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# *Helping a 221-Year-Old Institution Harness Cutting-Edge Communication Technologies: Research Findings to Enhance Congressional Contact with Constituents and the Media*

## Introduction

New technologies are transforming day-to-day life on the Hill, forcing Members and their staffs to adapt to changing circumstances in innovative and cutting-edge ways. Here are some of the major changes occurring currently, and opportunities that have yet to be seized:

- The implosion of the traditional "dinosaur media" has contributed to a splintering of how constituents receive information. It has also occurred in tandem with the rise of "social media," with implications that remain unclear for Members of Congress. A growing amount of attention on the Hill is being showered on constituents who have embraced social media, but whether this is a wise allocation of limited resources remains an open question.

- The advent of tele-town halls means massive numbers of constituents are being touched personally by a Member of Congress, but overall penetration rates remain extremely low. Furthermore, the valuable data generated by conducting these events has yet to be tapped by most offices.

- A similar under-use of data is found with Congressional websites. Tracking software such as Google Analytics enables Members to know remarkable amounts of information about the ways visitors locate their website, how long they visit the site, and what information is most often accessed during a visit. Yet, most Members fail to track and use this readily available data.

- The days of "snail-mail" correspondence from constituents are over. Most of the correspondence Members receive from constituents today is via email, and it is increasingly common for Members to reply through that same medium. Managing an ever-growing workload of electronic correspondence in House offices is becoming a growing challenge, one that some offices are meeting far more efficiently—and cost-effectively—than others.

## Methodology/Acknowledgements

In November 2009, December 2009, and January 2010, Presentation Testing President Rich Thau engaged in approximately 30 hours of formal interviews and conversations with three dozen Hill staff, including 18 chiefs of staff. We made an agreement with each office that we wanted as much candid information as possible, and in order to get it, all interviews were conducted off the record and not for attribution. Throughout this report, direct quotes from Hill staff are related anonymously to reflect those agreements.

Following the interviews, Presentation Testing conducted a national, random-digit-dialing phone survey of 500 registered voters on January 6-12, 2010. The margin of error for the full sample is 4.4%.

This project was a true partnership with the Congressional Institute. President Mark Strand enthusiastically spearheaded the effort to turn the project from an idea into a reality. Patrick Deitz scheduled the interviews on the Hill. And Tim Lang accompanied Thau on virtually all the interviews, taking copious color-coded notes that serve as the backbone for this report. We are indebted to all the busy Hill staff who took the time to facilitate the meetings and meet with us in person.

## Summary of Key Findings:

1) Many offices lack an all-encompassing communications strategy. They rely on tactics without something larger to guide them.

2) Huge percentages of constituents say they rarely/never hear from their Congressman. This matters because satisfaction with a Member's job performance is in direct correlation with how frequently constituents hear from their Representative.

3) While the volume of incoming constituent correspondence ebbs and flows dramatically during the course of the year, most of the offices we interviewed handle between 1,000 and 2,000 inbound communications per week—the majority of which are email. The biggest challenges to handling the current volume of email are too few staff, and too much time required to provide a meaningful response to constituents inquiring about issues that require Member office research.

4) Offices remain split on how to respond to a constituent email message—whether with an email reply, or with a "snail" mail reply.

5) House offices typically require between one and two weeks to reply to a constituent email query about public policy, with very specific replies requiring up to a month. But some offices can turn around 90% of their email in two-to-three days.

6) The fall of the "dinosaur media" and the rise of "social media" are radically altering how Hill offices produce news and interact with constituents.

7) In addition to the benefits, using social media to communicate with constituents has plenty of shortcomings.

8) While there are myriad ways Members structure and maintain their presence on Facebook, no broad consensus exists about which approaches are the best, and there's insufficient evidence to suggest any one approach is better than another.

9) While Member websites remain the focal point of most offices' Internet presence, a comprehensive strategy seamlessly integrates an official website into social media and takes advantage of programs to track visitor behavior.

