

Constituent Relationship



Management for State Legislators



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INTRODUCTION

Not another out-of-touch academic paper



This white paper is about something called Constituent Relationship Management (CRM), developing a constituent-focused philosophy in state legislatures that helps elected officials use technology to manage constituent correspondence and requests in a responsive, efficient, and effective way.

I might have lost you already.

The term “constituent-focused” seems very touchy-feely. So do the terms “constituent relationship” and “responsiveness.” Each term works well in theory. After all, most state legislators believe that constituent feedback – whether over email, phone call, face-to-face meetings, or fax – is an important part of the policy-making process.

Yet, each of these phrases seems to reflect the sort of out-of-touch jargon that analysts like me use to describe a perfect world in which elected officials and their constituents walk hand-in-hand through the legislative process. In other words, they seem like impractical ideals that don’t reflect the realities of holding public office. Some of these realities range from a lack of permanent staff to no financial resources for technology to the occasionally unceasing barrage of computer-generated email launched at legislators by advocacy groups.

Fortunately, this is not another out-

of-touch academic paper. Situated at GWU’s Graduate School of Political Management, the work of my organization, the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet, cannot help taking a more practical approach.

I mentioned a few realities in the last paragraph: namely, lack of financial and human resources and an onslaught of email during the busiest times of the legislative calendar. What I haven’t mentioned are a few other realities – things that blur the distinction between running for and holding public office and good, old fashioned customer service:

- People are more responsive when they feel like they are participants in a real relationship with other people – a relationship that includes genuine conversation.
- Constituents are more likely to be content with an elected official when they feel as if that elected official is responsive to their needs and speaks directly to their wants, needs, and desires.
- Reelection is not simply a matter of name recognition. Positive name recognition certainly helps, of course, but as federal candidates are beginning to find, elections are being won and lost based on how much the campaigns know about their voters and how they use that information to target get-out-the-vote activities. Many of their tactics are starting to trickle down to the state level.

Too much data

In order to create these kinds of relationships, however, you need to get

to know the other person – or rather, the other people, the hundreds and thousands of them in your district. You need information about them.

In the academic-technology world, we call this information by the rather impersonal moniker “data,” and you need to be able to access that data, regardless of where you are, what you’re doing, or how big your office is. If you’re like me then you probably store information about the people you care about personally somewhere, either in an old fashioned address book or an email inbox or in our cell phones or using contact management software. This way, we know the best way to reach our family, friends, and neighbors.

I know, for example, that the best way to reach my father during the day is by cell phone or email. This differs from the best way to reach my college-age sister, which is by instant message. And it differs entirely from the best way to reach my colleagues, which is by email or a friendly face-to-face chat. However, I can almost always find the younger members of my staff using text message or instant message.

The ways I resolve issues for each of these people differs, according to their needs and their preferred method of communication. So do the ways in which I try to get all of these groups to agree with me on something – say, the days I want to take off for summer vacation.

Reaching one’s family and friends and trying to coordinate vacation days are rather mundane tasks, compared to the practice of creating legislation and building cohesion for a particular piece

of policy in elected office. However, the same tools and techniques that allow me to accomplish these mundane tasks can also be applied to the legislative process – from answering constituent correspondence to handling casework to building a coalition around a proposed piece of legislation.

It's called Constituent Relationship Management (CRM), and you probably already incorporate some of its principles into your routine as state legislators – you just didn't know that it has a fancy title. The term "Constituent Relationship Management" isn't a software package (although some companies sell CRM-enabling software). Rather, it describes a philosophy, a way of approaching constituent correspondence, data, and information to help your office address constituent concerns without wasting a lot of time or money.

An ongoing issue

In spring 2007, IPDI published a handbook called *Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book of Politics*¹. The publication assembled the practical advice and expertise of political consultants, campaign staff, and political analysts who believe that technology can help officials in elected office – and their political campaigns – manage constituent correspondence and casework. When we wrote the publication in 2007, we focused on national politics: senators, congressmen and women, federal campaigns, and large nonprofit organizations.

This white paper is a little different. Commissioned by the Council of State Governments-WEST for its 2008 annual meeting, this white paper looks specifically at the ways in which state legislators use technology to manage constituent correspondence. It offers best practices and case studies from state legislators and offers suggestions on how a "constituent-focused" philosophy, combined with a few online tools and tactics, can help legislative offices handle constituent

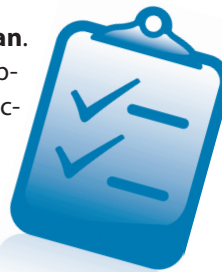
correspondence in a more efficient, effective way. However, some of the sections in this publication are adapted from the writing and advice contained in *The New Little Black Book*.

Before you begin

Naturally, some differences exist between political leadership in federal office and at the state level: financial resources, size of staff, amount of campaign fundraising, rules and regulations regarding franking privileges – to name just a few. However, some of the lessons we learned compiling the *Little Black Book* in 2007 apply very well to the state legislative process.

Before you begin reading the rest of the book, consider the following advice:

1. **Change your philosophy.** As the next few pages will discuss, a CRM approach places your constituents at the center of your organization. In other words, your office becomes less about you and more about your constituents. In this environment, constituent correspondence is not a big bother. Rather, it becomes an opportunity to listen and respond to constituent concerns, to develop a relationship with constituents, and to collect information about who they are and what they care about.
2. **Develop a data plan.** Before you begin applying any of the tactics outlined in this white paper, get a few ideas down on paper. What kinds of information do you want to collect from your constituents? How will you store that information? More importantly, how will you use that information?
3. **Find a database that works for you.** Companies, federal candidates and big advocacy groups and nonprofit organizations integrate all of



their on- and offline tools – a website, blog, email, donation program, mobile program, phone calls, direct mail – into one "backend" system. That is, they use online software programs to store data about their customers, constituents, and donors in one secure online location. Usually, these online databases can be accessed from anywhere, and they tend to be as easy to use as many applications on your desktop – if not easier. If you can send an email, then you can most likely use a simple, backend database.

4. **Personalize and automate.** Most people who answer constituent communications and requests – from the state legislators themselves to their staff – attempt to personalize responses as much as possible. However, sometimes it is difficult to respond personally to every email that comes in – especially when emails are mass generated. State legislators with the ability to use an interactive database or CRM software can customize their responses automatically.
5. **Maintain and guard your data.** Once you start to build a database of constituent information, your lists need to be maintained. Improving and refining your database is something that should occur everyday – every time you receive an email or phone call from a constituent or meet face-to-face. Keeping your database up to date is important – especially if you intend to communicate with your constituents using email newsletters later on. Email addresses expire when people change jobs or schools. Finally, data is priceless. Keep your database secure by limiting access.

¹The entire publication can be found online at <http://www.ipdi.org/uploadedfiles/IPDI-CRMreport-final.pdf>.

SECTION I

CONSTITUENT MANAGEMENT FOR STATE LEGISLATORS

From customers to constituents

Don Peppers and Martha Rogers, two of the America's leading thinkers on Customer Relationship Management, met at an Advertising Club event in Toledo in the mid-1990s. Peppers was giving a speech about some of the Internet technologies being developed in Silicon Valley when he made the statement that technology would eliminate mass marketing in the business world. Their first book together, *The One to One Future*, outlined their vision for the future of marketing and customer service.

Both Peppers and Rogers believed that technology would lead to individualized media choices, marketing customized to the needs, wants, and desires of individuals, and two-way conversations between customers and the product creators. Many of those predictions are being fulfilled today in both the marketplace and the political space.

- **Individualized media choices** – Today, the media consumption habits of Americans are fractured. We no longer turn to a few evening programs but to an endless stream of cable news shows, radio, newspapers, and online media, often consuming more than one media source, such as television and online media, at the same time. Even political candidates and

elected officials currently try to reach voters and constituents in this new media space, from the efforts of the major presidential candidates to create special videos on YouTube aimed at their supporters to the online communications efforts of the office of the President of the



Utah State Senate that include a podcast, YouTube channel, blog, and live web cam.

When the 2008 presidential campaign of U.S. Senator John McCain ran out of money in summer and fall of 2007, campaign strategists knew that they had to use the Internet to conserve financial resources while reaching as many voters as possible. Instead of buying ads on national or cable television, the McCain campaign crafted web videos and placed them on YouTube. The campaign's web videos reached two sets of viewers: Internet-savvy McCain supporters and members

of the media. The campaign found that when they placed an ad on YouTube, it immediately generated "earned media," and both network and cable news played each video repeatedly. This gained the McCain campaign as many – if not more – eyeballs than if it had resorted to buying traditional ads.

- **Marketing customized to individuals** – We call it micro targeting, and businesses and political candidates are using information stored in their database to create highly targeted messages that reach people through the communications medium that they prefer the most – email, home phone, mobile phone, direct mail.

