

Top Ten Tips for "Weos" - Wired Elected Officials

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As I have traveled the world online and in-person, I have discovered an emerging new breed of politician. They are not just on the Internet, they are now of the Internet age.

These "Weos" or Wired Elected Officials are using the Internet as their primary strategic communications tool. They use to strengthen and support good old fashioned and highly

effective in-person politics. A Weos is more likely to build power and respect through information guiding and sharing than an old style politician who holds on to power through control

and selective release of information. A Weos understands that other politicians and the public are adrift in a sea of information - they need help, they need direction. What we need are

wired politicians at the rudder guiding people through the information sea to what is most important.

Agenda-setting and decision-making, that is governance in the information age, require new skills for elected officials whether they have been in office for twenty years or twenty

weeks. Read on for the top ten tips on how to become a "Weos" to survive and thrive in the information age.

Top Ten Tips for Weos

1. Use the Internet to communicate.

Whether it is private one-to-one or public group communication, interaction is the most transformative and powerful political application on the Internet. Speech on the Internet is meaningless unless there is free electronic association.

2. Use the Internet to disseminate information.

Whether as part of your official duties or party/campaign work, encourage your constituents or political supporters to join your one-way e-mail list(s). The web is passive from an organizers perspective because people rarely visit the same site twice. You want people to join or "opt-in" to your e-mail lists so you can share your message widely little or no cost.

3. Develop multiple e-mail address identities on the Internet.

Have one e-mail address for public official constituent communication, one internal address for official government work, and at least one personal e-mail address for unofficial campaign/party political communication and other personal communication.

4. Promote "E-Democracy" within your existing representative structures to enable "wired" public participation.

Take your existing processes such as committee hearings, public testimony, constituent communication and adapt them to the information age. Active integration of information and communication technology into legally representative democracy is essential to maintain legitimacy and improve democracy. Pass model "E-Democracy laws" that require representative and consultative features of the administrative side of government and other government bodies to be fully accessible online. Start by requiring that all public meeting notices and agendas be posted online through a uniform system.

5. Use the Internet to connect with peers around the world.

The Internet is a terrific way to establish intentional and value-added opportunities for peer-to-peer information sharing among people with similar interests or goals. Take any public policy topic of interest and create networks for you and your staff. Don't wait for others to build global policy network of elected officials. Become a known global expert in a topic area by taking the initiative now.

6. Use the Internet to access information.

It is an information maze out there. Be patient and you will often find what you need. Use your peer connections and assist each other with research requests and needs. Sending a query to the group will often result in references to useful information just as proactively sharing the results of your online research will provide value to others. Think of this as "just-in-time-democracy" through the use of your expert and other's online "best practitioner" networks.

7. Use the Internet to access information smartly.

Settle on a search engine like Google <<http://google.com>> and subject trees like the Open Directory <<http://dmoz.org>> and Yahoo <<http://yahoo.com>>. Learn how they work. Find similar sites by reverse searching - for example "link: <http://www.e-democracy.org>" will find all pages indexed at Google or Alta Vista <<http://altavista.com>> linking to that page. Try the reverse search to find out who links to your site.

8. Use the Internet to be fed information automatically.

Subscribe to select e-mail newsletters and announcements list on the web sites you find most useful. Let them tell you when they have something new. Use e-mail filtering (ask your technical staff for help) to sort your incoming e-mail into different folders to keep e-mail list messages separate from e-mail sent personally to you.

9. Use the Internet for intelligence.

Whether it is a site you find useful or the site of your political opponents, use the Internet to monitor their public activities and documents. You can use tools like Spy On It <<http://spyonit.com>> to set automatic page watchers that will notify you when something new is posted on a web site. Some of the best public policy information is not promoted beyond placement on a web page. Let a web reminder tell you something has been changed or added.

10. Promote integrated services for all elected officials across the organization.

Uniform systems, networks, and equipment should be overhead covered by the representative institution itself and not a cost to members directly (at least for the essential technology

base). This is a balance of power issue. If the administrative side of government invests billions in their information infrastructure, the representative side must invest as well to remain a relevant voice for an increasingly wired society. The same goes for those in political party based elections - promote an integrated and aggregated campaign information infrastructure that may be used securely and strategically by all party candidates.

Calling all current and future Weos

So are you a "Weos?" Would you like to become one? If you are an elected official you can take the first step by requesting joining a private online peer forum designed specifically for "Weos." For more information on the Weos forum or to comment on the ten tips, send an e-mail to <weos@publicus.net>.

Steven Clift is the editor of Democracies Online Newswire <<http://e-democracy.org/do>> and Co-Manager of the Parliaments Online Forum, a peer-to-peer forum for those who work on parliamentary online efforts in over 30 countries. For further reading visit Publicus.Net <<http://www.publicus.net>>.V2.0