10) New technologies help build efficiencies in Congressional offices, as well as provide new and varied ways to reach out.

11) Use of mass franked mail is on the decline, but targeted 499s are in, as well as highly-targeted smaller mailings of 3,000 to 5,000 pieces.

12) E-newsletters provide inexpensive outreach to thousands of constituents, and opted-in constituents can be emailed during black-out periods.

13) Tele-town halls remain popular but under-utilized, given the willingness of constituents to participate in them over and above the current frequency of Member outreach, and given their remarkable ability to generate valuable data.

## Key Findings

**1) Many offices lack an all-encompassing communications strategy. They rely on tactics without something larger to guide them**

Our interviews with Congressional offices started with a question about the office's broad communications strategy. What we uncovered is that many offices do not have one.

When asked to describe their communications strategies, offices responded with comments such as:

> "We do 499s, print, TV, and radio."
>
> "I don't know if we have a mission statement."
>
> "Communicating as efficiently as possible, using tools such as Twitter, E-newsletters, & 499s"
>
> "Anyone who writes the office, we respond to them, in the medium they contact us."

Then there were offices that actually have a strategy, but didn't realize it:

> "When we sat down and took a look at what we want to do, I don't know we had a strategy, per se. We had a good number of things in our heads, and the only thing we discounted was franked mail. The whole thing was built around trying to get the message to as many people as possible, as cheaply as possible, and to stay out of trouble."

And finally there are communications operations that have a clear strategy and statement of purpose:

> "Our mantra is 'Bring Washington Home.' It is specifically my job as press secretary to make [our] district constituents know what he is doing for them."
>
> "Everything is geared toward making it easy for constituents to reach us."
>
> "There is an offensive and a defensive strategy. With the defensive strategy, not to use it pejoratively, things come in—emails, letters, phone calls—and for whatever message is received there is a proper response, and the correspondences are entered into a database….The offensive strategy tracks what we are doing each month, what big issues are. This is just making sure there is a balance: not just responding to inquiries but aiming directly to constituents."
>
> "The strategy is to get the Congresswoman out in front, to proactively communicate, not to be reactionary."
>
> "We try to be proactive and answer questions before they are asked, and put information into an easy to access format."
>
> "The traditional and new media complement each other. The new media amplify what is released through the traditional media. The people who follow the new media might not pick up the same newspaper as those who follow traditional media."

A couple of offices we interviewed take the useful step of creating an annual media plan at the beginning of each calendar year. One press secretary described hers as “an outline of what we want to accomplish—our goals for the year.” Another press secretary shared her office’s written “2009 Earned Media Plan,” in which there is a clearly-stated “Objective” and a “Strategy,” as well as “Proactive Priorities,” “Reactive Priorities,” and “Tools and Tactics.”

The “Objective” section of this plan states that its purpose is to “Create an infrastructure designed to allow for a sustained flow of communications to constituents for the purpose of” accomplishing three things:”

- “Keep constituents informed of the public policy debates occurring in Washington and how the proposed policies have an impact on [our district], throughout the state…and across the U.S.”
- “Communicate the Congressman’s policy positions and legislative priorities; explain why and how these reflect the interests of constituents”
- “Demonstrate that [the] Congressman…is using his position in Congress to the betterment of the District and the Nation”

The plan’s “Strategy” is “intended to both advance the Congressman’s policy goals and inform the public of the tangible differences and implications of [the two parties’] ideologies. Currently…the majority of our communications efforts will be proactive in nature (focusing especially on our five office priorities), and a small part of our communications efforts will necessarily be reactive in nature—that is, responding to and creating contrasts between our agenda and policy proposals being advocated by [the opposing party].”