The 2008 presidential campaign of U.S. Senator Barack Obama, for example, established a social networking application built within its own campaign website, called My.BarakObama, to collect information about the issues people care about, how often they donate to the campaign and in what amounts, what causes them to donate, whether any of their friends or neighbors have donated, contact information and more. Combine this information with the data that a presidential campaign could buy – including magazine subscriptions, shopping habits, and voter files, and you have a tremendous amount of information that can be

used to craft campaign messages to individuals or groups of individuals who look the same.

• **Two-way conversations between customers and product creators** –

One of the most influential business books of the past decade is *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, authored by Rick Levine, Chris Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger. Cluetrain opens with 95 Theses, the first six of which address the issue of conversation:

1. *Markets are conversations.*
2. *Markets consist of human beings, not demographic sectors.*
3. *Conversations among human beings sound human. They are conducted in a human voice.*
4. *Whether delivering information, opinions, perspectives, dissenting arguments or humorous asides, the human voice is typically open, natural, uncontrived.*
5. *People recognize each other as such from the sound of this voice.*
6. *The Internet is enabling conversations among human beings that were simply not possible in the era of mass media.*

The authors of *Cluetrain* argue that the earliest marketplaces were about conversation, haggling, dialogue. During the Industrial age, commerce grew too impersonal, but the Internet helps customers and businesses return to a marketplace.

It is not a stretch to apply the *Cluetrain* ideals to politics. After all, before we associated the classical Greek term agora with marketplace it was used to describe a large assembly area where men would go for military duty or to hear about politics. During the past 60 years, we have experienced broadcast politics, mass-produced messages for a mainstream audience. In the new millennium, however, technology gives us the opportunity to return to a politics of conversation.

Peppers and Rogers argue that in order to adapt to a changing media environment and marketplace, companies have to change their philosophies. Instead of making the product or

“Focus on the constituent (or voter), not the elected official (or candidate).”
- Peppers and Rogers

brand the center of the company, focus on the customer. They call this 1:1 marketing. Politically-speaking, I translate this imperative to read “focus on the constituent (or voter), not the elected official (or candidate).” Thus, the business-based Customer Relationship Management becomes *Constituent Relationship Management* (CRM), a philosophy of responding to constituents in elected office and on the campaign trail.

Principles of Constituent Relationship Management

Enough of the business talk. Most of the businesses Peppers and Rogers wrote about had larger staffs and budgets that the office of the average state legislator. Which principles of CRM apply to the world of policy-making and state legislatures?

Jeff Mascott runs Adfero Group, a non-partisan consultancy that has worked with Republican candidates in the past. In 2007, Mascott and I collaborated on a series of chapters for IPDI’s publication, *Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book of Politics* that applied corporate CRM principles to elected office. This section reviews some of those principles and applies them to legislative office.

Principle 1 – Make constituent interaction accessible.

CRM helps you understand, anticipate, and respond to your constituents’ needs in an efficient and consistent way. One way you can accomplish this is through the use of a good database that helps you learn who your constituents are and what they care about, and it helps you respond to their needs – and incorporate their needs – into what you do.

The two keywords are automation and integration. Your CRM system should be automated so that it helps you and your staff respond when your constituents contact you, and it should be integrated to include all interactions (phone calls, face-to-face meetings, email, sign-up forms on your Website) – not just those that occur online.

A database system takes all the notes you might have scribbled on sheets of paper or stored in an email inbox on your personal computer and puts them in one place. All the many separate “islands” of information merge into one. You and your staff can access information regardless of where you are – even when you are not physically present at your desktop computer.

Principle 2 – Know your constituents.

Being able to answer “why” your constituents ask you for something, such as voting for a bill, as well as “what” they ask you for, allows you



to react to your customers more effectively. This works on both a macro and a micro level. For example, CRM encourages you to measure every interaction you have with people. Every point of contact can be tagged, so that you can personalize communications. Surveys can help you track preferences and learn about people.

Collecting this type of data has become incredibly popular in politics over the course of the past few years. Most of us in the political space know that a database or a member list is a valuable commodity. Collecting this information is the first step. Storing that information in one central hub, where staff can access the bits of information they need, even if they are on the road or in the field, is the second step. Using it to personalize communications with your customers and shape the way you serve them is the third step.

A CRM-based technology solution can help you handle the “clutter.” So when the busy season hits – and the calls and emails keep coming in – you don’t have to struggle to find information. It’s all there.

As an example, let’s imagine that tomorrow, you plan to vote on relief for orange farmers after this winter’s big freeze in California. Gail Simmons – one of several thousand others – calls your office to express her opinion. Luckily, the staffer answering the phones today has access to your database. When Gail calls, your staffer enters her name into the system and notices that Gail called the last time a farm issue arose. Your staff thanks Gail for calling, gives her a quick update on the last issue – the bill passed – and asks if she would like to sign up to receive an email about the results of the vote tomorrow. The staffer checks one box, and tomorrow, minutes after the bill passes, your system generates an email to Gail, telling her that the bill she supported passed.

Principle 3 – Deliver good service.

Your office undoubtedly offers many kinds of service: managing constituent requests for a tour of the Capitol, handling constituent requests, responding to constituents about legislation, etc. When it comes to the political space, good service has to be efficient. Despite the medium of communication – online, over the telephone, in person,

by fax – you need a time-conserving process that will improve “customer” relations and reduce support costs.

How does a political group deliver good service? Let’s start with what good service in the political space actually is. Good service isn’t just about selling a candidate, an elected official,

“In the new millennium, however, technology gives us the opportunity to return to a politics of conversation.”
- Peppers and Rogers

or an issue. It is about identifying each customer or constituent, deciphering his or her needs, and serving them in as many ways (and through as many mediums) as possible.

Principle 4 – Build your office.

Maintaining customers is important to any organization, but in order to grow, an organization needs to attract new clients – or in the political world, new supporters.

CRM can identify new opportunities by helping you understand what people value and how they interact with you. The applications to politics are apparent: you want to reach people by appealing to their interests through the medium that best suits them. Knowing more about people in your district, likely donors, potential members, or likely voters improves the quality of your communications with them, opening new paths for “customer development” and retention. The idea

is to use the data you collect to build new relationships with people.

Let’s look at an example from the corporate world. Car dealerships do this all the time, even if they don’t call it CRM. They often generate leads through in-bound calls or queries on their Websites. If you are in the market for a new car, and you call the local dealership inquiring about an ad you saw in the local paper, then the salesperson you talk to is probably collecting information about you. Are you male or female? What are you looking for in a car? What is a good time for you to visit the dealership? Do you know how to get to the dealership? What is your phone number? Do you have a second number? What is the best way to reach you? If the dealership is smart, it will have the salesperson enter all of this information about you in its database. Later, the salesperson you meet at the dealership will use this information to help sell you a new car. But it doesn’t stop there. Often, the dealership manager will look at data from all the incoming calls to determine trends – such as which models or which deals are generating the most attention and adjust its marketing program if necessary.

How does this apply to legislative office? Some states may allow state legislatures to move their constituent lists from their offices to their reelection campaigns and back to their offices.² The contacts and data those lists generate can be incredibly useful in campaigning and electioneering, enabling even campaigns with small budgets and few staffers to craft targeted communications and generate walk lists for door-to-door get-out-the-vote activities.

Principle 5 – Plan ahead.

Data without action is useless. The purpose of all the data collected in a CRM system is to reach out proactively.

²This varies from state to state. Check the office of your Secretary of State for more information.

With a good technology-based CRM solution, what used to be an annoying phone call from a constituent about a farm bill or the state of a road becomes an opportunity to learn about your constituents and – possibly – build a coalition of support around an issue.

“Data without action is useless.”

- Peppers and Rogers

This is a lesson that the business world has known for years. If you think that good customer service is just a gimmick, think again. Business development, like politics, revolves around strategy. CRM is a long-term philosophy about the process of doing politics that has the ability to affect your bottom line, if you use it well. That is, if you view it as a flexible tool that helps you create room for your office – or your

campaign – to grow. For many of us, a long-term political strategy is identifying your voters, donors, or members and giving them a way to vote, donate, or join you.

Think about how your office responds to constituent communications that inevitably occur during the final week or two of your session and the rapid push of bills that pass right before adjournment. Each of those bills generates hundreds, possibly thousands, of constituent communications – email, faxes, phone calls, etc. – responding to all of those communications seems impossible. This is the exact moment when a long-term CRM strategy becomes the most useful tool for handling an overload of constituent mail.

When every email is received, information about the sender and the issues automatically updates the database. How many of these emails are from supporters in my district? How many

are from likely supporters? How many are members of an association? Did this person contact you on a parallel issue in the past? The same information can be updated in the database by the staffers who handle incoming calls or faxes.

