sites might carry streaming video of specific events, but this is C-Span's bread and butter.

FOR POLITICAL BACKGROUND

DemocracyNet - www.dnet.org

This site, run by the League of Women Voters, does not draw the attention given Project Vote Smart, but aims for the same lofty goals of giving "unfiltered" information to citizens by presenting side-by-side comparisons of candidates, issues and ballot measures. Ideally, candidates offer thoughts in their own words, but, much like Project Vote Smart, searches yield many "No Comments." The site has a political calendar and the links are well-organized. The heart of the site is its "Issue Grid," which navigates the user through numerous resources and is easily reached via an impossible-to-miss map and zip code search function on the home page.

FOR POLLS AND REPORTS

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press - www.people-press.org

The Pew Center is a nonprofit organization that conducts surveys about attitudes towards the press and politics. The site has a long list of survey reports, and more expert users can access the survey data themselves. Searches can be conducted by topic, by year (back to 1995), or by keyword. There is also an up-to-date archive page of "other polls" from the major media and polling organizations, offering a nice destination site for the latest national polls. The site is not necessarily deep with information and resource links and the news and commentary sections offer fewer options than one might expect. For an added bonus, check out the "News Interest Index," which compiles composite polling data back to 1986 to produce a list of stories the public has followed most closely.

FOR NEWS ABOUT NEWS MEDIA

The Poynter Institute - www.poynter.org

The well-known school for journalists has a lot of resources online, balancing analytical pieces from regular contributors with information on the Institute's seminars, including a "journalism event calendar." There's not much political information or news here—this site examines the profession of journalism. To that end, Poynter is the home of Jim Romanesko's MediaNews (www.poynter.org/medianews). Romanesko summarizes top news and inside information on the media industry and links you to the source material.

FOR RECORDS AND DOCUMENTS

SearchSystems.Net - www.searchsystems.net

This site, run by Pacific Information Resources, bills itself as the first and largest collection of free public records on the Internet. It claims to offer links to more than 8,000 public databases. From court decisions to deeds, you can find digital public records on practically any topic, but coverage from state to state is spotty. Still, in some states you can check professional licenses, death records, real estate records, legal opinions and incarceration rolls. Searches can be done nationwide or by state, and by keyword. The site suffers from overload. Nonetheless, it's a valuable collection of links to a vast array of public documentation.

ALSO SEE:

For **archives**, also see:
- Newslink - www.newslink.org

For **searches**, also see:
- Daypop - www.daypop.com

For **political news**, also see:
- Washington Wrap – www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/02/26/politics/main502099.shtml

For **political background**, also see:
- Politics1 - www.politics1.com
- StateWeb - www.stateweb.com/default.php3
- Stateline - www.stateline.org

For **polls and reports**, also see:
- The Gallup Organization - www.gallup.com
- The Polling Report - www.pollingreport.com

For **news about the media**, also see:
- Daily Briefing - www. journalism.org/daily/index.html
- I Want Media - http://www.iwantmedia.com

For **records and documents**, also see:
- Thomas - thomas.loc.gov
- Federal Lobbying Reports - sopr.senate.gov

"The Internet gives reporters everywhere access to the same information at the same time–no more waiting on the postal service or the fax repair man."

-James Lynch
Senior Staff Writer, The (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) Gazette

Section V. Insider News Flourishes on the Web

It's 11 a.m.and Mark Halperin, director of the ABC News Political Unit, is "crashing on the Tipper thing," as he tells a caller. That's Tipper Gore, wife of former Vice President Al Gore, who on this day in mid-March is flirting with a race for U.S. senator from Tennessee.

Earlier in the morning, Halperin and his reporting crew posted to ABCNews.com their daily political digest, The Note. The headline says, "Forget Tipper." The night before, the Associated Press reported that Democrats in Tennessee were urging her to run. The Note's early take: "Let us be clear at the top, before the inevitable spiraling out of control: Based on our reporting, we are deeply, deeply skeptical Mrs. Gore will run for Senate."[1]

By midmorning, though, the skepticism softens, and Halperin writes an internal memo to producers of World News Tonight who will decide whether to air a story at 6:30 p.m. The view is still that Gore ultimately won't run, but she was actively considering it. The memo weighs the pros and cons in a chatty, informal style that includes factual reporting and analysis and quotes a former Gore aide who touts the idea. The memo advances the story by reporting that Rep. Bob Clement (D-Tenn.) will announce his candidacy, possibly to head off Mrs. Gore by threatening a primary contest.[2]

In the pre-Internet age, the memo would have stayed in house, and the political unit would have focused on the evening news. Now, before that work begins, Halperin and colleagues decide to "print" what they've got—just as news wires and afternoon newspapers have done for years. Except this not a wire service or a newspaper, but a television network with a Web site. The internal memo is quickly and only slightly recast as a news story by one of Halperin's colleagues, while Halperin dictates a headline as it is posted on the ABC Web site: "Associates Say Gore Mulling Run." Someone adds a subhead that in the rush adds a typo: "Speculation Swirts in Tennessee, Washington."[3]

This has all transpired in 30 minutes. Halperin hasn't slowed down, juggling a conference call for World News and making sure the story is put on the Web in time to make the noon deadline for The Hotline, the web site for political professionals and journalists. That evening, the story appears on World News Tonight and is considerably more serious about the likelihood of a Gore candidacy than the skeptical Note posted nine hours earlier.*

Welcome to political journalism online—fast, informal, speculative and ephemeral. This journalism often aims at a niche audience of political insiders, a genre that flourishes on the Web. Although the Internet's influence on politics as a mass

* ABC Anchor Elizabeth Vargas: "There are several indications today that Tipper Gore, the wife of former vice president Al Gore, is considering a run for the Senate. It is the same seat from Tennessee once held by her husband. Democrats believe Mrs. Gore would be an appealing candidate and, as of now, the race is wide open." (Burrelle's Information Services, World News Tonight, March 15, 2002). As it turned out, the Note had been right. Two days later, after a meeting with Rep. Clements, Gore announced she wouldn't run.

medium is questionable, the Web has become a vast repository of political news, commentary—and yes, speculation and gossip.

The information crosses the spectrum—from the personal commentary of blogs and the rumor mill of Drudge to the thousand tidbits on Hotline and the huge news archives of The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Our study suggests that political journalists spend a lot of time on these sites, reading political news to keep informed and abreast of the competition. Reading political coverage topped our respondents' list of their most frequent Internet uses, being cited as done "very often" by half our interviewees. Respondents cited the National Journal and its Hotline as their No. 2 favorite individual Web site.

ABC's Note placed eighth in our top ten sites, although it has only been posted since January 2002. As Halperin described to us on the morning we visited, the political unit has been writing a daily political memo for years for internal consumption, sometimes "bootlegging" copies to political sources. Now, this insider news and commentary—sometimes with an edge—on the day's breaking political stories is posted to the Web at mid-morning each workday. Take this example of a lead item June 12, 2002, that you won't get on the ABC newscast:

> *Let's face it: Democrats and the press do not trust the White House to tell the truth about the war on terror, and do not trust the White House to not play politics with the war on terror.*
>
> *Although the Note is often accused of being cynical, we in fact aren't. And we don't relish at all the facts in that paragraph above. But we are compelled to describe reality as we see it around us, and this is an important reality right now in U.S. politics.*[4]

More often, The Note tries to be clever. It takes chances, like the June 4 edition that parodied the stories of the day to the tune of "My Favorite Things" from The Sound of Music.[†] The Note includes regular features like calendar items, snapshots of key state races, and insider gimmicks that have long been The Hotline's trademark. For example, the Note features a section called the "Invisible Primary," which is already handicapping candidates for the 2004 presidential election.[5]

Halperin said his audience is not just political journalists, but political operatives and political junkies, particularly young political junkies.

"Our Note is much more informal than we would have put on TV. The notion is that younger people are more inclined to read things that are less formal, and the informal style can accommodate serious political reporting," Halperin said.[6]

But when asked how many people saw his story on Mrs. Gore, he was more ambivalent about his enterprise.

"No idea. I'm writing for mostly an inside audience and we carefully published in time to make Hotline … And that's a big thing in our world."

And, he continued, "I'm positive as a consumer of all this stuff. I like to use it. It helps me. As a businessman, I'm less positive in the immediate term—midterm. I think the audience and the revenue will be there. But it is hard for the culture of a big company that measures its eyeballs in millions to be happy with the revenue, or lack of revenue, that comes from tens of thousands, if that."

---

† Today, these are a few of OUR favorite things:
Rush talking warming,
As Gephardt goes charming,
Voters out voting,
And the Note, well, now noting
That hearings on Intel will begin their stings.
These are a few of the Note's favorite things.

On the day he was crashing on Tipper, Halperin had one keen observer—Dotty Lynch, senior political editor of CBS News, who, with her crew of young reporters and researchers, was doing pretty much the same thing as Halperin & Co. at ABC. For the 2002 election, the CBS unit also has started "repurposing" its reporting for its Web site.

"We were competitive with them on that story," Lynch said a month later from CBS's Washington Bureau. As she worked the Gore story, she kept an eye on the ABC site. "At one point they had The Note saying forget it and a news story saying take it seriously."[7]

This year, CBSNews.com has featured a five-day-a-week report, Washington Wrap. In contrast to The Note, which can run long, the Wrap is a tight 1,000 words or so, usually containing three insider political items, and there's less commentary or attitude. But the Wrap, too, is informal. Take this lead item from April 18, 2002, which might sound familiar:

> *Washington—President Bush has a series of White House meetings on Thursday, including one with just-returned Colin Powell. The Beltway buzz is that Mr. Bush better duck because the Democrats and the press have decided that the post-Sept. 11 honeymoon is really over and are ready to let the attacks fly.*[8]

"It's very fun, especially in an off year," said Lynch, who first resisted the additional assignment because of the potential strain on resources. "You don't know what television [the evening news] is ever going to be interested in, and when. So you have to compile this stuff every single day, but you don't have an outlet. This gives us an outlet." Lynch also writes a weekly column for the site.

Like ABC's crew, the CBS political unit had first circulated an internal e-mail within the news division that the Gore story was serious and Lynch was offering a breaking news story. CBS Radio responded and Lynch did a report for that medium, but she couldn't get the network's Web site to pay attention.

"I was going ballistic because I had a good source to take it seriously and I couldn't get the Web to take it seriously," she said. Then she laughed, suggesting she might be taking it too seriously. "It is all, like, our little world here."[9]

A small but influential world of journalists, pundits, consultants, politicians and their staffs has found a clubhouse on the Internet. Doug Bailey, a Republican consultant, and Roger Carver, a Democratic consultant, first tapped into it—more accurately perhaps, built it—when they launched Hotline in 1987, anticipating the technological revolution. "You just knew that what was coming was a rapid transmission of massive amounts of information," Bailey said.[10]

Hotline started on a CompuServe bulletin board, although its distribution was largely by fax. By the early 1990s, Hotline was on its own servers; news organizations, and even individual reporters were filing directly to it. Occasionally a reporter's story might find itself in Hotline before it made the newspaper. Bailey and Carver sold Hotline to National Journal in 1996 and a year later the Journal took it to the Web. Now housed in the Watergate office complex, Hotline is a multimedia operation that offers an array of digested news stories, the latest polls and video clips, including the latest campaign ads.