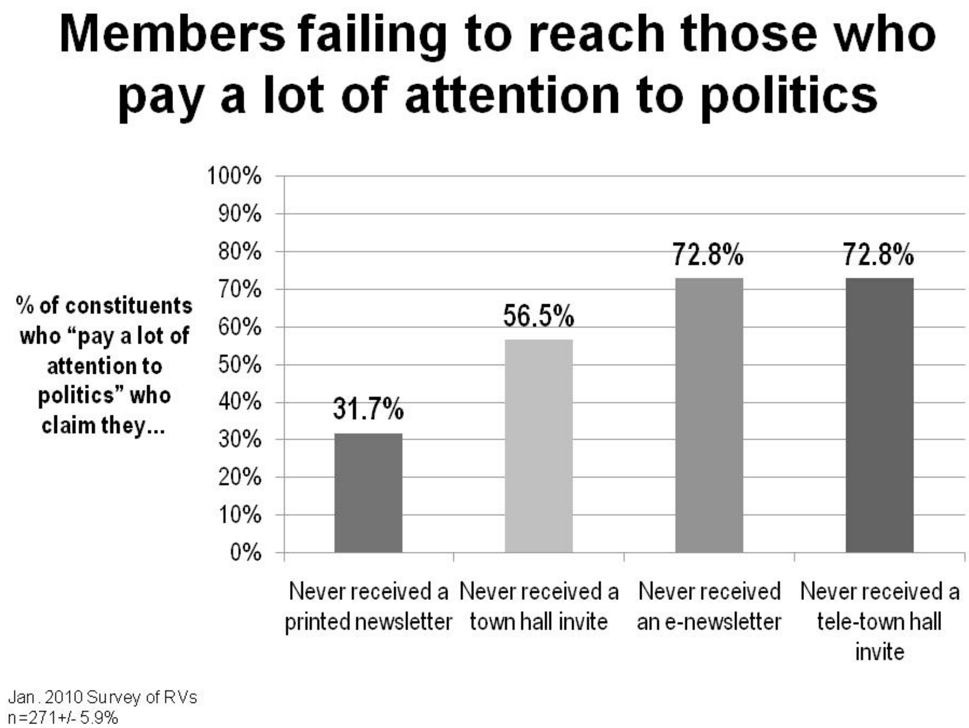
The “Proactive Priorities” are district-specific, but relate to both the highest issue priorities of that district in its entirety, as well as concerns of specific regions within the district. The “Reactive Priorities” are focused on rebutting ideologically-opposed media outlets on both the national and state/district level, while building the Member’s presence and name ID among ideologically-aligned media.

The “Tools and Tactics” include: “Issue-Based Networking,” “Constituent Communications,” “Alternative Media,” and outreach on a key social issue.

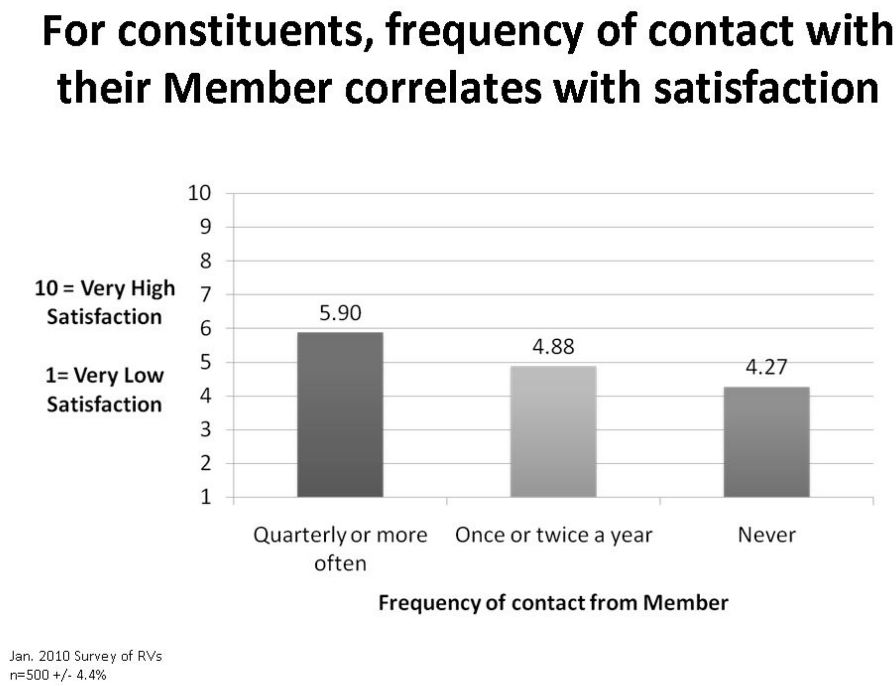
Further research could help determine whether offices that follow a formal communications plan are more effective than those that do not. But what’s hard to dispute is that in a world of proliferating media choices, Hill offices would do well to prioritize how they’re reaching out, and to whom.