Of course, the process doesn't end with the act of collecting information. It's not just what you know that matters: it's how you use it. Members and their staff can use some high-end CRM system to set up "rules." In other words, you can tell the system to immediately generate an email thanking a voter for her opinion on the issue of roads and telling her that the office will update her as soon as the vote occurs. After the vote, the system immediately generates a pre-written, pre-approved email to all 200 people who email in support of roads. That's 200 emails on the busiest day of the year.

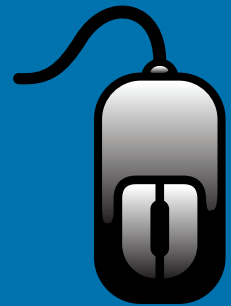
Politicopia

Utah State Representative Steven Urquhart founded *Politicopia*, a wiki that allows registered users to discuss proposed legislation. The Politicopia site (www.politicopia.com) allows for plenty of constructive give-and-take and plenty of civil disagreement.

According to Representative Urquhart, the online community that has developed around *Politicopia* "moves the needle. It helps you be more effective" in legislative office. He says that his site allows people to comment on legislation on their own time. Unlike more formal venues, at Politicopia: "They're not worried about who may be sitting next to them talking. They're not worried about us calling on them. So this is my attempt to improve the dialogue..."

How can a wiki help your office develop relationships with constituents?

1. It feels more like one-to-one conversation than an exchange of form emails or snail mail do.
2. It can build a community of support for (or against) a piece of legislation.
3. It can help your office learn more about its constituents and pinpoint politically active members of your community.



SECTION II

THE CURRENT STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF STATE LEGISLATURES



We've already discussed the principles of constituent relationship management. How do those principles apply to the everyday world of a state legislature?

This section contains case studies, practices, techniques, and perspectives of data analysts, state representatives, and information officers and outlines how state legislators across the western half of the United States manage constituent communications, handle casework, and develop technology solutions to help organize both.

Many factors contribute to how different state legislators handle constituent management. Some, such as funding, staff, and technical support, are dictated by the state in which they serve. Others are based on more personal choices, such as the personal philosophies and preferences of legislators and their offices and comfort with technology. Finally, often the constituents themselves play an important role

in the process. How do constituents prefer to communicate with their elected officials? What kinds of things do they communicate about?

Case Study 1 – Building a better message-taking system

Kevin Hayes, Session Information Office, Montana State Legislature

The Montana State Legislature meets biennially (in odd-numbered years) for 90 days. Most of its members do not have permanent staff. However, those who need staff during session hire on a temporary basis.

During the last session, members received around 60,000 emails and 50,000 calls – all in a 90 day period. "Montana is a small state, but there's a lot of organization among lobby groups to generate mass emails and phone calls," says Kevin Hayes, who heads up the state's Session Information Office. Hayes provides information to the public, and sorts and forwards constituent communications to individual members. That means that during the session, Hayes might sort through thousands of emails a day. He has developed a few tactics to help manage the flow of email traffic.

How they're wired

Five years ago, the Montana Legislature used a traditional email interface

to handle all of its online correspondence. However, the system began to develop problems, viruses and large amounts of spam. The Session Information Office designed a new system called the Legislative Messaging System, based on Microsoft Access, to track and manage constituent communications. It presents the public with two means of sending messages to legislators. A person may telephone the office directly and leave a message with an operator or a person can send a message by means of a web form on the legislative website.

When a telephone call or web message comes into the office, Hayes and his team collect and file the name of the constituent and the message electronically. All requests are then printed on different colored paper and given to each member. The session information office doesn't respond to constituents on behalf of its members. Most legislators address constituent correspondence on their own. However, about ten percent of its members write messages on the back of the printed emails, and the office emails those responses back to the constituents. The office is about to test a pilot project that will send messages electronically to the legislators.

The Legislative Messaging System also functions as a warehouse for constituent data. This wealth of information about each constituent and his or her

requests is not passed onto to members. Rather, it is stored in the session information office for reference purposes.

Technology in action

Prior to the 2001 session, operators transcribed telephone messages by hand, a cumbersome and time-consuming process. Callers' names and contact information were taken for each call, and the length of messages that callers could leave was extremely limited.

In the mid-1990's, a legislative email address was established so that people could send emails to legislators. These messages were processed and printed from a designated computer. However, due to a large volume of messages and problems with the designated computer being plagued with computer viruses attached to some incoming messages, this method proved inadequate to efficiently deal with email processing.

Montana's solution, the Legislative Messaging system, has been modified since its inception, but the basic structure remains intact. The system allows an operator to enter a caller's name and contact information into a database. The operator then transcribes the caller's message and sends it to specific legislators. Should the caller phone again at a later time to leave another message, an operator can retrieve the caller's name and contact information from the database, bypassing the necessity of the caller repeating information provided in a previous call. The system also contains a large field wherein operators can type a caller's message, thereby providing a better opportunity for callers to go into more detail than under the previous system. Once an operator has completed a caller's message, the message is stored in a database, printed out, and delivered to the appropriate legislator.

Prior to the 2003 session, information technology staff also created a web messaging form in-house. The form appears on the legislative website

and replaces the former email system. Users are prompted for their name and contact information. They then choose a legislator to whom they want the message sent, type their message, and send it. These messages are subsequently stored in a database and printed out at regular intervals by LIO staff and delivered to legislators. The web form does not allow attachments, thus alleviating the problems with viruses that occurred under the former email system.

Case Study 2 – How constituent email helps legislation

Representative Janice E. Arnold-Jones, New Mexico State House



New Mexico has a bicameral citizen legislature – a House and a Senate composed of individuals who are retired or hold full-time professions outside of their legislative duties – that meets once a year for either 60 or 30 days. Additionally, state representatives do not have staff outside a legislative session. State legislators must fend for themselves, managing constituent correspondence in the most cost efficient and effective way possible, but legislators are, for the most part, alone in their efforts to manage and track constituent requests.

The state legislative budget does not include a line item for members' technology needs beyond Microsoft Office and Outlook. That means no money for constituent management software. Legislators can use any email management or constituent correspondence program they want, as long as they raise the funds for it themselves. Legislators are also free to build their own constituent contact lists, which can be moved from the office to the campaign and back again. During session, each legislator is allowed franking privileges

for direct mail not to exceed \$1,200.00.

This case study looks at how one state legislator, Representative Janice E. Arnold-Jones, uses technology to manage constituent correspondence.

How they're wired

"Real solutions come from constituents almost 100 percent of the time," says Representative Arnold-Jones. "Documenting and accessing constituent correspondence is vital." However, managing it can be tricky.

Representative Arnold-Jones finds that email offers the best solution for managing constituent correspondence and requests. "I like email, and most of my constituents know that I like to communicate by email," explains Representative Arnold-Jones. She uses contact management and correspondence programs on a regular basis in her professional life and has tried to adapt some of those techniques to her role as a state legislator, even though she cannot purchase the software.

Her email service provider of choice is AOL, and Representative Arnold-Jones posts her personal email address on her website. She receives two to three constituent emails a day. However, when issues arise during the legislative session, Representative Arnold-Jones can receive 20-30 emails on each subject or up to about 700-1,000 emails per legislative session. During the last legislative session, the House looked at a domestic partnership bill that generated 100-200 emails a day. A health care bill generated 40-100 emails a day. Neither of these bills topped the amount of emails she received regarding a cock fighting bill a few years ago.

When advocacy organizations encourage their constituents to use websites that automatically generate emails, Representative Arnold-Jones can receive up to 300 emails a day, making constituent correspondence difficult to manage. Representative Arnold-Jones is not alone. Once many of her colleagues receive automatic emails

on one topic, they often turn to spam filters to help separate individually-written correspondence from automatically generated emails. "Like most legislators, I put more value in a personally written note than an auto-generated note," says Representative Arnold-Jones.

Representative Arnold-Jones stores her email in files on AOL, but she worries that this provides only a short-term solution and may result in lost files. To prevent this from happening, she regularly uploads her email files onto her computer. Yet, Representative Arnold-Jones says that her greatest challenge is list and file management. How can a legislator with no staff and no tech funding manage the amount of information she receives on a regular basis from her constituents? This also poses a conundrum when the House is in session. When the House is swamped with constituent correspondence on a polarizing issue, representatives try to triage their email. They don't have time to answer every email in the queue, unless they know it is from a constituent in their home district.

"As a tool, my system of handling constituent correspondence is not nearly as agile as tools from business world," explains Representative Arnold-Jones. "It can be cumbersome, but it's not impossible – if you have the right staff

to work it." It is important to make the effort, she says. Answering constituent correspondence adds a level of transparency to state legislatures.