The Web's chief benefit for Hotline has been to streamline the collection of news items, which were originally clipped from newspapers. Now Hotline is built in part by its staffers, who surf the news sites harvesting stories to digest.[11]

The Web has also expanded Hotline's audience, according to its executive publisher, Craig Crawford. He estimated that Hotline reaches an audience of about 25,000 daily, about a third of whom are journalists. Hotline is available in every congressional office and its audience remains political professionals and journalists who need the information for their work and can afford the sizable subscription fee.

"Our market now is tapped out," said Crawford, who expressed surprise there haven't been more efforts on the national level like ABC's Note. "I've always been paranoid about the competition, but it never materialized."[12]

Although they might not have shaken Hotline's hold on the pros, a lot of free sites have tried to compete as hotline copycats, aiming for an audience of political pros and a market Hotline has not pursued—ordinary folks with an interest in politics.

Probably the best known of the state sites is Rough & Tumble[‡] in California, which we found popular enough among journalists to make our list of favorite sites. There are also the free Web sites of insider Washington organs like C-Span[§] and the two Capitol Hill newspapers, Roll Call and The Hill.[**] Add to that the "political pages" featured on the Web sites of most metropolitan newspapers during election years.

"The basic principles of journalism apply to the Internet, same as for other aspects of our jobs—double-check information, and always consider the source."

-Stephen Ohlemacher
Ohio Statehouse Reporter
The (Cleveland, Ohio) Plain Dealer

Unmasking Anonymous Sites

But there is also a more dubious trend of "hotline" sites popping up in the states, run by political operatives who won't identify themselves.

One anonymous site is the South Carolina Hotline, which not only borrows the name but even offers its "quote of the day" like the original Hotline. Nowhere on the site, which has the link-look of the Drudge Report, are the authors identified, although they will take your credit card to make a donation.[††]

"We don't know who operates SC Hotline," said Lee Bandy, political writer for The State newspaper in Columbia, S.C.. "The guys are anonymous, and they cover up their identity quite well. It's obvious from reading it that it's run by Republican political operatives. It definitely promotes the GOP cause. I seldom read it, and never use it."[13]

Some of the anonymous hotline sites are being treated more seriously by journalists, including a series of them in Northeastern states run by the so-called "Publius Group," styling themselves after the authors of the Federalist Papers.[‡‡] We suggest the authors of these sites more closely resemble early 19th-century Washington correspondents who wrote under pen names to disguise their identities as congressional clerks or other political operatives.[14] The Publius Group, which also sells political buttons on the sites, has "franchised" sites in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Vermont and New Hampshire. Crain's New York Business went to the trouble of checking the group's incorporation papers in Delaware. The one named corporate officer was a former New Jersey Republican political consultant.[15]

Washington pundit Stuart Rothenberg decried the proliferation of anonymous sites in his column in Roll Call earlier this year.[16] "Some of what appears on these sites is entertaining and even useful. But a disturbing amount of it ranges from simply misleading to truly irresponsible." Rothenberg noted that some of Publius' sites were being reported in The Hotline, and we found that the New Hampshire and New Jersey sites were being recommended in the National Journal.[17] The New York and New Jersey Publius sites were linked from the political pages of The New York Times on the Web.

‡ See: http://www.rtumble.com/
§ See: http://www.c-span.org/
** See: http://www.hillnews.com/ and http://www.rollcall.com/
†† See: http://www.schotline.com/
‡‡ http://www.politicsny.com/aboutus/index.shtml. Has links to four other sites.

The implicit endorsement by mainstream publications of anonymous screeds underscores a concern we heard from some journalists—that it's too easy to accept Web information at face value. The Poynter Institute, which offers tips on judging Web sites, poses these questions at the top of the list: "Who wrote it, why, and what are their credentials? Who published it and why? With whom are the author and publisher affiliated?"[§§]

Journalists might want to do more than just shun the sites as reliable sources. They should strive to identify and publicize the authors of these sites, just as they would seek to unmask someone distributing anonymous campaign fliers. "All politics needs to be in the sunshine," said Phil Noble, president of PoliticsOnline.com and a campaign consultant based in Charleston, who has watched the SC Hotline develop. "Obviously, it belongs to a bunch of Republican insiders," he said. But he also said there were several upstart sites like it in South Carolina, and he predicted that they represent a new kind of political player that will become "terribly important" in coming years.[18]

How should journalists approach them?

"I think they should use them, exploit them, and yes, expose them," said Noble, who warned that it would be a mistake to ignore them. "They are another medium of insider politics."

Web Effects, Good and Bad

So how has the blossoming of Internet political content affected political journalism? On one point we found wide agreement—it has made everything seem faster, even if deadlines haven't changed. And some expressed a fear that more secondary material is being recycled at the expense of original reporting.

"I think it increases the velocity," said Dan Balz of The Washington Post. And, he added, "The problem is, we all get so inundated with information that we don't get out and do our own reporting."[19]

On whether the Internet has exacerbated pack journalism, there was a lot of debate.

"I think it has made it 100 times worse," said Adam Nagourney of The New York Times. "That's why I don't read Hotline. The whole world's homogenized. Thirty years ago you never would know what's going on in 25 newspapers. Now you can go on the Web and look at all of them. So I do think it reinforces conventional wisdom."[20]

Rejecting the pack journalism argument, J. Scott Orr, a reporter for The Star-Ledger of Newark, said the Internet helped break "the bubble" of traveling on a campaign, particularly a presidential campaign.[21]

"Previously, the only real source of information was the campaign. There wasn't a lot of access to whatever else was happening. With the Internet hookups in 2000, you were in planes and trains and could see what others were writing about."

Even Hotline co-founder Bailey conceded, "Hotline itself has become the leader of the pack." But that wasn't true, initially, he said. "It democratized the coverage." Before, he said, a few reporters with national audiences led, and Hotline gave voice to many others who suddenly had a national audience inside the political community. The Internet could do the same, he said.[22]

"The Internet gives you the opportunity to speak loud enough to have your voice heard if somebody wants to listen. It also gives all the more authority to those who are respected, trusted voices."

"My one caution and concern is that reporters may try to model their coverage or approach to what they're reading online. . . That's bad, and can lead to too much copycat stuff. . ."

-Jo Mannies
Political Reporter, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

§§ See: http://www.poynter.org/Web/053102Jon.htm

Anecdotally at least, the notion of democratization resonated in this respect. Washington-based reporters often mentioned that the Internet allowed them to reach beyond the Beltway mentality by going directly to news sites in the states or interacting with readers by e-mail or simply finding experts on far-flung campuses. Political reporters outside of Washington said the reverse—the Internet makes it much easier for them to keep up with political news from the capital or tap national political sources.

"I think the Internet has, overall, helped reporters deal with the global issues surrounding campaigns," said Jo Mannies of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "Such as, did George W. Bush hit the same issues in his visit to St. Louis as he did in, say, Los Angeles the week before? The Internet allows a reporter to quickly pull up stories from other places to find out."[23]

But, she added, "My one caution and concern is that reporters may try to model their coverage or approach to what they're reading online elsewhere. That's bad, and can lead to too much copycat stuff and less original thinking and writing."

Tom Baxter, a political columnist for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, said he often started his workday by going to Slate's summary of the national political news and even surfed the sites of European newspapers looking for column ideas.[24]

"No question, you have an incredible breadth that you didn't have before," Baxter said. "It has created a political culture that is greater than Washington."

1 Marc J. Ambinder, Mark Halperin & Elizabeth Wilner, "Forget Tipper," the Note, March 15, 2001. http://more.abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/dailynews/note_archives.html
2 In-person interview with Mark Halperin, political director of the Political Unit of ABC News, New York, March 15, 2002.
3 Marc J. Ambinder, Mark Halperin & Elizabeth Wilner, "Associates Say Gore Mulling Run," ABCNews.com, March 15, 2002. http://more.abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/dailynews/tippergore_020315.html
4 The Note, June 12, 2002, archives.
5 The Note, June 4, 2002, archives.
6 Halperin interview.
7 In-person interview with Dotty Lynch, senior political editor, CBS News, Washington, April 19, 2002.
8 Dotty Lynch, Elizabeth Fulk, Douglas Kiker and Susan Semeleer, Washington Wrap, CBSNews.com, April 18, 2002.
9 Lynch interview.
10 In-person interview with Doug Bailey, co-founder of The Hotline, Washington, May 9, 2002.
11 In-person interview with Craig Crawford, executive publisher of The Hotline, Washington, May 9, 2002.
12 Ibid.
13 E-mail interview, Lee Bandy, political reporter, The State, Columbia, S.C., July 10, 2002.
14 Donald A. Ritchie, *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) pp. 20-22.
15 "Poison Pen," Crain's New York Business, April 1, 2002.
16 Stuart Rothenberg, "Anonymous Web Site Presents a Challenge to Political Orthodoxy," Roll Call, February 18, 2002.
17 James A. Barnes, "Sites Worth a Look," National Journal, December 8, 2002.
18 Telephone interview with Phil Noble, president of PoliticsOnline.com, Charleston, July 12, 2002.
19 Telephone interview with Dan Balz, political reporter, The Washington Post, Washington, May 6, 2002.
20 In-person interview with Adam Nagourney, chief political correspondent of The New York Times, New York, March 15, 2002.
21 Telephone interview with J. Scott Orr, staff writer, The Star-Ledger, Newark, June 14, 2002.
22 Bailey interview.
23 Telephone interview with Jo Mannies, political reporter, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Louis, June 7, 2002.
24 Telephone interview with Tom Baxter, political columnist, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta, May 30, 2002.

"The main change the Web has brought has been the use of e-mail as a quick method of written communication between the candidates and myself."

-Kevin Dayton
Capitol Bureau Chief
The Honolulu Advertiser

Section VI. Q & A on Web Campaigning

We asked Jonah Seiger, co-founder and chief strategist of Mindshare Internet Campaigns, LLC, to answer basic questions about online political campaigns. Founded in 1997, Mindshare develops online communications strategies for public affairs. In 2002, Seiger was a visiting Fellow at the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University.

Q. How are candidates using the Web?

A. In the 2002 cycle, campaigns have begun to view the Web as a cornerstone of overall strategy, focusing primarily on direct contact with voters. The Internet has not yet replaced television and radio as a means of winning voters, but it has proven effective at "closing the deal" with existing supporters and converting their support into tangible benefits—particularly fundraising, volunteer recruitment and GOTV efforts.

Q. How important are campaign Web sites to an overall campaign plan?

A. While a Web site is one of the most visible components, it's only the beginning of an effective Internet strategy. Less visible, but equally important, are the candidate's use of e-mail to keep in touch with core supporters, online advertising and viral "word-of-mouse" e-mail forwarding campaigns to drive visitors to the Web site in order to recruit more supporters and raise money.

Candidates who use the Web effectively make it the hub of their entire campaign. They harness traditional forms of outreach—including direct mail, door-to-door canvassing, candidate appearances, TV and radio spots—to drive interested voters to the Web for more information and to involve them in the campaign.

