



## A Few Good Tools for e-Advocacy

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A large display of public opinion can have a powerful message. Is your organization using all the tools at its disposal to find, engage, and mobilize the people who support its mission?

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Advocacy groups focus the support of people who share their missions to influence politicians and corporations by promoting a cause, opposing legislation, or challenging ad campaigns or policies. Traditionally done with mail, the sheer bulk of hundreds or thousands of letters was a strong visual stand-in for the people behind the cause. Today the message is more likely to be delivered by email, telephone, social media, or text, with the sheer physical presence of the message being replaced by the constant barrage of communications.

Organizations have a dual incentive for conducting these campaigns: sending targets a message, and growing the number and engagement of their followers.

A recent example is the huge online push to oppose legislation that would end Net Neutrality. One of the driving groups, Battle for the Net, offered a number of ways for people to take action on its website at <https://www.battleforthenet.com>. The outcome is not yet clear, but millions of people are paying attention and making their voices heard at the FCC and in Congress.

Recent years have seen a multitude of such campaigns. In fact, the Congressional Management Foundation, a nonprofit that supports members of Congress and their staffs with operations and constituent interaction, estimates that congressional

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Want to activate your constituents around a cause or campaign? Download our new guidebook and get the latest best practices for using mobile messaging like text and chat to increase civic engagement. Download the guidebook at <http://bit.ly/2sOJ1VT>.

offices experienced an increase in constituent correspondence of between 200 and 1,000 percent.<sup>1</sup>

At the forefront of this surge of interest in democracy is a marketplace of e-Advocacy tools designed to help individuals and organizations send legislators written

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<sup>1</sup> "Citizen Resource Center," <http://www.congressfoundation.org/citizen-engagement>

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messages. These tools provide a way to deliver constituents' form letters, calls, emails, texts, and social media messages to appropriate legislative targets from current databases of elected officials and other recipients (such as corporate executives and news editors) based on geographic location and district maps.

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Tools also include a range of additional features to make these campaigns easier and more effective, such as ways to share campaign information with advocates via email or on the web using microsites, embeddable widgets that users can add to their own websites or social media channels, or smartphone apps. Many also offer ways for users to share the actions they've taken with their own audiences, as well as easy ways for administrators to view and report on campaign results.

We talked to a number of experts in the field of e-Advocacy and asked them about some of the tools most commonly used and most commonly recommended in the following categories:

- Tools for Social Media Advocacy
- Dedicated e-Advocacy Platforms
- e-Advocacy Tools Built into CRMs

Social-based tools are becoming more easily usable by nonprofits, while dedicated e-Advocacy platforms offer more features at a wide range of price points. These platforms tend to play well with organizations' websites, and some offer enough content-creation and

constituent management features to function as an organization's website and back-end management tool.

Organizations that already use a full-featured CRM system may find it has an e-Advocacy tool built-in or available as an add-on for additional charge. Several common CRM vendors offer e-Advocacy as an integration with one of the dedicated platforms described in this article.

Regardless of which type of tool you consider, think about the relative pros and cons of integrating multiple tools vs. an all-in-one approach. Whichever you pick will depend a number of things, including your budget, your organizational style and culture, and the role of advocacy in your mission and programs.

### TOOLS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY

These tools take advantage of social media platforms that constituents already use (or new platforms dedicated to e-Advocacy) to help nonprofits organize their own campaigns.

**ActionSprout** (<https://actionsprout.com>) is a Facebook app focused on helping organizations get the most out of the social media giant. It helps page administrators organize followers to act on and share e-Advocacy content, schedule Facebook ads, and get more data about followers. Prices range from about \$100 to about \$1,200 a year with higher tiers including post scheduling, user tracking, and automation.

**CountableAction** (<https://countableaction.com/>) lets organizations create action centers on the *Countable.com* social network, a free platform for politically active individuals to learn and share information about issues and contact members of Congress. Countable lets users share multiple types of content including user-generated video to offer background on advocacy for or against a position or piece of legislation. A smartphone app is available. Costs start at about \$15,000 per year.

**Twitter** (<http://Twitter.com>) does not have dedicated tools for reaching public and elected officials, but it does have an active community of advocates who communicate information about issues and legislation

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and rally them to take action—both online, and in person. C-Span maintains an updated list of all legislators on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/cspan/lists/members-of-congress/members>, which makes it easier to find and message your representatives.

## DEDICATED E-ADVOCACY PLATFORMS

More tech-savvy organizations with large lists that are able to invest \$10,000 or more per year in e-Advocacy will find lots to like—and many choices—in this category. On the other hand, less digitally-oriented groups with big member lists that put a lower priority on contacting officials may be better served with a CRM that includes an e-Advocacy module.

Because tools tend to price based on number of records and how you plan to email them, your list size is an important consideration—another is the features each system offers. In addition to how the product performs, consider how well it may integrate with other tools your organization is already using or planning to use.