Technology in action

Representative Arnold-Jones believes that email allows her to function in a more agile manner and communicate with stakeholders on legislation. Recently, a regulatory issue arose when the state legislature passed a piece of legislation concerning physical security. When Representative Arnold-Jones began to receive email from her constituents about the issue, she used those emails to create an issue-specific email list. That email list became a makeshift but active community. Representative Arnold-Jones was able to leverage that list by asking its members to attend a regulation hearing that would have occurred behind closed doors. Around 130 people turned up to the meeting, based on email.

According to Arnold-Jones, "In this case, email helped us identify where, why and how this new law and the proposed new regulations were killing off small businesses by preventing them from hiring new employees." It also helped build an active base of on- and offline support.

Representative Arnold-Jones uses the following principles to guide her con-

stituent correspondence management activities:

- 1. Get and Give the Best Information.** Insist that constituents provide basic information about themselves when they send email. Never assume that an elected official can look up your phone number. Tell me who you are and what your contact is beyond an email. As an elected official, model that practice yourself. Anything you send out should have a way for constituents to contact your office.
- 2. Prioritize.** Always answer constituents within your home district. If constituents take time to write a personal note, then write them a personal response back.

Case Study 3 – Handling out-of-district email

Representative Mike Doogan, Alaska State House

The Alaska State Legislature is a bicameral institution. The part-time legislature meets annually for 90 days, and many of its members are employed in the private sector when not in session. The state provides some resources to help members manage their offices, including two full-time staffers during session, one full-time staffer out of session, a state IT office, and some software to manage constituent correspondence – a state email service and a state database. Members are allowed by state law to move the information contained in their state databases to the political databases, which are used for campaigning.

Representative Mike Doogan, from House District 25 in Anchorage, Alaska, says that snail mail has practically disappeared as a method of constituent communications. Representative Doogan's office received around a half dozen pieces of snail mail from constituents in the last year, usually from people who don't have access to the Internet. Instead, constituents reach

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him directly through a combination of the Internet and real-world interaction. "There is a high expectation that people can walk into the office and talk," explains Representative Doogan. However, email seems to be the preferred form of contact for most constituents.

How they're wired

The Alaska Legislature has a network of 22 regional "Legislative Information Offices" – centers across the state where citizens without Internet access can go to send public opinion messages to their representatives. The Legislative Information Offices have teleconferencing capabilities, as well as legislative records, calendars, and events and, when the legislature is in session – information on the status of bills, committees, and floor activities.

Many of the members use a program called Constant Contact to send email updates to their constituents. Representative Doogan sends a weekly eNews update to the members of this contact list every Friday that reviews that week's legislative events. Around 6,000-7,000 constituents receive those emails, but "bounceback" emails are an issue. His office receives about 30-50 bounceback emails each week. Representative Doogan's office does not conduct much database management, since he "does not see the emails that come to me as a representative as a political act."

Technology in action

Representative Doogan believes that constituent correspondence helps him understand what a relatively discrete, self-selecting audience feels on a set of issues. However, he feels that most constituent correspondence does not directly impact the legislative process. "If someone writes in saying they don't like my stand on a particular issue," says Representative Doogan, "then that doesn't mean as much to me as if they wrote in with information about an issue." His office occasionally receives email presenting this type of

informed position. These emails are most useful to Representative Doogan, but the percentage he receives is very small.

As it is for a lot of state legislators, the amount of email Representative Doogan's office receives depends on the legislative schedule. When a significant piece of legislation is up for a vote, then his office receives an increased number of emails – many from the members of political organizations and associations. Representative Doogan says that these organized email campaigns are easily identifiable.

Another issue is the number of emails that come from citizens outside Representative Doogan's district. The number of people on the list is small compared to the number of people in his district. Representative Doogan estimates that only about 25 percent of the email he receives comes from constituents who live and vote in his district. In other words, if Representative Doogan receives 900 emails about a piece of legislation, then only about 225 of those emails come from actual constituents. Doogan reads them all and responds to as many as he can, but he says that some email – especially mass email from people outside his district – does not require a response.

Case Study 4 – Managing constituent casework

Paul Mouritsen, Constituent Services, Nevada State Legislature

In Nevada, state legislators do not have district staff, so they need someone to handle constituent communications and requests for them. The state of Nevada handles this problem through one central Constituent Services office, which currently operates under the leadership of Paul Mouritsen and his staff of analysts.

The office handles constituent communications and casework, and Mouritsen handles most of it himself. During session, this means that Mouritsen per-

“A wiki is a series of web pages that can be edited by a group of people using a simple markup language. In layman’s terms, a wiki allows you to edit or update a web page with other people – without having to learn how to code the web page.”

sonally handles several hundred emails a day, which make up about 80 percent of all the requests the office receives (phone calls make up the other 20 percent). That number drops to about 10-12 emails a day when the Nevada State Legislature is not in session.

How they're wired

Mouritsen's office keeps extensive files on each constituent and stores them in a program called ISIS. The office also uses an in-house wiki with articles on popular topics of constituent inquiry, such as landlord/tenant rules, property taxes, minimum wage, marijuana, and fair debt. The office uses the wiki as a reference when people call and email in about issues. According to Mouritsen, "constituents are shocked when you can quote them, chapter and verse, on issues they call about."

The office also develop its own request log, which allows staff to search for previous requests from each constitu-

ent, file new requests, add notes about how they worked on the requests, and link to written responses, which are pasted into the system. The request log provides an institutional history that will exist long after staffers leave the office for other jobs, and it provides immediate access to constituents and their requests. "That's the advantage of having a central constituent services staff," said Paul. "You don't have to handle every case or constituent request from scratch."

Case Study 5 – Developing a data strategy

Lee Harris, Legislative Data Center, California State Legislature



California has two chambers - the Assembly and the Senate. Each house has different practices regarding its use of constituent

data and correspondence tracking. This section looks at the Legislative Counsel of California's data center. The Legislative Counsel office is a nonpartisan legal shop that renders opinions and drafts bills. The data center, a subdivision of the Legislative Counsel office, conducts all the data processing for both houses, including tracking bills for the Senate.

Lee Harris runs the data center. The California legislative session lasts two years. Harris estimates the data center at the California Legislature receives between five and ten million emails from constituents through each member's public mailbox during the two-year session. Another half million emails come through the members' websites. Harris's office helps with data processing and support.

Most members use targeted mailings. The data center trains office staff on

how to send those emails and use the computers and systems. They also train new staff on what to expect. The office also tests new software to make sure it integrates with the system. Harris spends a good deal of time looking at how other states use technology to manage constituent casework and correspondence. The data center updates its constituent management system yearly, but they plan strategically on system updates two to three years ahead of time. Many of those updates are based on what offices say they need.

How they're wired

The data center developed its own constituent tracking system. It's a web-based application, which means that offices can access the system regardless of which desktop computer they use. Individual offices handle incoming communications, like email. An unavoidable problem when dealing with any constituent correspondence – especially electronic communications – is determining whether or not the sender resides in the recipient's district. When an office receives a piece of constituent correspondence (email, snail mail, fax, phone call) that interaction is reported in the tracking system.

This tracking system is identical for both the Assembly and Senate offices, and it integrates with other tools, such as the offices' internal mailing systems. When a constituent calls to give a stance on a bill, the staffer who receives the call begins by looking up the constituent's record. The staffer can add new people, update the voter registration record, and query the system for that bill number and topic of bill. Then the staffer adds the constituent caller to a list of other constituents who say they support or oppose the bill. These lists are grouped together within the tracking system, which enables the office to send a response quickly.

The system can be programmed so that constituents with email addresses receive an email updating them about

the bill, and constituents without an email receive a snail mail. If a constituent's email fails, then the staffer can take the email off the record. The system then generates a snail mail message. Filtering "bounce back" emails helps the offices clean up the record. Then, because the system is web-based, the member has the ability to pull the list of all his or her constituents who support – or oppose -- a bill on the floor of the house.

The data center uses ContactMe to handle queries from the web. The system opens up a form from each member's website. The form requires a name and address, and it allows constituents to pick from a list of topics. This information is immediately updated in the tracking system as soon as the constituent hits "send." This allows offices to look quickly at all the emails that came in each day on a particular topic.

“Harris estimates the data center at the California Legislature receives between five and ten million emails from constituents through each member’s public mailbox during the two-year session”

- Lee Harris

Each house has different rules about what kinds of voter information their member offices can see. Here's where it becomes tricky. For example, only one house, the Assembly, is allowed to see a constituent's party affiliation. Senate offices aren't allowed to see this information, so the constituent tracking system has different rules for each house.

In California, district offices typically manage casework requests. The integrated, web-based system allows this, adding incoming calls, emails, and faxes from district offices.