Q. How can you tell if a campaign is making a serious Web effort?

A. The following checklist can be helpful when evaluating a campaign's online component:

- Is the campaign using the Web to collect e-mail addresses? Is it using the e-mail list to keep subscribers informed about campaign developments and solicit contributions?
- Is the campaign promoting its Web site? Does the URL appear on all campaign materials and ads? Does the candidate talk up the site?
- Does the site provide useful information to voters and reporters covering the race, such as issue papers and candidate bios?

- Does the Web site compare the candidate's record with the opponent's record?
- Does the Web site include Spanish content, particularly in districts where Spanish is widely spoken?
- Is the site accessible to visually and hearing impaired Web surfers? Accessibility for disabled surfers includes special HTML code tags that can be read by specially equipped browsers. You can check to see how a campaign Web site scores against basic accessibility requirements by typing its URL into Bobby (www.cast.org/bobby).

Q. What role does a webmaster play in the campaign?

A. The campaign webmaster is the person responsible for updating the site and ensuring that the Web is fully integrated into the overall campaign. Except in well-funded statewide races, most campaigns do not have full-time Web staff. Instead, they rely on the communications director, a volunteer, or an outside firm to manage their site.

Q. Are there specialized Web consultants for campaigns?

A. Yes. Leading firms in the Washington area include our own Mindshare Internet Campaigns, LLC (issue groups and PACs: www.mindshare.net), the NetPolitics Group (Democratic candidates: www.netpoliticsgroup.com), Casey.com (Democratic candidates: www.casey.com), RightClick Strategies (Republican candidates: www.rightclicks.com), and Integrated Web Strategies (Republican candidates: www.iwsnow.com).

Q. How do campaigns obtain e-mail addresses?

A. Effective campaign Web sites allow visitors to sign up for a campaign newsletter. The goal is to establish a relationship with a supporter via e-mail, and, over time, convert that supporter into a contributor, volunteer and voter.

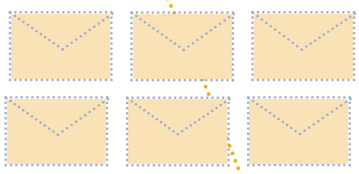
Campaigns might also try to obtain e-mail addresses through direct mail programs and telemarketing. Another practice, known as "appending," matches voter lists against a database of e-mail addresses. This practice is new for 2002 and raises a number of interesting questions regarding privacy and SPAM.

Q. Do campaigns buy and sell lists of e-mail addresses?

A. Occasionally they do, though this can be very risky. Unsolicited e-mail (aka SPAM) is controversial and angers many recipients.

Q. When is e-mail SPAM?

A. SPAM is generally defined as e-mail sent to an individual who did not ask to receive it. SPAM is also usually sent with falsified header information (i.e., an invalid return address). When a campaign buys an e-mail list, gets one in a trade, or obtains an e-mail address through appending, they are probably engaging in SPAM. Ask the campaigns tough questions in this regard. There may be an interesting story lurking.



Q. Have any candidates gotten into trouble for SPAM?

A. Yes. Take the example of Bill Jones, a GOP candidate for California governor. In the days before the March 2002 California primary, the Jones campaign purchased a list of e-mail addresses and sent a solicitation to tens of thousands of people. While the campaign was told that the list was targeted to California Republicans, in fact it included a large number of Canadians (someone thought that addresses ending in ".ca" meant California, not Canada).

When several recipients of the e-mail complained to the Jones campaign's Internet Service Provider (ISP), the company shut down the campaign Web site for violating its terms of service (most ISPs have terms of service, which prohibit sending uns olicited e-mail). The episode prompted stories in local media discussing whether the campaign violated the state's anti-SPAM law. Both developments brought negative press and the loss of both the campaign's Web site and e-mail operation.

Q. What is a privacy policy and why is it important?

A. The privacy policy should describe how information the site collects is used and the circumstances under which it is disclosed to third parties, including personal information such as e-mail and snail-mail addresses, telephone numbers and contribution amounts. A sound privacy policy is important to establish trust between the campaign and the voters. If the campaign has no privacy policy, call the campaign manager and ask what the campaign does with information collected on its site. If the campaign gathers any personal information, but lacks a privacy policy stating what information is shared, and when, write about it.

Q. What is online advertising, and why is it used?

A. Online advertising purchases space on Web sites targeted to potential voters. So far, candidates have advertised mostly on major portals (such as MSN and Yahoo) and news sites. Candidates have used it sparingly in the past two election cycles.

Contrary to common perception, and unlike traditional forms of advertising, campaigns typically do not use online advertising for message delivery. Instead, online advertising is used as a recruitment vehicle akin to direct mail. The goal is to drive interested individuals back to the campaign's Web site to obtain their e-mail address. Building a database of e-mail addresses, in turn, lets the campaign establish a relationship and convert that visitor into a donor, volunteer and voter.

Q. How does online advertising differ from TV, radio, or print ads?

A. Online advertising is distinct in two important ways: The ability to target very precisely and to adjust quickly based on performance. Many Web sites that accept online advertising can target ads based on user profiles, including demographic information such as age, gender and geographic location, obtained when a user signs up for service. As a result, it is a simple matter to show one ad to women over 40 in Iowa with an interest in health, and a different ad to men over 40 in Nebraska with an interest in hunting.

Online ads can also be tracked more precisely than traditional advertising. It is possible to know how many people in a specific demographic profile saw a particular ad, and what percentage of them responded. Ad performance can easily be compared, and the rotation of ads can be adjusted quickly to maximize response rates.

Q. How does online advertising measure success?

A. Advertising online, campaigns want to maximize the number of persons who click on an ad (known as the "click-through rate"). The higher the click-through rate, the more visitors to the campaign Web site and the greater the opportunity to obtain an e-mail address from those visitors. In addition, campaigns measure success by "cost per acquisition," the ultimate cost of obtaining one e-mail address from an online ad. Cost per acquisition is influenced by the price of the ad buy, the number of ads placed and, ultimately, by how well the ad motivates an individual to click.

Q. What are typical response rates for online ads?

A. The performance of online advertising depends a great deal on the effectiveness of the ad itself—how well the ad conveys the message and motivates a viewer to click. An ad campaign can be judged to perform well if the click-through rate is between .5 and 1 percent.

Q. How can I find out who owns a domain name?

A. Check the WHOIS database (the master registry of all domain names on the Internet) at www.netsol.com/cgi-bin/whois/whois/.

Q. What happens when a candidate fails to register a domain name?

A. There are a number of examples of campaigns that were late to register their name, only to find the preferred URL in the hands of an opponent or parodist. Ask President Bush, who was nagged during 1999 and early 2000 by an aggressive parody site at www.gwbush.com. Bush made a second tactical error by filing a suit with the FEC seeking to have the site shut down. This drew media interest (and traffic) to the parody site. Candidates who fail to register their names early can also fall prey to cyber-squatters who snap up domain names of potential candidates in hopes of later extorting large sums of money from their campaigns.

AN ONLINE GLOSSARY[1]

The online world is full of confusing jargon, which campaign managers occasionally manipulate to mislead reporters. This glossary may help make sense of common Internet terms.

Traffic Statistics

Campaigns often tout traffic statistics to show their online success. There are no reliable independent measures of traffic to candidate Web sites. Most are too small to register on commercial tracking services like Nielsen/NetRatings. When dealing with self-reported data, it's essential to grasp the metrics of measuring Web traffic.

- Web Page: Each individual page contained within a Web site is described uniquely as a "Web page."
- Hit: A red flag should go up whenever a campaign describes traffic to their Web site in terms of "hits." A "hit" describes the number of files called up by each page visited. It is possible for a visitor to a single Web page to generate a large number of hits. As a result, this term is imprecise and unreliable for measuring and comparing Web traffic. Instead, ask about "page views" and "unique visitors."
- Page View: A page view refers to the number of times a single Web page is viewed by a visitor. One page view is equal to one pair of eyeballs on a unique Web page. The total number of page views on one Web site can be reliably compared with those on another site. This is not true of "hits." It is important to note, however, that page views do not measure unique individual visitors.
- Unique Visitor: This term describes the number of individuals who visited a Web page during a given period. The period is determined by the Web site operator, but is typically measured weekly or monthly.

A good rule of thumb to help distinguish among these terms: A unique visitor will generate multiple page views and larger numbers of hits during each visit to a Web site.

Privacy Terms

- Privacy Policy: A description of what information is collected from visitors to a Web site and how that information is used. It is generally accepted that Web sites should have a privacy policy prominently linked to any page that collects information about visitors. The Federal Trade Commission has enforced violations of Web site privacy policies under fraud and abuse statutes. Congress has considered legislation to require commercial Web sites to post privacy policies, so it's especially interesting to see if members of Congress follow this practice on their own sites.
- Opt-in/Opt-out: These terms have many definitions. As a general rule, the terms define how information collected from an individual is re-used or shared with other organizations. Visitors can either "opt-in" by making an affirmative choice to permit sharing of their information, or "opt-out" by making an affirmative choice not to have their information shared. Although some claim that "opt-in" protects privacy better, in practice there is little difference between these terms.
- Cookie[2]: A cookie is a small text file saved on your computer by a Web site. There are many reasons a given site would wish to use cookies. These range from the ability to personalize information (as on MyYahoo or Excite), or to help with on-line sales/services (as on Amazon Books or eBay), or simply to collect demographic information. Cookies also give programmers a quick, convenient means of keeping site content fresh and relevant to the user's interests. The newest servers use cookies to securely store any personal data that the user has shared with a site. For example, cookies help speed logins to favorite sites.
- Secure Server: When a campaign collects credit card information on its Web site, it should do so on a secure server to prevent the credit card from being intercepted during transmission. You can tell if a Web server is secure by looking for https:// in the address (note the "s" stands for secure), or a small

gold padlock in the lower right corner of the browser window. If the Web site is not secure, the campaign is putting itself and all its donors at risk.

Advertising Terms

- Banner: A generic term used for paid advertising on Web sites. Standard banner ads are the small rectangular ads at the top of most commercial sites, though banners come in many sizes and formats. Other variations include: Pop-up ads, skyscrapers, large rectangles, and half-banners. Sites usually offer a variety of these formats to advertisers and performance of an ad campaign can vary based on the mix of formats used.
- Venue: The site on which an ad is placed.
- Targeting: The ability of a venue to target ads based on information in their database. Many venues require users to register (such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or MyYahoo). On these sites, ads can be targeted based on a wide variety of demographic information, including age, gender and geographic location.
- Impression: One pair of eyeballs on a Web page. Similar to a page view, this term is used specifically to describe ad inventory.
- CPM: The standard unit in which ads are sold. CPM refers to Cost Per Thousand impressions (the M in the acronym stands for the roman numeral M or 1,000). CPM varies depending on the Web site and the level of targeting, but typically ranges from $5 to $50 per thousand impressions.
- Click-through rate: The ratio of "clicks" on an ad to the number of impressions. Campaigns will adjust targeting and messages to maximize click-through rates.
- Conversion Percentage: The percentage of people who clicked on an ad who then took the desired action, which is usually defined as giving an e-mail address.
- Cost per acquisition: The cost of obtaining an e-mail address, usually measured by dividing the total budget for an ad campaign by the number of individuals recruited. The same formula is used in traditional direct mail programs. Typical cost per acquisition online ranges from as low as $1 to $20 per e-mail address.