**2) Huge percentages of constituents say they rarely/never hear from their Congressman. This matters because satisfaction with a Member’s job performance is in direct correlation with how frequently constituents hear from their Representative**

Despite all the efforts to reach constituents, there are massive percentages of constituents—including those who say they "pay a lot of attention to politics"—who claim they never receive a printed newsletter, e-newsletter, or an invite to either an in-district town hall or tele-town hall.




Why does this matter? In previous research we conducted for the Congressional Institute—and we found it again in 2010—there's been a consistent correlation between how frequently constituents hear from their Member and their satisfaction with the Member's job performance.




Such a considerable amount of a Member's staff time is spent responding to inbound constituent communications that the office-initiated outbound communications to constituents often becomes secondary. This emphasis is misplaced, and the greater priority should be placed on reaching households in the district with much more frequency.

3) **While the volume of incoming constituent correspondence ebbs and flows dramatically during the course of the year, most of the offices we interviewed handle between 1,000 and 2,000 inbound communications per week—the majority of which are email. The biggest challenges to handling the current volume of email are too few staff, and too much time required to provide a meaningful response to constituents inquiring about issues that require Member office research**

On the low end, we heard DC offices report an average of 500 pieces of mail per week. On the high end, one office reported an average of 2,500 per week. Most indicated that they process between 1,000 and 2,000 per week.

In Autumn 2009, there were huge spikes in mail during the healthcare debate that led up to the now-famous Saturday night House vote.

Unlike 10 or more years ago, when a lot of the correspondence arrived in the form of written mail via the USPS, most of the mail the offices process today is in the form of email from constituents, who are reaching out through the email application on the offices' official website.

Constituent “snail mail,” meaning written correspondence sent via the USPS, has slowed to a trickle, largely for two reasons. One is that faster forms of communication (such as email) have become more prevalent in our society. The other is that, according to the EPA, “in October 2001 the deadly micro-organism anthrax was found in mail sent to various news agencies and to the offices of U.S. Congressmen. As a precaution, the U.S. Postal Service, with assistance from FBI and national public health experts, began irradiating mail to kill potentially present anthrax spores.”[1]

This irradiation process—combined with delays associated with scanning snail mail so it can be electronically forwarded to offices—means that it commonly takes a month for a letter sent from a constituent to reach a House office. As a result, Members and their staffs told us they encourage constituents to use email and avoid snail mail if they want a timely response.

Whether the increased ease of sending email vs. snail mail has contributed to more outreach by constituents overall is an interesting hypothesis. But whatever the reason, House offices are struggling to cope with the large amounts of email they receive.

It was common for us to hear comments such as these from Hill offices:

> “One of the biggest challenges is sheer numbers, and sorting it all.”
>
> “The breadth of topics and the volume can be challenging for staff to dedicate attention to detail and quality to the response. The editing of the letters can be time-intensive. We have one person who pretty much only edits constituent mail.”
>
> “The challenge is the sheer volume; we have the same number of staff as 10 years ago, but we have 10 times the volume. That’s the frustrating part; just the volume is frustrating to keep up with. We are limited by budget and space, which limits the staff we can have.”

The good news is that no office conveyed that it was in a losing battle against constituent communications; in other words, no office said it was backed up with months’ worth of unprocessed queries awaiting replies.