Case Study 6 – Crafting a constituent management system

Bud Richmond, IT Analyst, Oregon State Legislature

The Oregon State House and Senate have 90 members, and each member has one to three full time staffers during the regular session period (January through June in odd years). During the interim they will have one – or possibly zero – staff. That's about 400 full time employees year round and 600 when the legislature is in session.

The Information Systems office is staffed by 26 people. This includes management, analyst/advisors, development, media and operations. Bud Richmond is the analyst/advisor to the members of the Oregon State Legislature. When members or their staff have an IT problem – from a jammed printer to compiling an HTML newsletter to send to constituents – they turn to Bud and the operations staff to handle everything from hardware problems (desktop computers, printers, mobile devices, etc.) to software issues, to technology strategy (from mail merging documents to website design).

Each member's office is responsible for handling his or her own constituent communications effort, but Bud along with the Operations staff can help each office develop the best constituent

Bud Richmond suggests the following tips to help manage constituent communications with incoming legislators:

1. **Track every time you communicate with a constituent and when a constituent communicates with you.** This will help to resolve any issues that may arise in the future.
2. **Customer service is incredibly important.** Richmond's office strives for excellent response time to a trouble call. Their response time is usually less than 10 minutes. They treat their "customers" – the member offices – with respect, and they appreciate what Richmond calls his "computer side manner."
3. **Resolve issues quickly.** When Richmond's office receives a trouble call, then they fix it immediately. If it is a more difficult issue, then they replace the problem hardware with a loaner computer. This provides the offices with as little down time as possible and allows Richmond's team to fix the problem properly.

management strategy. According to Bud, the technical ability of each office "depends upon how tech friendly they are, and that depends upon the member and member's staff."

How they're wired

Each member's office answers its own email. Bud consults with each office to develop the best strategy to manage and store constituent requests. Most member offices use Microsoft Outlook Contacts to manage their constituent contacts. Other solutions include Excel, Access and an "in house" Access database constituent tracking system called "Legicon." The idea is to steer each staffer toward a solution that best fits the individual needs of each office.

Member newsletters are an important communication tool that members use to push information to their constituents. This can be particularly tricky since the size of each member's list can vary. One member has 19,000 constituents on his email list. Other members have only a few hundred people on their email lists. The average list size, however, tends to contain 2,000 - 3,000

names, including information on constituents who have emailed, called, or faxed the office with a request or an opinion about legislation. To solve the ongoing problem of so many emails being sent or being tagged as spam, the legislature uses an external service called GovDelivery to deliver newsletters. Richmond assists the member office in the best way to create these newsletters, from initial design to finished HTML. Office demands for newsletters vary. Some offices want lots of color or pictures, or they want the newsletters to have a certain look. Richmond's goal is to make sure that constituents can read HTML newsletters accurately, regardless of which email service they use.

Bud's team is currently looking into a more comprehensive constituent tracking system. They hope to find a system that will incorporate all the needs of a member office from initial constituent contact, electronic and written communications, case history, and some form of a paperless office. Bud says that he is "always looking for the best 'turnkey' solution to handle

the correspondence that members send out to the web." In the future, all of these functions will be integrated into one system. When a member office receives a constituent email, the system will automatically update itself and tie each entry to the bill the constituent wrote in about.

Technology in action

Every two years, Bud and his Oregon staff team get what he calls "technology slap." New members and their legislative assistants come into office with new tools and mobile devices. Richmond consults with each incoming member and his or her legislative staff individually as soon as they arrive in office to assess their technology wants and needs and devise a strategy to help them sync up and manage constituent correspondence.

The most important topic that Bud faces is trying to teach members and their staff how to manage email. In Oregon (as in many states), members don't have a lot of space to save email. However, members have to hold onto email for a least a year as matter of public record. Richmond advises incoming members to view their Microsoft Outlook mailboxes as filing cabinets. "You have to file an email like you would a piece of paper in a filing cabinet," says Bud. His team works with member offices to develop their own folder system. Almost all offices create a constituent folder, a constituent follow-up folder, and folders for each hot bill they track or follow. Some members create a folder for every bill introduced in session. Others track only certain bills – perhaps 20 per session.

Everything is "backed-up" or stored on the network. If a member experiences problems with his or her desktop or if they lose an email folder, then Richmond can restore everything within 30 days. When the email box is too large, then Bud's team works with members to archive old emails. Everything prior to the beginning of the year is automatically archived on the district drive.

Following-up on those emails is just as important as filing them. Bud's team cautions member offices to flag emails once they are moved into a folder, or better yet, create a folder just for emails that require attention. Put stars in front of the title, so that the "to do" folder is the first folder you see.

After Bud talks to members about email management, he then moves on to scheduling. During session, most legislative assistants will schedule constituent meetings in five to fifteen minute increments. Members' schedules are packed. Because most members (Bud estimates 60 out of 90) use a PDA some kind of mobile device to manage their schedules, these devices need to be synced with the office desktop through the Capitol public or private wireless network. Bud also shows members how to keep private things – like a dental appointment or child's birthday party -- private and off the public record. Bud's office supports all mobile devices, and he consults with members about which device is best for them.

Finally, Bud's team walks members through how they can store their contacts in Outlook. "There's a difference between contacts you want in your mobile device and constituent information," says Bud. He advises members to create a sub-folder called constituent contacts. Some new members start with zero contacts, others transfer entire lists into Outlook.

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Case Study 7 – Developing Proactive Online Communications

Ric Cantrell, Chief Deputy, Utah State Senate

Ric Cantrell is the Chief Deputy of the Utah State Senate. The Senate comprises 29 men and women elected to four year terms. Half of the seats are up for election every two years.

"Somewhere in Utah, an elementary student might access the web cam as part of a school project and realize, looking into the Senate president's office that 'this is what I want to do when I grow up.'"

- Ric Cantrell

How they're wired

The Utah State Senate proactively uses online communications to conduct "Government 2.0," exploring the use of new media technologies to reach to media and help constituents participate in the process. Their strategy includes a web video channel on YouTube, a blog, a podcast series, online town hall meetings, a newsletter, and a live webcam, called SENATEcam that broadcasts from the Utah Senate president's office. According to Cantrell, constituents "vote for us and pay for our jobs, so we felt we needed to do a better job of telling them what we do."

When the State Senate receives the same questions from many different constituents, Cantrell's office replies on blogs or by podcast or by a mass email. Cantrell says that the Senate does not see it's blog as a propaganda tool, but as a way to involve citizens in the policy process. In fact, Cantrell has found that constituents use the blog a lot to post comments about proposed legislation. Some of those comments have actually changed legislation, creating a feedback loop between voters and the elected officials who represent them.

The Senate also uses legislative online town hall meetings to encourage discussion between citizens and state officials. People submit questions online, and the legislator answers, using a live streaming video feed. One town hall meeting lasted three days.

Cantrell says another tool, the SENATEcam, "serves to demystify the halls of power." As he explains it, somewhere in Utah, an elementary

Cantrell suggests the following best practices for managing proactive online communications in legislative office:

1. **Sometimes the organizational structure of legislative office isn't suited for Government 2.0.** Pre-existing structures, rules, and ways of governing may not adapt to the online environment. If you're interested in using online communications for Government 2.0, make sure the legislative leadership is supportive and the right structures are in place.
2. **Consider not using a government server to host your multi-media outreach, such as podcasts and video streaming.** Use a private vendor that can support your multi-media activities and the number of people who will log into them.
3. **Don't be afraid to invent solutions.** Revolutionary steps are just baby steps. We haven't begun to redefine/explore ramifications of Government 2.0. However, the best way to predict the future is to invent it, so that the ideals of Jeffersonian democracy are stronger, not weaker.
4. **The more proactive you are, the fewer individual emails you receive.** Therefore, the fewer emails you have to respond to individually.

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SECTION III

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS: Putting Principles into Practice

The term “CRM” (customer relationship management in the business world and constituent relationship management in the political world) typically refers to two things. It often describes a set of principles that guide users in developing one-to-one relationships with customers and constituents. We discussed some of those in the first half of this publication. It also refers to a technological or software system that helps offices put CRM principles into practice. Some people call this a CRMs. Others call it “Software as a Service.” Sometimes I refer to it as a “back bone” system. CRM guru Paul Greenberg calls it a data warehouse.

Regardless of what you call it, in order to put CRM into practice you need one thing: an actionable database – not a spreadsheet and certainly not something difficult to access or tricky to work with. Rather, you need one central database, accessible from anywhere. Legislators without a lot of staff or technological expertise need a database that is as intuitive and as easy to use as an email inbox.