[1] Mindshare Internet Campaigns, LLC.

[2] The Unofficial Cookie FAQ (http://www.cookiecentral.com/faq/)

Section VII. Ethical Challenges Online

As the 2000 election season began, CBS News and AOL officials met to work out a joint online effort to connect voters with candidates on the issues. Voters would fill out an online questionnaire and their answers would be matched in a database with candidates sharing their views.

It was innovative and experimental, just the thing to showcase the interactive powers of the Internet. But there was another problem that goes with the Internet: How to pay for it. The AOL officials had an idea. They'd sell advertising space to candidates and political issue groups, who, after all, would be most interested in the content.

"We don't sell political ads in hard news broadcasts," said Dotty Lynch, senior political editor for the network, recounting the incident in an interview. Although allowing them on the periphery of a newscast, the network's standard bans political advertisements inside a newscast and AOL's plan seemed to threaten that separation. "When we raised the ethical concern, I don't think the conflict had occurred to them. They asked for advice and accepted our standard," Lynch said.[1]

Traditional journalism, meet the online world, where old standards find new challenges. Should the old rules apply and are there other situations where the traditional standards don't fit? Are journalists, particularly those who cover politics, thinking about new challenges to ethics or sound practices?

While the issues are broader than political journalism, our focus here, we explored some situations in which use of the Internet raises ethical questions. We found instances where ethical issues have not been confronted or resolved. We also explored some issues that are only on the horizon, such as candidate advertising on news sites, to which we'll return later. First, we start with the basic question.

Is the Internet a completely public forum, free for journalists to wander at will and extract what they want? Can they do that without violating traditional standards that state journalists should not eavesdrop, misrepresent themselves or prey on the unsuspecting? These questions could become important as more political discourse finds its way online—as politicians interact with voters online and as news organizations offer their sites as political discussion forums. At the same time, how does that discourse evolve in an environment that tolerates and even celebrates anonymity, and in which participants worry about their privacy?

Anecdotally, journalists we talked to said the Internet is a public forum and what campaigns do on it is subject to journalistic scrutiny. But they were less sure that voters online would agree the Internet is a great public square. One journalist offered an interesting analogy to an older technology—the rural telephone party line.

"If you are talking about a chat room where people think they're talking to like-minded people, they are treating it like a party line phone call. They kind of understand that people can listen, but really don't expect someone to get on," said Carl Cannon, White House correspondent for the National Journal.[2]

Journalists can observe in newsgroups without being noticed or interview sources without being present or really knowing who is on the other end. When we posed some hypothetical ethical questions, we found strong support for self-restraint in some cases and tentativeness in others.

Seven of 10 of our online respondents said it would be inappropriate for a reporter in a political chat room to collect information for a story without identifying himself or herself as a reporter. By a larger margin—about eight of 10—respondents said it would be inappropriate to quote someone from a chat room or listserv without notifying that person, or to use anonymous statements from a listserv or chat room.

Many news organizations address sourcing rules in their ethics codes, although some consider it more an issue of sound practice. We picked a sourcing question unique to the Internet—posting a query to a listserv of experts and receiving responses by e-mail. We asked if it would be appropriate for a journalist to use those responses without further corroboration. As we expected, a majority came down on the inappropriate side of the scale, but only a third found it very inappropriate and more than a quarter were neutral, suggesting they haven't thought about or encountered this issue.

If it is inappropriate to participate unannounced in a chat room, is it inappropriate to sign up for a campaign e-mail listerv for supporters without identifying oneself as a journalist? There was no clear consensus. Only a plurality of respondents, 45 percent, said it was inappropriate compared to the 26 percent who said it was appropriate. Twenty-eight percent were neutral.

Why the difference? Perhaps chat rooms are of so little utility to journalists—six in 10 found them least useful—that it's easy to forswear reporting from them. Campaign e-mail in general is much more useful and familiar to journalists.

Almost every campaign Web site has a "join our campaign" feature where supporters can sign up. A recruitment tool, the resulting e-mail lists are used for money raising appeals and rallying supporters. Thus, it is e-mail, not chat rooms, that raises the real dilemma for journalists in monitoring the under-the-radar campaign the Internet might portend. Some journalists told us it was only a borderline ethical issue. Their larger worry about enlisting was either showing up on a list of supporters or getting a flood of worthless e-mail.

The Traditional Media View

But is this an example of a new ethical challenge spawned by the Internet? Michael Oreskes, assistant managing editor for electronics for The New York Times, said no.

"This is not an Internet issue. This goes back to direct mail. When I was a political reporter, I used to sign up for people's direct mail. I put my name on it and had them mail it to the office. I guess that is one of those [questions] you debate a little bit. You are signing up for a public thing. Now there is a flip side to that one. You can't sign up for things in a way that is going to make it look you really are a supporter … But one of the things interesting about this example is that it shows there are lot of issues that are not new to the Internet. These are issues that have been around for a long time."[3] Oreskes, a former Washington bureau chief of the Times, has been a prominent proponent of the proposition that traditional journalistic values should answer most challenges that arise in the new digital world. In a cover article for the American Journalism Review in November 1999, he said journalists should "reassert our highest standards" in the wake of controversial coverage of the Lewinsky scandal and the new challenges of the Internet. To do otherwise, he warned, would be to accept the standards of Internet gossip Matt Drudge.[4]

"Sure, the medium is new. But that doesn't mean all history and every lesson we ever learned is now useless," Oreskes wrote.[5]

In the article, Oreskes targeted two areas where he argued old standards should apply to new challenges on the Internet—the online rush to publish and the acceptance of anonymity.

At the time, he noted that there had been "a lot of hand-wringing about how the speed of the Internet puts pressure on journalists, causing them to make more mistakes." This was after news organizations ran stories online they later had to retract during the Lewinsky scandal.

Oreskes' answer was that deadline pressure is not a new problem for journalists; he invoked the old rule of the long gone International News Service to "get it first but first get it right." He also noted that broadcasters cope with live news all the time and the problem with speed on the Internet was largely a matter of newspaper journalists who had grown "a little soft" with evening deadlines. "A Web site doesn't change a simple editing rule: You shouldn't run with something before you know it is true."[6]

The Timesman's other point was that news organizations should resist the Web's tolerance for anonymity, particularly in the online chat rooms that are fixtures on news sites. He said that chatters on a news site should be required to use their real names just as if they wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper. "The standard good enough for letters to the editor is good enough for journalism chat rooms, too," he said.

Oreskes' AJR article seems to reflect the views of many traditional journalists as they approach the Web and we sat down with him to see if his views had changed in the intervening three years. We asked if news organizations are updating their ethical guidelines in the new environment.

"Probably not as fast as we should be," he said. But, pointing to our question about chat rooms, he said he wasn't sure whether ethics codes should be amended.

"The issue of identifying yourself as a reporter, that should be in an ethics code. … Our ethics code clearly says you cannot disguise yourself. I don't think we've explicitly said that applies to a chat room, but it applies to everything. … You can't put on a doctor's uniform and go into a hospital and get an interview by pretending to be the doctor. … You have to announce that you're a journalist. … If somebody went in a chat room and didn't say they were a reporter, they would be breaking that rule as clearly as if they had gone into a hospital and pretended to be a doctor."[7]

"Even though I consider list postings the equivalent of writing words on a wall, I still think the writers of those words should be informed that they're going to be quoted."

-David Steinkraus
County Government Reporter
The (Racine, Wis.) Journal Times

On coping with new online deadline pressures, Oreskes pointed to the Times' solution of using a "Continuous Newsdesk," to selectively update the Web site as news demands.

"The new political cycle seems to have no fixed deadlines, and therefore puts you under psychological pressure to file as fast as you can. But we all have to realize that it is psychological pressure. There is nothing that stops us from saying, 'I'm going to wait, figure it out, and then tell my readers what it is really all about.' Or you can say, 'I'm going to put three paragraphs on the Web site right now with the quotes, so the news, the statement of what the candidate made at his 10 a.m. press conference, is on the Web site. … Then I'm going to go away for three hours. I'm going to work it out. I'm going to talk to people. I'm going to put myself back on the old daily cycle.' I think we just need to have more discipline."

In our online questionnaire, we asked about the online news cycle. The results suggest journalists might be doing a better job coping with deadlines than feared by the early "hand-wringing," to use Oreskes' phrase. We asked our respondents if they were writing more spot news, feeling more deadline pressure and seeing more bogus information find its way into the news. Two-thirds said there had been no change in the number of spot stories, while a third said the Internet had increased the number of

spot stories. Forty-five percent said there had been no change in deadline pressure, while 35 percent said deadline pressure had grown. Half said more bogus information was finding its way into the news, while half said there had been no increase.

But when asked about their own experiences, whether their work had suffered as a result of the rush to post stories online, six in 10 disagreed and a quarter of the respondents were neutral on the question. Only 16 percent agreed their work had suffered. At the same time, six in 10 agreed the Internet was sometimes a distraction and three-quarters said they sometimes feel overwhelmed by e-mail.

This suggests that the information rush, not deadline pressure, is more responsible for the widely held view that the Internet has accelerated political coverage.

The New Media View

On one question of old standards versus new challenges, Oreskes and other traditionalists have lost to an Internet culture that prizes anonymity in online discussions and chats.

Discussion boards or chat rooms are fixtures on news sites and a standard offering on political pages. We looked at a few dozen sites and almost all allow participants to chat or post comments using an anonymous screen name, including The New York Times on the Web. The newspaper's Web site, which is a separate operation, requires participants in its online discussions to register by name and give a valid e-mail address that can be checked, but participants can make up a screen name.[8]

Nevertheless, Oreskes said, "I do not buy the idea that there is an online culture that we have to support, that violates basic standards."

Andrew Nachison, a new media expert at the American Press Institute in Reston, Va., said Oreskes and other traditional journalists are missing the point.

"Political discourse has changed on the Internet and traditional media is groping for a role," Nachison said. "Whether they like it or not, there are new rules. The delivery channel has changed who is in control. A Letters to the Editor page is tightly controlled by the editors. A discussion forum [online] is controlled by the users. The tables are turned and for traditional media, that is disturbing.

"It is a cogent argument that the ethical standards of the last 50 to 150 years ought to apply, but the fact is that if you try to run a newspaper's Web site like a Letters to the Editor page, you'll fail."[9]

Nachison said the "fundamental rules of journalism still apply" but there are new challenges, including anonymity and separating advertisements from news content, which might require rethinking old standards. And, he acknowledged, news organizations have been slow to address the new issues.

"There is pretty wide recognition that things are in flux. I'm not sure we're at the point to make rules yet. I don't think the medium is mature enough yet."

Updating Ethics Codes

While some newspapers and organizations have codified new guidelines or modified old ones, our research suggests that most have not. (Appendix A excerpts online ethical guidance from some of the codes discussed below.)