The bad news is that the small percentage of constituent queries related to issues that are “off the beaten path” consume inordinate amounts of staff time, and can often take a month to be processed. In a hypothetical example we posed to many offices, we asked what would happen if a constituent asked about the Member’s position on U.S. trade policy towards Tanzania. The responses were all over the lot:

> “We ask for a phone number; for something like that we might call the person back to speak with them.”
>
> “For the oddball ‘Tanzania’ issues, we send a canned response where we say that we will keep it in mind if something comes up about it.”

[1] http://www.epa.gov/rpdweb01/mail-irradiation.html

> "This would go to an LA—we have never been written about this. The LC looks through the library and sees if there is an appropriate response."

> "Sometimes the LC will follow up by phone, and then do the research for oddball issues. This happens to less than two percent of the letters and emails received. Sometimes interns are allowed to research these issues."

> "When it seems like it is an obscure issue, it is often that the person actually wants something more general. We will ask: 'What do you want to know? Is this what you are asking? Are trying to get some trade numbers about Tanzania?' One question will lead to another. They might, for instance, write in about trade policy with Tanzania, but in actuality they are essentially asking about the Member's free trade policy."

The bottom line is that most offices take constituent queries very seriously—no matter how difficult they are to answer. And the resources consumed on these efforts arguably come at the expense of reaching far more constituents far more often.

**4) Offices remain split on how to respond to a constituent email message—whether with an email reply, or with a "snail" mail reply**

Despite all the efficiencies made possible by constituent management software commonly used on Capitol Hill, a number of House offices continue to respond to email queries with printed letters sent via the USPS. This is true not only for offices that are more traditional in their approach to technology, but ones that pride themselves on being among the most advanced.

From a constituent perspective, there's nothing really wrong with replying via snail-mail. Our January 2010 survey found the following:

- 72.8% of respondents told us that if they sent an email to the Member of Congress, they'd expect an email reply; *however…*
- 89.8% of respondents said that if they received a written reply instead, that would be satisfactory
- The main reason a written letter would be satisfactory is that it would seem "more official" than an email (cited by a plurality of 26.9%)

For the offices that send snail-mail replies, there is something inherently valuable in the act of mailing a printed letter to a constituent that cannot be captured by sending an email. We heard comments such as:

> "It is the personality of the Member to respond in paper; people remember it when they receive a paper response."

> "People like receiving formal letters. For instance, someone wrote about gun rights, and really liked the vote the Member cast on an issue, so he got a letter back. As it so happened, we visited his place of business, and [the Member] toured his dealership. The guy essentially said, 'I'm a huge fan, and you got back to me. As a matter of fact, I hung up the letter in my office.' He had hung up the letter, even though it was a form. He may be one of in a thousand that saved it—but I think it's a lot more who appreciate the printed letters."

> "We reply to every email with a paper response. Our staff tends to send a very tailored letter, which are less canned than other offices'."

> "I think the reason is that [the Member] is involved himself, and he personalizes it, and signs it. He has an almost eerie ability with names—he can remember meeting the person five years ago and write a personal note. He can write a note at the bottom, so the letter is substantive on the issue and personal."

Then there are those who dip their "email-reply toes" in the water, but won't fully dive in:

> "We have just established an email response policy. We will still respond in snail mail to email, but if there is a barrage, the email will be responded with email. An auto reply is generated saying that a reply will be given, but does not specify the form."

> "It's been an ongoing debate about whether we should shift to sending emails for emails. We may move over to it. It's the same issues every year. People like receiving formal letters."

Then there are the arguments not about the value of letters but about the shortcomings of email, which include:

> "When you send [email] electronically, you open yourself up to a lot. I had something about Armenia on Facebook, and a person forwarded it to others, and responses flooded my inbox…. With the email, there are a lot of people out there who want to argue for the sake of arguing. People get upset if you can't reply. You are setting yourself up for a lengthy debate…. When emailing, sometimes the constituent believes they are in direct correspondence with the Congressman, which gets messy."