In his book, *CRM at the Speed of Light*, Greenberg talks about the importance of bringing all of your data into one location – even if you need a low-tech solution for managing it. One central, actionable database allows you to access information about your constituents anywhere and from any device, laptop or desktop. It allows you

to clean up redundancies and identify missing data. It keeps your interactions with constituents consistent. Finally, many CRM solutions contain analytic tools to help you make decisions based on your database and act on those decisions.³



Most of these CRM tools, applications, and software are designed to help offices accomplish a few basic things:

1. **Receive and store inbound electronic communications.** Some systems scan inbound email for certain terms, such as the title of upcoming legislation. Others simply store inbound email in much the same way that most email systems, including Microsoft Outlook, store email.
2. **Allow you to create, send, and store outgoing communications.** This allows you to follow the train of communications between your office and each constituent. Most systems also contain easy tools to create and send email newsletters, as well as written correspondence.
3. **Store, manage, and analyze constituent data.** Many organizations are moving away from traditional desktop database software and toward online systems that allow users to log in and access this information from anywhere they find an Internet connection. Some systems even allow you to create charts and graphs about who your constituents are, where they live, how often they communicate with you, and what they communicate about. The more work you put into database management, the more useful your database will be.
4. **Store information about offline communications, such as phone calls, snail mail, in-person meetings, and faxes.** This provides a history of your communications with each constituent. Think of it as a reference to remind you about who contacted you, when they contacted you, what they wanted, and how you responded.
5. **Manage constituent casework.** The ideal system will prompt you to take actions and allow you to tag and store information about how your office resolved the issue and followed up with each constituent.

³ Paul Greenberg, *CRM at the Speed of Light* (Emeryville, CA: McGraw Hill/Osborne, 2004), 66.

Designing a data plan for legislative office



Before you begin to look for a new technology solution to help manage constituent correspondence and information, start by writing a data plan. This can

be as formal – or informal – as you like, either scribbled on a napkin or typed, printed, and hung in your office. A data plan will help you answer a few questions about what you need from a new tool or application and – more importantly – how you anticipate using it.

Begin by asking yourself a few questions:

- Where is your data going to come from? Constituent emails? A supporter list you carried into office from your campaign? Phone calls? Snail mail? Faxes? In-person meetings.
- What resources are available for you to use? Does your legislature have an IT staff and a software budget? Do you have funds to purchase a software system? How many staff do you have? Are they permanent? How much time do you have to maintain the database each week and handle constituent correspondence and requests?
- Are you purchasing CRM software? What kind? What can it do? What can't it do?
- Who will maintain your database? Can a dedicated staff member take sole responsibility for maintaining and using the database? Will the IT department do it? Or will you have to manage it? How many people need to have access to it?
- How do you plan to use the data you collect? To send personalized responses to constituents? To handle casework? To design monthly or weekly newsletters?

- How will you keep your data safe? Will you limit the number of users?

What to look for in a technology solution

Databases, email management, micro targeting, multi-media are useful tactics. They help your office put its constituent-focused philosophy into practice, but no single technology solution – not even the most intuitive, efficient database – will revolutionize your office unless your heart is in the right place. You have to start with 1:1 politics, a politics focused on listening to constituents, learning about them, and then responding. Once this philosophy exists at the heart of your office – even if your office consists of one person, the elected official – technology can be a very powerful tool.

What do some of these technology solutions look like? Peter Churchill, a politics and CRM expert at the Center for American Progress, detailed a list of ideal technology solutions in the publication *Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book of Politics*.

According to Churchill, any ideal technology solution includes:

- **ONE repository of constituent data.** – Not lots of separate lists. Instead of looking at five or six different lists, you only need one. Make sure that the system you choose is intuitive and easily searchable.
- **Access for all who need it.** – Everyone in the organization must be able to access the data when they need it, whether they are in the office, at an event, or on the floor of the state house. Providing this level of up-to-the-minute access involves the ability to synchronize data with portable data devices, such as handheld Personal Data Appliances (PDAs).
- **The ability to contain all kinds of interactions – not just online interactions.** – The constituent should be able to communicate with

the legislative office using his or her preferred method, e.g. mail, email, website, phone, etc. Those interactions should be tracked in the CRM system. This means every communication channel must integrate with the central database, including face-to-face interactions and queries from the member's website.

- **Correct information.** – All communications must be attached to the correct contact record.
- **The ability to be studied.** – This data will be stored to the member or his or her office to analyze interactions, issues, and communications over time and to respond to constituent communications in a personalized way.

Data privacy

No publication about data and CRM would be complete without a passage on data privacy and security. As Peter Churchill discusses in our 2007 publication, *Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book of Politics*, data capturing requires both ethical and legal responsibilities.⁴ Most voters have no idea that their information is publicly available, or that their elected officials might collect that information. Nor do most voters realize that buying and selling their personal information (from what magazines they read to who they donated to) is a common practice in campaign politics.

Further, no one likes to receive spam. State legislators often feel overwhelmed when political activists target them with dozens – sometimes hundreds – of the same email about an issue. Voters experience the same kind of fatigue when they receive standardized, impersonal communications that they didn't sign up for from their elected officials.

⁴ Peter Churchill, "It's the Data, Stupid," *Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book of Politics* (Washington, DC: Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet), 22.

IPDI advocates treating all communications with constituents with the utmost respect. This means only sending mass emails, such as newsletters or updates, to people who have signed up to receive them. However, this also means responding in an efficient way to constituents who email legislative office with requests and needs. We call this “opting-in” to an email list. Finally, keep your data secure by not sharing with other people and using password-protected CRM software.

Style

Political emails can feel like spam when they are written in a robotic, impersonal way, riddled with legislative jargon. Think of the types of emails you read first – not the advertisement for supplements or software programs, but the communications you receive because you signed up to receive email from a company, organization, or listserv. Many of us tend to delete emails that feel impersonal first, but we often read emails sent to us from trusted friends, family members, and

work associates first.

When you write email responses and updates for your constituents, keep in mind the kinds of language and writing style that appeal to you as an email recipient. Do you hate receiving form emails? Then considering sending your constituents email messages that feel more authentic and personal.

Use language that is crisp and concise and consider explaining some of the terms that a non-legislative audience might not understand.

Questions and Answers About Implementing a CRM System



Questions and Answers about Implementing a CRM system

This section, written in question-and-answer form, addresses some of the issues that legislative offices may have about implementing a CRM system. It contains real world advice from some of the technologists and writers who implement CRM on a national level, from the worlds of business, advocacy, and politics.

I'm a low-tech person. How can I incorporate CRM tools and tactics into my legislative office?



Answered by Paul Greenberg, The 56 Group

A Technology is never the actual answer to constituent engagement. It is merely an enabler. If you have only a Yahoo! account and no

data there are still several things that can be done.

If you don't have the technology to bring your constituents to you, then go to them. Digitally, legislators have an obligation to meet their constituents. If I have a Yahoo account, then I have a computer and an Internet connection. Make sure that you participate in the social networks that are likely to find your constituents, including sites like Facebook. Set up a legislative online “office” (a group) where your constituents can go to ask you questions or get something done. Make sure that you follow up on every single request. Don't be afraid of being “human” online either. Go to the sites that rate restaurants and local businesses and post your own reviews. It is important, however, to make it clear who you are when you do participate (albeit in subtle ways). Also, sites like Eventful are very useful to schedule and inform people about events that you're holding.

The key to successful CRM online is fostering the participation of the community in your legislative world. Find a volunteer or two to help you with the digital “stuff.” Look for an inexpensive database. For example, look

“Technology is never the actual answer to constituent engagement. It is merely an enabler”

- Paul Greenberg

at Anagram or the LinkedIn Toolbar, which has email address capture (the former costs \$30 and the latter is free) and start building up an email address database for those who write you. Technology need not be expensive.

Mayor Richard Daley used some of these approaches in Chicago. Every Friday evening at 5:00pm, the 46th Ward Alderman would go to the same family restaurant and clear out an area. He'd have a couple of staff with him with notebooks and pens. Starting roughly 5:30pm, constituents of his district would come to the restaurant, sit down, get some food and tell him their issues, concerns, beliefs, etc. His

aides would take notes. They would all eat and talk for a short time. Quick bite of food, some conversation, some action items and then follow-up. Chicago Ward Committeemen always knew what went on in their wards. When someone moved into the neighborhood, then he or she would hear a knock on the door, and a ward committeeman staffer would introduce himself or herself and ask the new neighbor if there were anything he or she could do for them. If so, the staffer noted it and did it. If not, the staffer would say that they would be back in three months to see how they were doing. Three months later the knock at the door happened again.

They didn't need a computer to do any of that. People felt they meant something to their elected aldermen and ward committeemen. Make your constituents feel the same. This might mean more work for you as a legislator, but, hey, that's what you signed up for, isn't it?

What if I use a personal email address to handle constituent communications? What kinds of CRM solutions should I look for?