After a controversy in 1996 over online advertisements that seemed to meld seamlessly with editorial content, USAToday.com devised guidelines intended to restore a "clear separation between editorial and commercial content."[10] MSNBC.com compiled a notebook on ethics and procedures, ranging from sourcing to message boards, in an effort "to make sure no matter what journalists are doing, they have

a sense of journalistic standards."[11] The American Society of Magazine Editors assembled its "Best Practices for Digital Media," an eight-point protocol based on the belief that "credibility is key to the success of all digital-media businesses with an editorial component."[12]

A 1997 conference by the Poynter Institute on values and ethics in new media resulted in protocols journalists might use as a starting point for creating their own ethical guidelines. Poynter offered the protocols as "models, not as the definitive answers" to some of the medium's more perplexing problems.[13] In addition, Poynter hosted a seminar on computer-assisted reporting that yielded another protocol for CAR journalism.[14] The document condemned deceptive methods of newsgathering that might include withholding one's identity while online.

It's hard to say how many news organizations have heeded the Poynter protocols and given their editors and reporters some guideposts to the online terrain. Some organizations eschew written rules and others keep them private.

"If it's unethical to misrepresent yourself in person or on the phone, why would it be any different on the Internet?"

-Stephen Ohlemacher
Ohio Statehouse Reporter
The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer

The Poynter ethics conference grew from a project by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in the late 1990s to "revitalize journalism's core values."[15] The project's product lingers—41 codes of ethics by ASNE member newspapers and six other media and professional organizations are registered with the organization and linked online as a sort of ethical clearinghouse.*

The ASNE-registered codes do offer insight into a fairly broad cross-section of news organizations. We searched the 41 codes and found a dozen that mentioned aspects of the Internet, including e-mail and the Web, and several other variations of terms associated with new media technologies. In many codes, mention of the Internet related to use of company e-mail systems, distribution policies and online competitive practices—not newsgathering or news presentation. But we did find several codes that addressed these issues.

The Radio and Television News Directors Association updated its code of ethics in 2000, but only addressed new media technologies in vague terms. All instances of the word "broadcast" (i.e., "broadcast journalist") were replaced with "electronic" (i.e., "electronic journalist").† The New York Times' code contained one reference to e-mail in attributions: "In those cases when it makes a difference whether we directly witnessed a scene, we should distinguish in print between personal interviews and telephone or e-mail interviews, as well as written statements."‡

The York (Pa.) Daily Record tells its employees to, "Represent yourself online as if you were appearing at a public meeting representing the Daily Record." It also warns: "Don't participate in political activities or take sides on matters of public debate electronically."§ The San Antonio Express-News warns against plagiarism and the temptation to lift digital material.**

The Roanoke (Va.) Times, which has a small section in its code labeled "What We Post on the Internet," states that no document will be published online until read in its entirety "by an appropriate staff member."†† The (Lincoln, Neb.) Journal Star outlines the same policy on posting articles while also addressing proper sourcing: "Make certain any electronic communication is genuine and verify all material gathered online unless it is known to be from a credible source."‡‡ The Norfolk Virginian-

* See http://www.asne.org As of July, 2002, 10 of the top 20 newspapers based on average daily circulation are represented on the list of 35 newspapers. (Source: 2001 statistics from the Newspaper Association of America). The site also includes codes for the Associated Press, the E.W. Scripps and Gannett newspaper chains, and three professional organizations, the Radio and Television News Directors Association, Society of Professional Journalists and ASNE.
† See:http://www.rtnda.org/ethics/coe.shtml
‡ See http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/newyorktimesintegrity.htm
§ See: http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/yorkdailyrecord.htm
** See: http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3554
†† See: http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/roanoketimes.htm

Pilot has one of the most stringent rules on sourcing: "If using a source via Internet or e-mail, verify the source by phone or in person. Make certain a communication is genuine before using it."[§§] The Philadelphia Inquirer, on the other hand, paints a policy in broad strokes, and cautions, "Everyone should keep in mind that the Internet is a public forum."[***]

Blurring News and Ads

In sum, a few news organizations are addressing new challenges as they arise, but some remain on the horizon. One of those is the problem Dotty Lynch of CBS encountered with AOL's proposal to sell political ads on their joint site. Political advertising on the Web is still in its infancy, but early application suggests a potential challenge—a choice placement for political advertisers is on news sites. After all, it's a medium hunting revenue, where placement is at a premium—heightening pressure to blend content with commerce.

The journalistic equivalent of the wall between "church and state" is separating advertising from news. It is one of journalism's most debated traditions, never more so than in political journalism, where keeping a candidate advertisement clear of the news has long been a struggle. While most papers would move a political ad or story to prevent an adjacency and top line broadcasters like CBS would keep candidate ads outside the newscast, that's not always true, even for the old media.

"Many local television stations now use candidate ads inside of their newscasts," said Bob Steele, Ethics Group Leader at the Poynter Institute. "That change has occurred in recent years, partly because campaign advertising is a huge revenue producer for television stations ..."[16]

"So, I'm very concerned when online operations blur the news content and advertising." The consequences, he said, are "diminished credibility for the news product in the eyes of users ... and the frustration of journalists who see their work being eroded by the increasing intrusion of advertising into journalism's 'space.'"

The most extensive online political advertising came in the 2000 election, much of it by the Republican National Committee. The RNC ran post-convention ads on 13 Internet sites, of which six were news sites.[17] It is unclear how many politicians will follow this example. In spring 2002, as we surveyed primary contests, we found no significant candidate advertising online.

But one example came to light in the 2001 election season. In the week before the New York City mayoral election, the campaign of now Mayor Mike Bloomberg bought ads that appeared on the metropolitan news pages of the New York Times on the Web—the same pages that carried election news. The distinctive Bloomberg ads, which featured the endorsement of outgoing Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, were not easily mistaken for news.[18] But we raised the question of proximity with Oreskes.

"In the paper that would not happen, because we see the pages before we publish. On the Web, we need to program the ads so that they don't land in proximity to stories about the same subject, and it is possible to do that," Oreskes said.

But will others, particularly those without the standards of the Times, do that, or should journalists find a new standard that fits the reality? Some online journalists said the new debate should not be over proximity; a political ad can appear on a Web page that features political content without breaching "the wall" as long as the ad is clearly distinctive as an ad. "Labeling is key," said Mark Stencel, former political editor of Washingtonpost.com.[19]

"I rarely quote anonymous sources from online discussions . . . and always attribute them as such. That lets the reader be the judge of their credibility."

-James Lynch
Senior Staff Writer
The (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) Gazette

‡‡ See: http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/lincolnjournalstar.htm
§§ See: http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3550
*** See: http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/philadelphiainquirer.htm

James Vaughn, government and politics director for AOL, said labeling was important in the portal's plans for the 2002 fall election, when they planned to revive the advertising proposal that CBS opposed two years ago. AOL laid plans in spring 2002 to launch a large voter guide site, Electionguide2002.com, drawing on AOL Time Warner's news organizations, CNN, Time and Fortune, and partnering with the League of Women Voters and Capital Advantage, a publishing firm that specializes in political directories and online voter guides. The plans also included selling candidate advertising space adjacent to the news content about that candidate.[20]

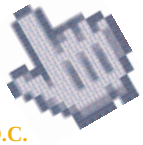
"Why shouldn't it be there?" said Vaughn. "There will be a clear label, a header or small text, labeling it as advertising. It will be pretty obvious." Also, he said the plans included restrictions on the advertising space. For example, he said the site would not sell adjacent space to a candidate's opponent. Also, AOL was working on a mechanism allowing voters to make campaign contributions through the site. (The site was tentatively launched on August 18 but, at this writing, is still being revised. As launched, it contained no candidate advertising, but Vaughn said in a follow-up e-mail that space was being sold to candidates to run closer to the election. He added that technical problems had delayed using the site to channel campaign contributions, but that was still planned.)

The nature of AOL's plans had already circulated in the online political and journalism communities. API's Nachison had heard about them when we talked with him in early June, and he expected controversy if the plans went forward. He called it another example of debating how old standards fit the new environment.

"The traditional newspaper or television journalist would say they [AOL] are crossing all kinds of lines they'd never cross. But the Internet journalist is gonna say, 'Let's talk about those lines.'"[21]

1 In-person interview with Dotty Lynch, senior political editor, CBS News, Washington, April 19, 2002.
2 In-person interview with Carl Cannon, White House correspondent, National Journal, Washington, April 12, 2002.
3 In-person interview with Michael Oreskes, assistant managing editor for electronics, The New York Times, New York, March 15, 2002.
4 Michael Oreskes, "Navigating a Minefield," *American Journalism Review*, November 1999, p. 22.
5 Ibid. p. 24.
6 Ibid.
7 Oreskes interview.
8 Telephone interview with Eric Owles, senior producer, The New York Times on the Web, New York, May 3, 2002.
9 Telephone interview with Andrew Nachison, Media Center director, American Press Institute, Reston, Va., June 3, 2002.
10 Online News Association. "Digital Journalism Credibility Study," presented January 31, 2002, at the National Press Club, pp. 55-57. See http://www.journalists.org/ona_credibilitystudy2001report.pdf
11 Ibid. p. 39
12 American Society of Magazine Editors. "Best Practices for Digital Media." See: http://asme.magazine.org/guidelines/new_media.html
13 The Poynter Institute, "The Value of Protocols." See: http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/newmedethics/me_samprot.htm
14 Bob Steele and Wendell Cochran, "A Sample Protocol for Ethical Decision-Making in Computer-Assisted Journalism." (October 1998) See: http://www.poynter.org/research/car/car_prot.htm
15 M. David Arant and Janna Quitney Anderson, "Online Media Ethics: A Survey of U.S. Daily Newspaper Editors," presented August 2000 at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Convention. See: http://www.elon.edu/andersj/onlinesurvey.html
16 E-mail interview with Bob Steele, senior faculty and Ethics Group Leader, Poynter Institute, St. Petersburg, Fla., June 30, 2002.
17 Karen A.B. Jagoda et al., "Measuring the Effectiveness of the Internet in Election 2000," published by the E-Voter Institute, January 2001.
18 Owles interview and telephone interview with Jon Werbell, former webmaster for the Bloomberg campaign, New York, June 4, 2002.
19 In-person interview with Mark Stencel, vice president of global strategy and partnerships for Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive, Washington, February 8, 2002.
20 Telephone interview with James Vaughn, government and politics director, America Online, Washington, June 3, 2002.
21 Nachison interview.

"Journalism, at its roots, is still a one-on-one, person-to-person contact. E-mail just doesn't cut it that way because you never know . . . where it came from."



-Hank Silverberg
Reporter, WTOP Radio, Washington, D.C.

Section VIII. Final Thoughts

The rise of the Internet as a new medium in politics and journalism has generated high expectations and dire predictions. We've tried to describe the new virtual campaign trail as we found it, not as we wish it were. In closing, we want to call special attention to three areas affected by the online environment, adding a few suggestions and final thoughts. Our intention is to offer specific advice where we can, while addressing broad concerns about working online.