**ActionKit** (<https://actionkit.com>), which bills itself as “used by progressive organizations,” is a feature-rich tool that includes built-in fundraising, blast email, events registration, and multilingual support—for some organizations, it may be robust enough to use as a primary CRM tool. Pricing is based on number of viable email addresses on a list, starting at about \$12,000 a year for up to 50,000 addresses, plus a setup fee.

**CQ Roll Call** (<https://info.cq.com/advocacy-software>) combines journalism and advocacy into a single site, reporting on the people and politics of Capitol Hill and providing software that includes news and policy analysis and tools for legislative tracking, grassroots advocacy, and advocate and donor acquisition. Among its suite of software is **CQ Engage** (<https://info.cq.com/advocacy-software/cq-engage/>), formerly known as **CapWiz**, a long-standing tool for email advocacy for those with a more sizable budget that integrates into your website, allows you to look up legislators by ZIP code, and can navigate through most web forms and filters. Prices range from about \$4,000 a year for a basic package to around \$10,000, depending on the size of your database and how many targets are needed.

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**DoGooder** (<https://dogooder.co>) lets constituents email politicians at state and federal levels based on their postal code or address. Prices range from about \$500 to \$4,000 a year, based on number of simultaneous advocacy campaigns, number of monthly emails sent, and features. Higher service tiers include fundraising, custom CSS code for websites, and the ability to “white-label” the site for your own organization by removing the DoGooder name and branding.

**Know Who** (<http://www.knowwho.com/>) offers a slightly different take. The company provides a subscription of regularly updated data on a wide range of elected-official datasets, from local city councils and mayors of every city with a population over 10,000 to the White House (plus UK and European Union data), and facilitates sending letters-to-the-editor at local and regional news outlets. Prices for members of Congress and their staff start around \$1,000 per user, per year; an add-on tool to create a Salesforce Action Center is \$8,000 per year.

**New/Mode** (<https://www.newmode.net>) is a set of engagement tools for campaigners that provides click-to-call-and-email functionality, the ability to send letters to the editor and flood social media, and more. Pricing ranges from \$1,400 to \$6,300 a year based on the kind and quantity of communications used; all tiers feature

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integration with CRMs such as ActionKit, civiCRM, Nationbuilder, and Salsa, as well as access to strategic training and webinars.

**One Click Politics** (<https://oneclickpolitics.com>) incorporates a range of messaging tools to let end-users send emails, Facebook messages, and tweets to legislators through a single interface. It also allows you to digitally organize constituents using scoring based on engagement metrics to identify and segment a base of advocates. Costs start at \$3,000 a year.

**Phone2Action** (<https://phone2action.com>), despite its name, offers tools for email messaging as well as click-to-call and other advocacy efforts. Its **Citizen Tools** interface (<https://phone2action.com/citizen-tools/>) lets visitors send email to elected state and federal officials in a single click, and look up and contact relevant officials via their social media accounts. In addition to integrating with CRMs, Phone2Action syncs to such commonly used email platforms as Constant Contact and MailChimp. Pricing reportedly starts around \$6,000 a year depending on organization size and features.

**SoftEdge** (<https://thesoftedge.com>) provides useful one-time services in addition to tools—for example, it will sort a mailing list of supporters into relevant legislative districts, deliver a group's letters to congressional staff and other contacts, and report back on open rates, click-throughs, and bounces. SoftEdge also offers “Fly-In” software to help organizations manage legislative lobby days.

**Sparkinfluence** (<http://sparkinfluence.net>), a newer platform to the market, uses Wordpress and functions as its own CRM to drive advocacy. One feature is the ease with which supports can embed and share calls to action using platform-generated code (similar to how users can embed YouTube videos) that connects to an e-Advocacy page. Contact the company for pricing details.

**Ujoin** (<https://ujoin.co>) offers free and paid versions. The free version is, essentially, a site for gathering signatures for petitions. For \$500 a year, the site provides

email and video messaging to legislators, and offers the ability to track the progress of specific legislation an organization is interested in by pulling live bill data at the state and federal level. A Ujoin Foundation arm provides education on advocacy, including lobbying guidelines for nonprofit groups.

**Voter Voice** (<https://info.voterveice.net>), a standalone component of the FiscalNote Government Relationship Management software platform, offers an array of grassroots advocacy tools “perfect for organizations with small technical staff.” Users can build and launch advocacy campaigns, track progress with real-time reports, manage fly-in days, mobilize supporters with targeted messaging, and create and distribute newsletters, surveys, and scorecards. Contact the vendor for pricing info.