Answered by Daniel Bennett, Practitioner-in-Residence, IPDI

A The simplest solutions, even when they seem to be the least specific for the task at hand, can give you the most control. Quite often people who can understand simple word processors can produce well-written responses, which linked with a simple database and email program can meet the needs of responding. On a very basic level, a legislator without financial resources can create his or her own miniature CRM system using Word mail merge and either an Excel spreadsheet or Access database.

However, there are systems that large organizations can use that have already been customized to the needs of the task. For example, where a more general CRM system may be ill-suited without a great deal of customization to meet the needs of elected representatives, there are systems that are well designed to meet the needs of this niche market. And although a simple set-up may be usable for organizations that do not have the resources, it should be understood that low cost solutions will inevitably require much more staff time. Without thoughtful support that makes sure that the system is safe from disasters like lost data, data corruption, and proper documentation, there will be an inevitable crisis. If the quantity of correspondence goes beyond a certain point, without vast amounts of unpaid labor, the only solution that will be adequate is the larger task specific system, because it is the most efficient.

A low-cost, high-tech solution for legislators with tech savvy (or tech-savvy staff) may be Open Source CRM tools, such as SugarCRM and CiviCRM. These tools can be free to install, but they require a lot of customization and well trained and long term staff support. Other solutions, such as Salesforce, offer CRM applications over the Internet. But until Salesforce offers a version specific to elected offices it will be hard to configure it for elected offices.

I run a central information office for the members of my state legislature. How can we better incorporate CRM philosophy and practice?



Answered by Bruce Culbert, BPT Partners LLC and iSymmetry

A First you should precisely define who your customer is. In this case it appears the information

office has two major customers; the constituents that want to connect to their representatives and the legislators themselves.

The second thing the information office should do is understand what your customers need, want and expect from them. You should do this by asking them directly through surveys, forums, interviews and other means of gaining input directly from customers to shape the service strategies of the information office. This would be done both with the citizens and their state legislators.

Third, you should take a realistic assessment of the information office's ability to execute on the overall experience desired by their customers. You will have to prioritize their initiatives based on available resources and determine a realistic course of action that enables you to provide valuable services that meet or exceed the expectations of their customers while experiencing these services. You can't be all things to all people.

Next, establish measurements and accountability for meeting the information office's customer commitments. For instance the office may want to establish a standard turnaround time for responding to emails and calls. They may be different based on the channel used to reach the legislators or the specific issue that is being addressed. Once the standards are set there needs to be someone or some group responsible for collecting the data, reporting on performance vs. the goal and for ensuring standards are met and corrective action taken when necessary to consistently meet and exceed customers' expectations.

Last, continue to aggressively pursue the use of technology to improve the overall customer experience and to increase the access and trust between constituent and representative. Email auto responses and self service applications coupled with the reduction in the price of deploying mobile applica-

tions represent significant opportunities to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the information office.

How do I know if people send an email from outside my district?

Answered by Daniel Bennett, Practitioner-in-Residence, IPDI

A There are very few ways to prove residency within a district by email. First, look for a postal address. If that address is within your district, and the sender claims it is his or hers, then the information is most likely correct. Because many constituents don't include postal addresses in their messages, generate an automatic response asking each correspondent to confirm his or her postal address and include his or her original message. Web forms, the system most often used by advocacy groups to send mass form emails, can actually be helpful in determining the source by requiring the addition of the postal address.

There are no widely adopted ways to prove identity or residence online, especially for non-monetary transactions. A good correspondence system will check to make sure the postal address is real and within a given jurisdiction.

My legislature has plenty of financial and human resources. We already track constituent correspondence, and we conduct some analytics. What else can we do?

Answered by Paul Greenberg, The 56 Group

A CRM is always strategy-based and focused on how to engage customers/constituents in ways that are mutually beneficial. Getting constituents to participate in the

legislative activities of their specific representatives and making sure that the legislator represents their concerns is the ideal engagement model. Having great data that's organized to identify and automate personalized responses is a start and certainly something to be proud of. But it is by no means sufficient as a long-term strategy. With that in mind, I'm going to suggest three things that might be done from a strategic standpoint, given the quality of information.

First and foremost, look at the interests of the younger generations in the political process as a result of the 2008 presidential primaries. Consider creating a non-partisan "Constituent Advocate" position that would oversee either both houses or two positions – one each for each house. Once that is established, try developing a bipartisan or non-partisan Constituent Advisory Organization that will work with each legislative house (under the aegis of the Constituent Advocate) to optimize the constituent's experience.

That means that not only would the constituents who are part of this advisory committee work to improve the legislative experience and processes, but they would also reach out to their fellow constituents to understand what is needed in considerably more depth than just a good customer record provides. This may include such things as: constituency mapping which would literally be a substantial questionnaire from the legislative houses that would glean the details on what the constituent sees as optimal in terms of their ability to engage their individual assembly member or senator. How would they like to do it, what's good about how they do it? What's bad? What are (and have been) their expectations? How does electronic constituent relationship management increase their trust, decrease their trust, etc? An approach of this kind may provide a major series of surprising revelations and uncover future best practices.

"Because many constituents don't include postal addresses in their messages, generate an automatic response asking each correspondent to confirm his or her postal address and include his or her original message."

- Daniel Bennett

Second, start to take your data to a new level. Go beyond just the constituent voting records, inquiry logging, and automated query response and head toward developing individual constituency profiles (with permission, of course). Look at sites like MyBarackObama.com (partisanship aside) and see how they are using technology to engage millions in both fundraising and volunteerism. They have done this by utilizing the social technologies to capture the younger voter base.

Third, develop a strategy that makes sure that each legislator has the opportunity to become the authority on "All Things District" and that this be a bidirectional effort. In other words, anyone should be able to go to the legislator's site to find out not only which pieces of proposed legislation are of interest to them, but also what events are of

value to them and what is going on in the district that may not be part of the legislator's agenda that could be of value to them. Also provide a place for constituents to comment on legislation and provide input. The government of Singapore has what they call "National Feedback Day" which gives all the citizens of Singapore the public forum (a conference which has thousands of attendees) to discuss a variety of reports that the government is releasing on topics like public housing and transportation. The citizens give their feedback and it's incorporated into the findings and then the programs grow from there. With contemporary tools, this can be an ongoing process. A policy wiki that invites public feedback with registration, for example, gives not only a great and real picture (well beyond traditional data) of an individual constituent but valuable input into potential legislative actions – and gives the constituent a sense of active participation.

All in all, the idea is to take what is already an advanced data system and move it to the next step with a strategy for constituent engagement. Data and technology are only as valuable as the judgments made on what they provide. The more engaged the constituent, the better the judgments, the more participatory the process.

How do I choose a CRM system that I will actually use?



Answered by Peter Churchill, Center for American Progress

A Keep some of these suggestions in mind:

1. Training! I can't emphasize this enough. Very often, teaching someone a powerful feature in Excel such as pivot tables will dramatically enhance their productivity. So make sure there is good training material available for staff when they join,

with relevant examples of what they might need to do.

Consider tools such as the jing project from techsmith which enables you to quickly record small training videos.

2. When choosing a CRM tool, focus on the elements that will make a user's life easier. With many offices having such small staffs, the functionality should implement CRM principles by making the data capture process a seamless part of the tasks they need to perform.
 - a. Ensure any solution has close integration between MS Office and the CRM system - so it is easy to add an email into the CRM system or generate a letter. That way, that valuable contact information with the constituent won't be lost in an outlook folder when you most need it.
 - b. If you make a user more efficient, chances are, they'll be more effective as well. So consider solutions with workflow tools built in, that can manage the flow of information, and help the user plan their workload.
3. Don't forget the Relationship part of CRM. Just capturing constituent data more efficiently is a good start - but using the data to build a relationship with that person is what the real end goal is. To do that, you need to be able to capture all of a constituent's communications together in one place, and relate them to the relevant issues and legislation.

Make sure any CRM system you consider is able to capture custom information such as details about legislation.
4. One size doesn't fit all - but one platform might. Consider consolidating the various solutions into one platform that is flexible enough to meet each office's needs, but only

requires the IT staff to know one system (e.g. CRM solutions from Microsoft or Salesforce.com).

How can a CRM system help me handle constituent casework?



Answered by Ken Ward, Adfero Group, and Nick Schaper, U.S. Congress⁵



Handling case work and constituent services well is a good way to build support in your district.

1. Use pre-approved templates for everything. Legislative offices receive many different requests. Each stage of handling different constituent requests should be scripted or should follow a similar formula.
2. Automate some of your responses. A good CRM program can prompt you or your staff to take the right actions when handling a case. For example, after six weeks, the program can prompt your staff to call the constituent and report on the request.
3. Follow-up. Let your constituents know that you're still working on their request.