Informing Voters

If there is any point on which our contentious profession can agree, it's that journalists have a special role in our democracy—to supply voters with accurate, impartial and complete information on which to base their choices in the voting booth. We believe the online environment, on balance, has increased the amount of reliable information voters receive from journalists.

We documented one case where that clearly happened; journalists do a better job tracking the money in politics by tapping into Web-based campaign finance databases. A voter who doesn't know whether his or her congressman received contributions from Enron hasn't paid attention to the news. More journalists are writing more campaign finance stories and more often putting those stories into the context of governmental action—in large measure, because of the Web. To echo what one writer noted in our report, it has helped change the political discourse that shapes campaigns.

- Suggestion: Keep the numbers in perspective. What is a reader to make of an insert in a story that the president's nominee for surgeon general gave him $500 in the campaign? A more analytical approach might consider the nominee's past giving and the comparative size of his contribution.

- Suggestion: Avoid using campaign finance databases for one-stop shopping. Campaign dollars can point the way to a story, but there are people with agendas behind that money. More reporting is usually required to know who they are and what they really care about.

- Suggestion: Don't depend on one database, no matter how good it is. Take time to learn how the sites crunch and categorize the numbers. Corroboration is key to everything on the Internet, and that means being able to go to the source: The government agency that collects the information. For federal elections, that means knowing how to use the Federal Election Commission's Web site.

Journalists told us that online resources are providing more sources and greater source diversity, which should produce more complete and objective reports. Unfortunately, journalists are also overloaded with e-mail, and many spend hours a day surfing online. To get things under control you must organize.

- Suggestion: Don't just bemoan or delete. Manage e-mail and political sites by taking the time to organize, whether through e-mail folders or Web site bookmarks. Top reporters we interviewed used e-mail to broaden their contacts and expand the reach of their sources. Many of those reporters also took seriously their e-mail exchange with readers or viewers. These contacts kept them in touch with the public, offered quotes for stories and prompted innovative story ideas.

- Suggestion: Nothing replaces a face-to-face interview, and the telephone remains important in connecting with sources. The new technology's power to communicate should not be used to replace, but rather to supplement and enhance, all three approaches to interviewing. That means developing a strategy, not an *ad hoc* approach: Clarify the ground rules for your sources and give your reports transparency for readers and viewers through more, not less, attribution.

- Suggestion: Just as we have urged applying the new tools to the old environment, we also think traditional approaches apply to the new environment. Journalists often keep a separate list of names, phone numbers and addresses as part of their campaign "beat." They regularly check in by telephone or dropping in on the campaign office. Add an "e-beat," as a separate folder of sites to check routinely. Don't limit them to candidate and political party sites; include the sites of interest groups that may have a political stake.

- Suggestion: Remember what the Web is—a network that is interwoven. A link is an editorial decision by the journalist when included in a story and a mark of association by a political site. Don't think of campaign sites in isolation. If an important group endorses a candidate, the candidate is likely to trumpet that on his or her Web site. Check if the group trumpets it on its Web site, too. This might suggest how important the group considers the endorsement and whether it conveys this to its members.

Testing the Truth

We embrace Philip Seib's notion of the political journalist as the "essential referee" in our political system. Catching a politician in a lie is not a new chore for journalists, but the role goes beyond that. It means systematically testing the candidate's message in terms of accuracy, distortion, and, if you like, civility.

As television has become the primary forum for political discourse, journalists have employed systematic approaches such as fact-checking debates and speeches and vetting television advertisements. Ad watches have become standard. Recognizing this, candidates routinely document ads in anticipation of fact checking and use news reports to validate the misstatements of opponents.

Journalists told us that the Internet has made fact checking easier and faster, and a candidate who now says one thing in one place and something else in another does not appreciate the power of an Internet-savvy journalist.

But political journalists appear to be slow in becoming truth testers of Web-based content. Journalists told us "Web watches" will have to wait until there is evidence that Web appeals are reaching broader audiences. We also heard the complaint that the Internet is too big to cover and e-mail appeals resemble under-the-radar tactics like direct mail and niche radio that always have been hard to cover.

- Suggestion: Resist the psychology that says the newsworthiness of a campaign's message is a function of the medium and the size of the audience. The size of the audience matters, but we've always vetted the candidate's message whether he or she is speaking to a handful of voters or a large rally. A lie is a lie, whether shouted or whispered. While the political Web is in adolescence, there's reason to think it will grow up. Journalists who start truth testing Web content now will be ahead of the game.

- Suggestion: Don't be paranoid, but stay skeptical of Web-based information. It is easy to take something at face value. If the "about us" doesn't clearly explain who is behind a Web site, try Google or Nexis (or the search engine of your choice) to see what pops up about the site. Look up the ownership of the URL. If all else fails, call them. Don't tolerate anonymous Web sites, particularly if they might have a political agenda. Expose them just as you would an anonymous pamphleteer.

Ethical Challenges

While our study is not a comprehensive look at online journalism ethics, we probed enough to establish a few norms and to observe uncertainty on some basic questions. Journalists risk the disapproval of their peers if they report from chat rooms without announcing their presence, quote unsuspecting online participants, and use anonymous quotes. But on several questions we found no consensus—between a quarter and a third of an experienced group of journalists took neutral positions, suggesting uncertainty. We also found that only a few news organizations are updating their ethical guidelines.

- Suggestion: Journalists should err on the side of caution, making their presence known. For example, we think it's important for journalists to monitor e-mail that campaigns send supporters. We recommend signing up for the supporter listservs but doing so with a company e-mail address to avoid masquerading as a supporter. If an ethical concern lingers, notify the campaign that you joined their list. If the concern is your name might show up on a public list of supporters, sign up for all the lists so you don't appear to be taking sides. If you worry that the flood tide of e-mail will add to the daily burden, use a secondary e-mail exclusively for this purpose.

- Suggestion: News organizations should update their ethical guidelines for the new environment, particularly concerning attribution and corroboration of sources. These should be guideposts, not rigid requirements discouraging use of the new tools. It is self-defeating to say every bit of information drawn from the Internet must be checked by a telephone call or personal interview. There are credible sites that don't require such corroboration. The emphasis should be on the steps required to decide whether a site is credible to begin with.

- Suggestion: View the Internet as a means to enhance credibility with the public, by connecting to readers and viewers and by making journalistic methods more transparent. Make staff e-mails accessible to the public, attached to the copy or on the air. A news site is just the place to publicly post the ethical standards of a news organization for everyone to see. We applaud those news organizations that already have done so.

Final Thoughts

"So much information on the Web is bogus that you have to question everything."

-John Strauss
Political Columnist,
The Indianapolis Star

The future has a way of creeping up on us. A new technology comes along and we marvel at it, learn it and adapt to new ways of doing our jobs. We quickly forget how things used to be, and go forward thinking nothing has changed.

But ten years after the Internet emerged, covering politics is different. We think journalists are doing a better job because of the technology. A journalist anywhere in the country can now tap national sources on campaign finance, polls and reams of political talk, previously accessible only to Washington reporters. Washington reporters now have a clearer window on where elections are held, out in the states, and they have new ways to connect with voters across the country. We think that has leveled the playing field between Washington-based and regional reporters—this is one of the ways technology has changed political journalism for the better.

Political reporters, editors and columnists, however, need to do a better job. First, the list of criticisms aimed at journalism in recent decades is long. It includes succumbing to commercial pressures, swallowing the lure of celebrity journalism, developing a tabloid fascination with private lives and airing thinly veiled partisanship or ideological bias.

Second, too many news organizations have shied from political coverage until it is suddenly urgent, like explaining how Florida tossed a national election into the air and the country into crisis. These legitimate criticisms must be addressed.

The Internet can help, but we need to put it to better use. In our report we have called for more "active" use of the Internet. Journalists need to keep abreast of new developments on major party and government Web sites. They should extend their reach to Web sites of state parties, interest groups and more diverse groups at the grassroots. Journalists also need to make better use of all kinds of government data, not just data that have been packaged into an easy-to-use format.

This does not mean that journalists have to become experts with technology. It does mean that they must see the Internet as a set of new tools to use and a new beat to master.

Appendix A. Excerpts from Ethical Guidelines for the Online Environment

From the Poynter Protocols

The Poynter Institute convened its Journalism Values in New Media Conference in 1997 to develop a series of protocols that editors and online journalists might use as guidelines for framing their own policies and procedures.

1. Online Content Reliability Guidelines

   This site strives to provide accurate, reliable information to its users.

   We pledge to:

   - Ensure information on our Web site has been edited to a standard equal to our print or broadcast standards;
   - Notify our online users if newsworthy materials are posted from outside our site and may not have been edited or reviewed to meet our standards for reliability;
   - Warn users when they are leaving our site that they may be entering a site that has not embraced the content reliability protocol.

2. The Ethical Use of Database Information

   It is our policy that we will make data available in a responsible way consistent with our organization's mission and journalistic values.

   Specifically, we should:

   - Be sensitive to individuals' privacy rights when compiling and making databases available.
   - Particularize data only when public right to know outweighs individual privacy concerns.
   - Reveal the authorship/ownership, scope, validity and limitations of the data we make available to the public.

3. Linking

   To maintain our site's credibility, links should be clear, responsible and reflect journalistic values. To accomplish that, we adopt the following guidelines.

   - Links should be clearly identified as either editorial or commercial, meaning links that the site has received money to include.
   - All sites referred to in text, either by URL or site name, will be reviewed for taste, relevance, currency and accuracy.
   - Before linking to a potentially offensive site, editors should explore alternatives, including increased storytelling, listing URLs in text, and posting intermediate pages providing a synopsis of the offensive materials.

4. Editorial Control of Potentially Offensive or Harmful Content

Our challenge is to maximize information and participation while minimizing offensive or harmful content. In order to strike this balance, online news organizations should formulate standards regarding permissible language and behavior for our interactive areas. These standards should be made known to users and should be applied consistently and fairly.

5. Journalistic Integrity and Commercial Pressures

We understand that the technology of the New Media is evolving at a rapid pace and that, as a result, new advertising models, including tracking technologies, are being drawn and will continue to evolve. Therefore, we recommend editorial content and reader privacy be protected from commercial intrusion in the following ways.

- The audience will be able to clearly distinguish between editorial content and advertising, including advertorials and other advertising models as they emerge.
- News organizations that enter such partnerships will be diligent in the protection of their primary contribution, which is independent reportage.
- Current and future tracking technologies (such as "cookies") will be used responsibly so as not to intrude upon or in any way violate the privacy of the reader.

* The full content of Poynter's protocol See: http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/newmedethics/me_samprot.htm

From the American Society of Magazine Editors' "Best Practices for Digital Media"

All online pages should clearly distinguish between editorial and advertising or sponsored content. If any content comes from a source other than the editors, it should be clearly labeled. … The site's sponsorship policies should be clearly noted, either in text accompanying the article or on a disclosure page … to clarify that the sponsor had no input regarding the content.

Hypertext links that appear within the editorial content of a site, including those within graphics, should be at the discretion of the editors. If links are paid for by advertisers, that should be disclosed to users.