## E-ADVOCACY TOOLS BUILT INTO CRMS

Most of the standalone platforms mentioned already can integrate with your CRM and other databases to combine available data about constituents, but which CRM you use—and which advocacy platform—can make a difference. Some integrate better than others. For example, many of the web-based tools are listed on the app exchange of **Salesforce** (<http://www.salesforce.org/nonprofit/>). **NeonCRM** (<https://www.neoncrm.com>) plays well with One Click Politics and Ujoin; and **NationBuilder** (<https://nationbuilder.com>) integrates with Countable, DoGooder, and Phone2Action.

But what about tools for e-Advocacy built right into popular CRMs?

**Luminate Advocacy** (<https://www.blackbaud.com/online-marketing/luminate-advocacy>), is an add-on to the Blackbaud Luminate CRM that allows larger nonprofits to meet more complex fundraising and other needs. Pricing is available from the vendor.

**BSD Tools** (<https://tools.bluestatedigital.com>), from Blue State Digital, is a CRM that preserves the focus on fundraising of its cousin, the company's Democratic Party-developed donation tool. But it also includes an

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e-Advocacy component, CallOut. Prices start at about \$7,200 a year for up to 50,000 email addresses.

**civiCRM** (<https://civicrm.org>) offers an e-Advocacy module alongside a wide range of other components. The software is free to download, but learning and using it will cost you. **Powerbase** (<https://ourpowerbase.net>) is a typical hosted version with this functionality built in offered for grassroots advocacy groups. It starts at \$4,200 a year for up to 10,000 records plus training and support in how to use civiCRM.

**Engaging Networks** (<https://www.engagingnetworks.net>) began 18 years ago as an advocacy platform and evolved into a full-function CRM with mail and marketing tools, donation pages, peer-to-peer fundraising, and event management. It still offers a complete set of tools for e-Advocacy at all levels in the U.S. and beyond. Prices start at about \$17,000 per year.

**EveryAction** (<https://act.everyaction.com>) is a newer CRM platform that grew out of the Voter Activation Network database. Clean and simple fillable forms and colorful graphic dashboards that report on constituents make EveryAction pleasant to use. Contact the company for pricing details.

**Salsa** (<https://www.salsalabs.com>) Salsa CRM and Salsa Engage are widely used. Salsa Engage, the company's newest platform, focuses specifically on e-advocacy and lets organizations create petition, custom letter, and social media campaigns for their base to use in contacting legislators or other targets, including custom targets. Because of its all-in-one orientation, Salsa makes it easy to incorporate fundraising and other features and content syndication functionality makes it a good fit for organizations with multiple chapters or statewide iterations. Prices vary by number of records and features selected. Contact the company for pricing details.

## CONCLUSION

With so many options for spreading your advocacy message, it's worth taking the time to choose the one that best fits your supporters and your targets. This article is just the beginning of the conversation.

As with any software selection process, due diligence is important. Ask similar organizations about the tools they use and how satisfied they are with them. Narrow the list of potential tools down to three or four, if possible—then schedule vendor demos, and ask questions about your specific workflow and how well the systems might meet your needs.

According to the OpenGov Foundation<sup>2</sup> and the Congressional Management Foundation,<sup>3</sup> legislators invest substantial staff time and effort in constituent communications. The House of Representatives created the Communicating With Congress Initiative (<https://www.house.gov/doing-business-with-the-house/communicating-with-congress-cwc>) to facilitate the ability for nonprofits to deliver messages to their legislators, and many legislators have purpose-built software that analyzes bulk emails and communications, reports on constituent sentiment, and facilitates responses to constituent messages.

That means advocacy campaigns can be an effective way to show support for a particular piece of legislation or policy or a similar cause while building engagement and growing an institutional database. Choosing the right tool can maximize your organization's effectiveness.

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<sup>2</sup> "From Voicemails to Votes," <https://v2v.opengovfoundation.org/>

<sup>3</sup> "Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement," <http://www.congressfoundation.org/projects/communicating-with-congress/citizen-centric-advocacy-2017>

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**How to Build an App to Call/Write Congress**, Medium.

<https://medium.com/civic-tech-thoughts-from-joshdata/how-to-build-an-app-to-call-write-congress-f79771ad-dc2b>

**Creating a Customized e-Advocacy Platform**, Taproot Project Finder.

<https://www.taprootfoundation.org/get-probono/be-powered-pro-bono/project/e-advocacy-platform>

**Apps Make Pestering Congress So Easy That Politicians Can't Keep Up**, Wired.

<https://www.wired.com/2017/01/apps-make-pestering-congress-easy-cant-keep/>

**What it Takes to Make Congress Actually Listen**, Wired.

<https://www.wired.com/story/opengov-report-congress-constituent-communication/>

**Citizen Engagement**, The Congressional Management Foundation.

<http://www.congressfoundation.org/citizen-engagement>

**Governance and Citizen Engagement**, The Omidyar Network.

<https://www.omidyar.com/our-work/governance-citizen-engagement>

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