For example, Susan Holmes is a voter in your district. She is having a Medicaid billing problem. She thinks there is a mistake. Susan has tried mailing and calling the Medicaid office, but the issue is still not resolved.

As a last resort, Susan walks into your district office on Tuesday morning with correspondence from Medicaid and her billing and insurance information. The staff assistant greets Susan, assesses the problem, and enters all the information he needs about Susan's case into your CRM platform. Your staff

⁵These suggestions originally published in Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book of Politics (Washington, DC: IPDI, 2005).

assistant can then start processing the request on the spot.

After Susan leaves, the staff assistant logs a Medicaid agency request into the database. This automatically prompts a form letter to the Medicaid agency. The staff assistant fills in the blanks with Susan's information.

Three days later, the CRM program prompts your office to send another letter to Susan to tell her that the legislative office submitted her appeal to Medicaid. The letter tells Susan to expect news in four to six weeks.

A month later, when your staff assistant hears that Susan's billing was in error and has been corrected, he calls Susan and tells her the good news. The staff assistant closes the case with a favorable outcome. This triggers a message two weeks later thanking Susan for coming to your office and expressing how glad you are that her request was successfully fulfilled.

I often struggle with answering the hundreds of form emails that advocacy groups often send me. How can I handle the email deluge?

Answered by Daniel Bennett, Practitioner-in-Residence, IPDI

A Emails forwarded in huge quantities by third parties can seem overwhelming because of the difficulty legislative staff and legislators have responding to each message. And many people jump to the conclusion that those messages do not reflect as intense a conviction as more individual and seemingly heartfelt singular emails. Because the manual hard labor necessary to respond to those large campaigns is both mentally unrewarding and time consuming, there is a tendency to give those messages short shrift. Before jettisoning the clutter, ask yourself, "is

it more important to collect individual messages or build as large a coalition group as possible?" In other words, do you want to know how people feel on certain types of issues, or do you want to collect the individual messages they send you explaining why you should support a piece of legislation?

"In the Internet age, being equipped to handle mass emails is becoming a political necessity."

- Daniel Bennett

I say respond personally to the individual messages as those people will be the first to get up at your public meetings and "call you out." On the other hand, collecting form emails on each issue may give you the opportunity to receive correspondence from as much as 10 to 50% of your constituency. My suggestion is to try as best you can to do both.

Fortunately in the case of mass mailings, there are a couple possible solutions. The first and easiest today is to contact the advocacy group and ask for an electronic list of all the senders. Responding is much easier then. The better solution is only now being adopted, where the advocacy groups forward messages designed to directly go into a legislators correspondence system and include a unique code for the campaign (this is the Topic Code system that I developed for Congress to use and which is described on my www.advocatehope.org site). The real question is "what are you looking for

out of constituent correspondence?" In the Internet age, being equipped to handle mass emails is becoming a political necessity.

What about on the campaign trail?

Answered by Christopher Massicotte, NGP Software

A Having a strong CRM in place during the campaign helps make the transition from campaigning to holding the office smoother. In some states, legislators are permitted to use data that they collected during their campaigns to help them with their constituent management.

A state legislator can use his or her CRM for fundraising, compliance with his state finance laws, and voter identification during the campaign. When the campaign is over he or she can also record the outreach calls made to and received from constituents. The legislator can record the letters and emails that are sent. Finally, the legislator can better understand what is on the minds of his or her constituents – who are the activists in their district and what kinds of outreach have taken place. Many state governments do not provide a robust enough CRM for their state legislators to effectively do this, and many times they need to go elsewhere such as campaign software to find it.

For example, a state representative combined his canvassing operation with CRM, email and mail during a very contentious primary in 2006. This state representative was instrumental in passing a substantial pay raise. The bill was passed in the middle of the night on the last day of the session. When the story hit the news, the public was outraged. The pay raise was quickly repealed on a nearly unanimous vote with the state representative being the lone dissenter. He believed strongly that the only way to attract

good candidates to run for office and to cut down on corruption was to pay them competitively to what they could earn in the private sector. This action prompted several candidates to run against him in the primary. Worse as primary season approached, all of his primary challengers dropped out to rally around a single challenger poised to defeat him.

His position was a complicated one, but if explained correctly to his constituents, it was possible that they would understand and keep him in office.

The district was small, just around 30,000 voters. The campaign sent paid canvassers and volunteers into the field to knock on every single door and ask people about the biggest issue that would influence the way they voted in the primary. By far, the biggest concern was the pay raise,

specifically the involvement of their state representative.

The campaign knew they had to focus their efforts on this group of people and educate them on the nuances behind the votes. They used a web-based voter contact management system that allowed them to track various demographics including issues important to voters. The CRM allowed the campaign to send customized letters and place issue-based phone calls to voters to explain the candidate's position, and also enabled them to avoid the issue altogether when it did not matter to that particular voter.

When the campaign had identified the voters they needed to get out on Election Day they sent canvassers and "flushers" to ensure that they got out and voted, and they only knocked on doors and called voters that had previ-

ously said they would support him. Seventeen other incumbent state legislators lost their primary challenges that year. A local political website called this campaign "the best, most well-oiled field program we have ever seen."

A web-based CRM for a constituency of fewer than 100,000 voters will cost roughly \$500 per month. This cost can sometimes be split between the campaign and the official office in some states. Additionally it is important that your CRM have a robust security and user permissions system. Most states forbid fundraising activities inside an official legislative office. Filtering your data so that official office staff sees only what they're supposed to see, and campaign staff see only what they are, ensures that campaigns and state legislative offices remain compliant with campaign finance laws.

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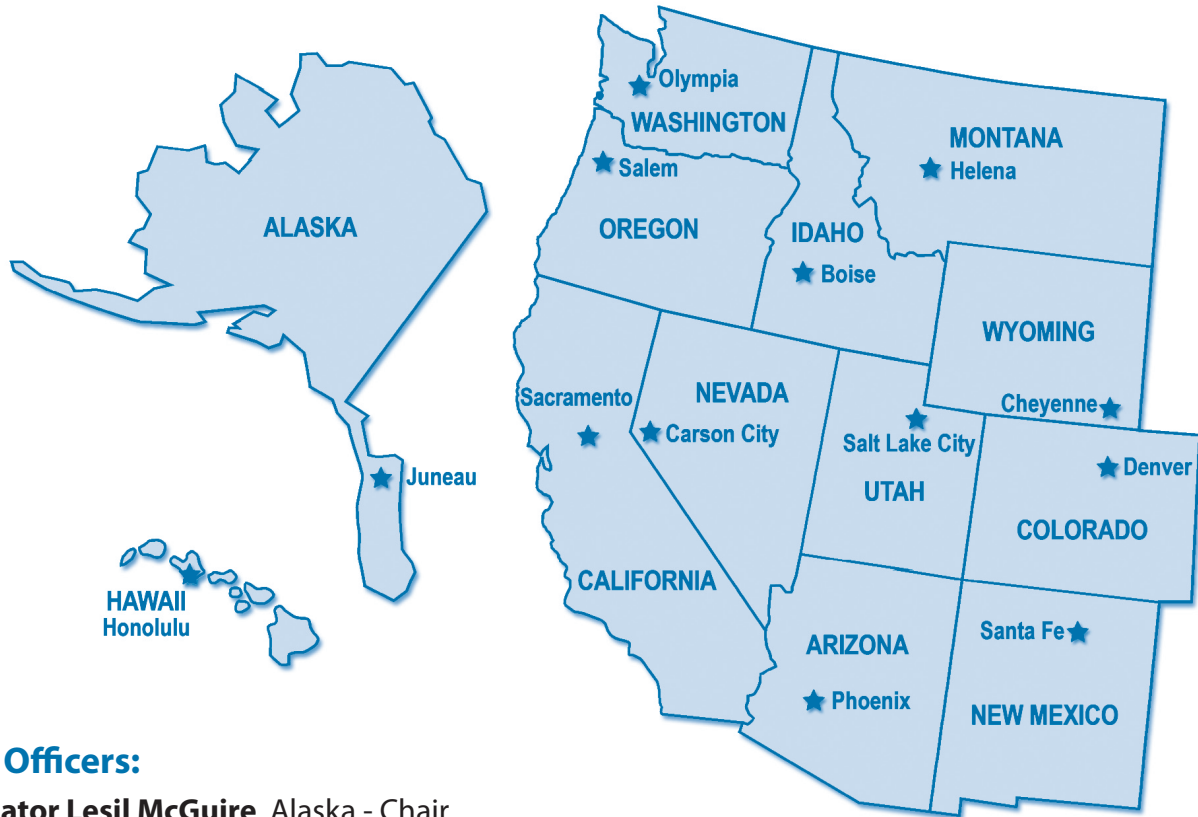
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