E-commerce commissions and other affiliate fees should be reported on a disclosure page, so users can see that the content is credible and free of commercial influence. Exact fees need not be mentioned, of course, but users who are concerned about underlying business relationships can be thus reassured.

* See http://asme.magazine.org/guidelines/new_media.html

From The Tampa Tribune, Online Journalism

- The Internet's unique characteristics do not lower the standards by which we evaluate, gather and disseminate information.

- Material gathered online should be verified.

- Material disseminated online should be solidly confirmed.

- The ability to change information around the clock does not lessen the need for accuracy.
  - See: http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3553

From the San Antonio Express-News, Plagiarism

- Plagiarism is one of the most serious offenses for journalists. Punishments can range from verbal and written warnings to suspension with or without pay to termination.

- With the increase in online information, it is tempting to lift wording from information you find on the Web or retrieve from the archives of other publications. Remember that digital words are no less copyrighted than words in print, and should never be republished without seeking the permission of the author.
  - See: http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3554

From The Virginian-Pilot of Norfolk, Internet Activities

- Use of Internet sources
  Verify all facts reported from an online site unless you are confident of its source. For instance, the official Pulitzer Prize Web site can be regarded as a reliable source for names of past winners; a trade association site may not be.

  If using a source via Internet or e-mail, verify the source by phone or in person. Make certain a communication is genuine before using it.

  Generally, credit photos and graphics downloaded from the Internet. Usually, generic mug shots and icons do not need credits.

- Researching the Internet

  Internet-derived information should be attributed, just as we would information from any book, magazine or other publication. Our prohibition against plagiarism applies to this information.

- Linking to Web sites from a story

  Always review Web sites listed in stories. If you have concerns about including a site in a story because of inappropriate content, check with an editor.

- Internet communication

  Use the same standards of representation as you would using the telephone or in person.

Using deceptive methods to gain information, including the failure to reveal one's identity as a journalist while using a computer or the use of false identification to obtain access to computer systems, is corrosive to truth telling.

* See: http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3550

From the York (Pa.) Daily Record's "Guide to Your Work Place"

- Represent yourself online as if you were appearing at a public meeting representing the Daily Record. Every message you send is stamped "ydr.com." What you write, even in private e-mail, can easily be posted to lists and newsgroups available to millions of people. No doubt it will be saved by somebody.

- The same ethical standards we practice off line apply online. Don't participate in political activities or take sides on matters of public debate electronically. Don't express opinions about products, companies or individuals when you may be perceived by the public as a representative of the Daily Record.

- If you do participate in an online discussion group, please clarify that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the organization.

  * See: http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/yorkdailyrecord.htm

From The Poynter Institute's "Sample Protocol for Ethical Decision-Making in Computer-Assisted Journalism"

- We are committed to truth seeking, full and fair reporting, independence from news sources and to minimizing harm to all who are touched by our actions. This standard does not change with the mode of newsgathering. All of our actions should be weighed against this backdrop.

- We respect the property of others, regardless of the forms it takes: ideas, words, physical possessions. This includes files, messages, data and other electronic property.

- We respect the privacy of other persons, including the privacy of their electronic persona.

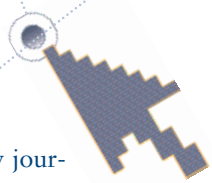
- Truth telling is enhanced by truthful newsgathering. Using deceptive methods to gain information, including the failure to reveal one's identity as a journalist while using a computer or the use of false identification to obtain access to computer systems, is corrosive to truth telling.

  * See: http://www.poynter.org/research/car/car_prot.htm

Appendix B. SYNOPSIS OF THE STUDY

The Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet at The George Washington University interviewed political journalists online to sample professional advice, learn what is most useful online and examine the effects of the new Internet environment. We also questioned journalists about ethical considerations. We interviewed 271 journalists who cover political campaigns, many from prestigious print and broadcast outlets and many based in Washington, D.C.

This summary reports our major findings, the demographics of our sample and the methodology we followed.



Results

The results show that political journalists make good use of the Internet. Many journalists follow their competition and receive press releases online, and there is widespread use of campaign finance Web databases. A political reporter who ignores campaign finance online is behind the times. Other uses of the Internet are more haphazard.

We were struck by the diversity of comments. In our one-on-one interviews, some reporters found value in political campaign Web sites, but our online interviews ranked such sites less useful. A few reporters are interviewing sources online, but this too has yet to catch on with most political journalists, who use the Internet more to find sources and set up interviews. Most of our respondents ranked interacting with readers or viewers by e-mail as a low use, but anecdotally those who engage in such exchanges called them valuable. Generally, e-mail overdose is a major complaint.

Key points

- Journalists believe the Internet has expanded the number and diversity of sources in their stories.
- Journalists believe the Internet has increased deadline pressure and the number of spot news stories they must produce; more experienced users feel this most strongly.
- E-mail usage is very high; some journalists find e-mail traffic overwhelming.
    - 25 percent send and receive 50 or more e-mails a day.
    - 75 percent agree they are "sometimes overwhelmed" by e-mail.
- Our findings suggest journalists use the Internet in "passive" ways, acquiring information and press releases where they are easily obtained. The only "active" usage is to explore campaign finance databases, but their attraction, in part, is ease of use.
- Few journalists use the Internet "actively." Not many interview sources

online, and few interact with readers. They rarely exploit the Internet's dynamic, interactive functions—campaign Web site search engines, chat rooms, message boards, listservs and video.

- Political journalists use the Internet chiefly to:
  - Read political coverage online.
  - Access archives of campaign stories.
  - Receive press releases.
  - Tap into campaign finance databases.
- Political journalists find little campaign news on the Web.
  - Candidate Web sites are considered less useful.
  - Political party and interest group Web sites are held in even lower regard. Journalists spend little time monitoring "online messages" from the campaigns.
- Our findings suggest that, as political reporters gain experience on the Internet, they move from using it simply as a passive research tool to an active tool that supports their reporting.
- We found agreement on some ethical issues and tentativeness on others:
  - As journalists wander the online environment, they think it is generally inappropriate to participate in a chat room without identifying themselves to the room.
  - Quoting an e-mail or chat room discussion without notifying the source and using anonymous statements from chat rooms are seen as inappropriate.
  - For some ethical issues, a large segment of our sample chose the neutral or middle response, which suggests that a fair number of journalists are unsure about the ethical import of issues raised by the Internet.

Demographics

Our sample is an elite and experienced group of journalists. Almost 75 percent have been journalists for at least 10 years, and about 41 percent have been in journalism more than 20 years. Most of them are newspaper reporters—64 percent work for newspapers and 74 percent use the job title "reporter" rather than "editor." We believe this makeup is shaped by two factors. First, newspapers are simply more likely to employ journalists on the political beat. Second, newspapers seem more likely to formally list staff as "political" journalists. Smaller media outlets and broadcast media, with smaller reporting staffs seem less likely to specify a correspondent as a political specialist.

Our journalists have covered every kind of campaign—from U.S. presidential campaigns to local and foreign races. The most-reported work was covering campaigns for the U.S. House and Senate, but every kind of race was well represented. More than 65 respondents are based in Washington. Our sample includes representatives from the major networks, public radio and television, The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times and The Wall Street Journal.

Methodology

The sample of journalists we sought has experience covering political campaigns and access to the Internet. Random sampling for this study was nearly impossible. Our sample, therefore, was drawn from lists of political journalists from several sources.

We obtained our initial list from personal knowledge, online lists of reporters and a search of the Web sites of media outlets. To qualify, a journalist had to be listed as a political or government reporter, editor or columnist. Journalists without some designation as political journalists were not included. Our final list included 870 political journalists.

We then contacted each journalist at least twice by e-mail between April 5 and May 14, 2002. In some cases, we made follow-up telephone calls. We made no attempt to reach reporters who did not list e-mail addresses. Journalists were directed to a Web site where they could complete the questionnaire online. Of the journalists contacted, 196 answered our questions, for a response rate of 23 percent.

We added to our sample by using a listserv, where a message inviting journalists to participate was sent to a broad electronic mailing list. One message went to the mailing list maintained by Stateline.org, a Web site dedicated to public policy issues, particularly state government and politics. Stateline estimates the list includes 8,000 people, about 20 percent of whom are journalists. Seventy-five journalists on the listserv responded.

The two samples differ slightly in predictable ways. The first sample was more experienced than the listserv sample. Our first sample included many veteran journalists and journalists who remained with an organization long enough to be listed as political specialists. Journalists sampled via the listserv were more likely to work for radio stations, online publications and weekly newspapers. Journalists from the listserv also tended to have more experience covering state and local campaigns. The first sample was more likely to report experience covering presidential and congressional campaigns.

Those who responded but did not indicate campaign experience were removed. The two samples were then combined for an overall sample of 271 journalists from across the country. At several points in our analysis, we compared experienced and less experienced reporters by combining the questions about Web and e-mail use.* Thirty percent of the respondents who reported heavier usage were classified as "more experienced" and compared to the rest. The two groups reported about the same amount of overall experience in journalism.

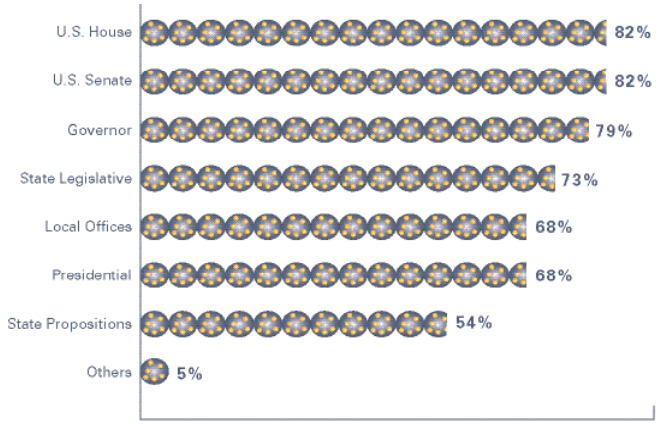


Figure 14. Types of Campaign Covered by Respondents

*Question responses were standardized in order to give equal weight to Web and e-mail use, and the results were then added together.

The Questionnaire: Online Political Journalist Interview

Hello! Thank you for logging in. You are about to take part in a project examining the effects of the Internet on political campaign coverage. The report we produce will help future journalists cover campaigns. This is part of the Democracy Online Project (now the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet) at The George Washington University and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The most important part of this interview is you, and we appreciate you taking the time to help us. Please answer each question carefully.

1. Please tell us about how many years you have been a journalist.
   - Less than 5 years 9.3%
   - 5 to 10 years 16.7%
   - 10 to 20 years 33%
   - More than 20 years 41.1%
2. What type of media outlet is your primary place of employment?
   - Daily newspaper 63.6%
   - Magazine 5.9%
   - Television news 8.6%
   - Online publication 8.2%
   - Other 13.8%
3. Are your duties primarily those of an editor or a reporter?
   - Editor 14.6%
   - Reporter 74.3%
   - Other 11.2%
4. This study is particularly interested in campaign coverage and the Internet. Please tell us what types of campaigns you have covered. Check all that apply.
   - Presidential 67.9%
   - U.S. Senate 81.5%
   - U.S. House 81.9%
   - Governor 79.3%
   - State legislative 72.7%
   - State propositions 54.2%
   - Local offices 67.5%
   - Others 5.2%

Using the Internet

1. How much of your work day is spent reading or searching Web sites?
   - Less than 1/2 hour 3.3%
   - 1/2 to 1 hour 22.5%
   - 1 to 2 hours 36.9%
   - 2 to 3 hours 30.6%
   - More than 3 hours 6.6%

2. How many work-related e-mails do you send and receive each day?

I rarely use e-mail for work	0%
Fewer than 10	10.7%
10 to 30	38.4%
30 to 50	25.5%
50 to 100	13.7%
100 to 150	7%
More than 150	4.8%
Other	0%

3. Please list your three favorite Web sites you use in covering campaigns. If you cannot name three, just move on to the next question.)

Using the Internet

How do you use the Internet for covering politics and campaigns? Read the list of items below. Please rate how OFTEN you use the Internet for each item while you cover a campaign. Rate each item on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "never" and 5 being "very often."

How often do you . . .

1. . . . read political coverage?

1 Never	.4%
2	9.2%
3	13.3%
4	24.0%
5 Very often	53.1%

2. . . . find a source or expert?

1 Never	2.2%
2	20.7%
3	27.7%
4	25.1%
5 Very often	24.4%

3. . . . receive press releases?

1 Never	2.2%
2	8.1%
3	18.8%
4	22.9%
5 Very often	48.0%

4. . . . interview sources over the Internet?

1 Never	44.8%
2	40.0%
3	10.0%
4	2.6%
5 Very often	2.6%

5. . . . research campaign finances?

1 Never	5.6%
2	13.3%
3	15.6%
4	25.6%
5 Very often	40.0%

6. . . . research candidate backgrounds?
   - 1 Never 1.5%
   - 2 ..... 8.5%
   - 3 ..... 21.5%
   - 4 ..... 34.4%
   - 5 Very often 34.1%

7. . . . keep up with polls?
   - 1 Never 5.2%
   - 2 ..... 20.7%
   - 3 ..... 26.7%
   - 4 ..... 24.1%
   - 5 Very often 23.3%

8. . . . monitor candidate online messages?
   - 1 Never 10.8%
   - 2 ..... 29.9%
   - 3 ..... 26.9%
   - 4 ..... 20.9%
   - 5 Very often 11.6%

9. . . . find candidate position papers?
   - 1 Never 4.9%
   - 2 ..... 20.5%
   - 3 ..... 31.7%
   - 4 ..... 27.2%
   - 5 Very often 15.7%

10. . . . interact with users, readers or viewers?
   - 1 Never 12.6%
   - 2 ..... 29.3%
   - 3 ..... 23.3%
   - 4 ..... 20.4%
   - 5 Very often 14.4%

What is most useful?

Now we want to know what aspects of the Internet are most useful in covering campaigns. Again, read each item, then rate the usefulness, with 1 being "least useful" and 5 "most useful."

How useful are . . .

1. . . . campaign e-mails?
   - 1 Least useful 7.0%
   - 2 ..... 19.3%
   - 3 ..... 32.2%
   - 4 ..... 28.1%
   - 5 Most useful 13.3%

2. . . . candidate Web sites?
   - 1 Least useful 2.2%
   - 2 ..... 18.5%
   - 3 ..... 31.5%
   - 4 ..... 37.4%
   - 5 Most useful 10.4%

3. . . . chat rooms and message boards?

1 Least useful	59.2%
2	28.1%
3	10.5%
4	1.5%
5 Most useful	.7%

4. . . . campaign Web site search engines?

1 Least useful	24.2%
2	32.7%
3	29.6%
4	10.4%
5 Most useful	3.1%

5. . . . campaign finance databases?

1 Least useful	1.5%
2	7.5%
3	14.2%
4	17.5%
5 Most useful	59.3%

6. . . . political party Web sites?

1 Least useful	7.5%
2	21.3%
3	36.9%
4	28.0%
5 Most useful	6.3%

7. . . . Web sites of interest groups?

1 Least useful	1.9%
2	15.5%
3	38.5%
4	36.2%
5 Most useful	7.9%

8. . . . images or videos online?

1 Least useful	39.6%
2	30.2%
3	16.2%
4	8.7%
5 Most useful	5.3%

9. . . . listservs of experts?

1 Least useful	21.6%
2	24.2%
3	28.8%
4	21.2%
5 Most useful	4.2%

10. . . . archived news stories?

1 Least useful	1.1%
2	3.4%
3	15.8%
4	28.9%
5 Most useful	50.8%

Some ethical issues

We would like to pose some hypothetical situations. As a general rule, how appropriate or ethical do you think the following behavior is? [1 indicates "Inappropriate," 3 indicates "neutral" and 5 indicates "Appropriate."]

1. To collect information for a story, a reporter signs up for a listserv for campaign supporters without identifying himself or herself as a reporter.
   - 1 Inappropriate 32.0%
   - 2 ..... 13.4%
   - 3 Neutral 28.3%
   - 4 ..... 10.0%
   - 5 Appropriate 16.4%
2. To gather information for a story, a reporter participates in a political chat room without identifying himself or herself as a reporter.
   - 1 Inappropriate 50.9%
   - 2 ..... 20.8%
   - 3 Neutral 17.8%
   - 4 ..... 5.6%
   - 5 Appropriate 4.8%
3. A reporter quotes someone from e-mail sent to a chat room or a listserv, without notifying the sender.
   - 1 Inappropriate 61.4%
   - 2 ..... 19.1%
   - 3 Neutral 12.7%
   - 4 ..... 3.0%
   - 5 Appropriate 3.7%
4. A reporter uses anonymous statements from a listserv or chat room.
   - 1 Inappropriate 61.7%
   - 2 ..... 16.9%
   - 3 Neutral 15.8%
   - 4 ..... 3.8%
   - 5 Appropriate 1.9%
5. A reporter conducts an interview by e-mail, but does not point this out in the story.
   - 1 Inappropriate 24.8%
   - 2 ..... 18.9%
   - 3 Neutral 32.6%
   - 4 ..... 11.1%
   - 5 Appropriate 12.6%
6. A reporter queries experts online and uses the responses without further corroboration.
   - 1 Inappropriate 32.6%
   - 2 ..... 26.1%
   - 3 Neutral 25.8%
   - 4 ..... 9.5%
   - 5 Appropriate 6.1%

Has the Internet changed your job? [1 indicates "decreased" and 5 indicates "increased."]

1. Has the Internet increased or decreased the number of sources in your campaign coverage?
   - 1 Decreased 0%
   - 2 ..... .7%
   - 3 No change 25.3%
   - 4 ..... 37.5%
   - 5 Increased 36.4%
2. Has the Internet increased or decreased the diversity of sources in your campaign coverage?
   - 1 Decreased 4%
   - 2 ..... .7%
   - 3 No change 34.6%
   - 4 ..... 37.9%
   - 5 Increased 26.4%
3. Has the Internet increased or decreased the bogus information, such as false rumors, that finds its way into news stories?
   - 1 Decreased 7%
   - 2 ..... 2.6%
   - 3 No change 48.5%
   - 4 ..... 30.7%
   - 5 Increased 17.4%
4. Has the Internet increased or decreased the deadline pressure you face?
   - 1 Decreased 7.4%
   - 2 ..... 12.6%
   - 3 No change 44.6%
   - 4 ..... 19.3%
   - 5 Increased 16.0%
5. Has the Internet increased or decreased the number of spot news stories you produce?
   - 1 Decreased 0%
   - 2 ..... 1.5%
   - 3 No change 66.3%
   - 4 ..... 19.3%
   - 5 Increased 12.9%
6. Do you produce any stories for online distribution? If so, what proportion of your work is published online?
   - None of my work is published online 7.4%
   - Less than 10% of my work 13.0%
   - 10% to 50% of my work 7.4%
   - 50% or more 18.5%
   - All of my work is published online 52.7%
   - Other 1.1%
7. Has the Internet increased or decreased your use of the telephone?
   - 1 Decreased 10.0%
   - 2 ..... 35.3%
   - 3 No change 47.2%
   - 4 ..... 4.5%
   - 5 Increased 3.0%

8. Has the Internet increased or decreased your use of face-to-face interviewing?
    - 1 Decreased 3.7%
    - 2 ..... 16.0%
    - 3 No change 78.0%
    - 4 ..... 1.9%
    - 5 Increased 4%
9. Has the Internet increased or decreased how often you cover events in person?
    - 1 Decreased 3.7%
    - 2 ..... 17.9%
    - 3 No change 75.4%
    - 4 ..... 2.6%
    - 5 Increased 4%
10. Has the Internet increased or decreased your use of polling data?
    - 1 Decreased 0%
    - 2 ..... .7%
    - 3 No change 66.0%
    - 4 ..... 25.0%
    - 5 Increased 8.2%
11. Has the Internet increased your likelihood to "cut and paste" material into news stories, such as campaign e-mails, online news releases, or Web site material?
    - 1 Decreased 1.5%
    - 2 ..... 1.9%
    - 3 No change 68.3%
    - 4 ..... 21.1%
    - 5 Increased 7.2%
12. In the space below, feel free to offer any comments about how the Internet has changed your work, including any tips you have for others.

Agree or disagree? Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Responses ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "Strongly agree."]

1. I am sometimes overwhelmed with the number of e-mails I receive.
    - 1 Strongly disagree 2.6%
    - 2 Disagree 10.4%
    - 3 Neutral 11.6%
    - 4 Agree 54.9%
    - 5 Strongly agree 20.5%
2. I am sometimes overwhelmed by the amount of campaign information available online.
    - 1 Strongly disagree 7.1%
    - 2 Disagree 23.5%
    - 3 Neutral 34.0%
    - 4 Agree 30.2%
    - 5 Strongly agree 5.2%
3. Sometimes the Internet is a distraction from my regular work.
    - 1 Strongly disagree 5.2%
    - 2 Disagree 16.4%
    - 3 Neutral 19.8%
    - 4 Agree 52.2%
    - 5 Strongly agree 6.3%

4. Sometimes my work has suffered because of the rush to post it online.

1 Strongly disagree	24.7%
2 Disagree	34.1%
3 Neutral	25.5%
4 Agree	13.9%
5 Strongly agree	1.9%

Thank you very much for your help!

1. Our goal is to help journalists cover campaigns using the Internet. Please elaborate on any part of the interview, or comment on anything you think might be useful to others.
2. What is the name of your news organization?
3. In addition to this interview, we are conducting telephone interviews for our report. If you would not mind being contacted, please include information in the spaces below. First, your name . . .
4. Your e-mail address . . .
5. And your telephone number . . .
6. We want to send you a copy of the report, which will be published in several months. Please include your mailing address below. Thank you.

The original questionnaire is available for viewing at:
http://128.164.236.190/interview/interview.html

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON DC

Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet
The Graduate School of Political Management
The George Washington University

805 21st St., NW, Suite 401, Washington, D.C. 20052

T (202) 994.6000 | toll free (800) 367-4776
F (202) 994-6006

web site address: www.ipdi.org