> "[The Member] was concerned that the person would forward it, especially on the sensitive issues, and she was also concerned that emails were liable to manipulation."

Those offices that respond to email queries with email responses tend to follow what might be called a "consistent medium approach" to constituent communications. This means that phone queries get phone responses, emails get email responses, and printed letters (which are often scanned offsite for security reasons and forwarded electronically to the Congressional offices) receive “snail mail” responses.

> “How a constituent contacts us determines what format their response is, and we lean toward e-mail, which cuts down on paper and cuts down on time. We use Write Your Rep as our e-mail contact [system]. If a constituent includes their e-mail, they will get an e-mail response. If they include hard mail address, they will get letter. If someone writes in a letter and includes an e-mail address, they will get a response on e-mail, not hard mail. The same goes for telephone calls, and faxes. If they include e-mail, they will get e-mail response. If they only give hard mail, they will get a letter.”

> “If you have email, we respond that way, regardless of how you contacted us. It takes about 20-30 minutes to fold and stuff 100 envelopes—thousands become daunting.”

When it comes to the rationale for sending email responses to email queries, offices told us:

> “They think less of you if you send snail mail for email. I’ve seen email in past years where you send a printed letter [response], and they reply, ‘What? You don’t understand email?’”

> “If we respond with snail-mail, we are paying for that mail unnecessarily. It comes out of our franking budget.”

The cost issue is clearly one that is on the minds of offices that need to maximize the efficient use of their MRA. The House Committee on Administration informed us that with the batching discount commonly applied to outgoing mail, Members pay approximately 35 cents for each pre-sorted piece of First Class franked mail sent to constituents.

Assuming a Member currently mails out 1,000 pieces per week, that works out to 52,000 pieces per year. At a cost of 35 cents each, those 52,000 pieces cost $18,200 in postage. This is equal to 1.3% of the office’s annual MRA. Additionally, some offices use outside firms to fold and stuff envelopes; one office told us it pays 8 cents each for this service. Applying that additional expense to 52,000 pieces adds $4,160.

We interviewed the senior staff of one Congressional office where they had previously worked for a now-deceased Member—one who used to reply to all constituent communications with snail mail. They described how this now-deceased Member regularly had stacks of letters awaiting signature, and how this was one of the key bottlenecks in providing a timely reply to constituents.

The differences between how their current office functions, versus their prior office, are telling:

*Chief of Staff*: [The late Member I worked for] insisted on sending snail mail to the constituent regardless of how the communication was received; with [our current boss], we respond in kind, even calling those who called us.

[How much time and money has been saved?]

*Chief of Staff*: Just with franking it is hard to tell how much money is saved; I've never tried to figure it out. The time is the biggest problem.

*Press Secretary*: It saves an unbelievable amount of time. With the email programs, you can get a bundle of a couple hundred emails with three clicks. It's incalculable how much time is saved. Under the new way it would take eight hours to go through 1,000 emails. Processing a single snail mail letter can take a week and a half versus 1-2 days for email.

*Chief of Staff*: We had to hire a second Legislative Correspondent just to handle the mail under [the late Member. With the current office], the two LCs are involved with other things. Then [with the late Member,] the LAs all wrote mail, too; so it was a team effort. We had a senior LA, 2 LAs, and two LCs. The LCs were devoted full time to processing mail; the LAs spent 30-40 percent of their time on mail, and the same went for the senior LA. The LD spent 50 percent of his time on mail too. It was 3.5 full-time people.

With the new model, we still have two LCs, one of whom does outreach, and the other performs administrative work. Seventy percent of their time is spent on mail. We have a military LA and a defense fellow (who is an active duty)…. Two LAs spend 20 percent of their time on email, senior LA spends 15 percent, and a district caseworker spends 10 percent on mail. The LD spends 30 percent. Also, the amount of correspondence has grown, with people who have never written before now writing on healthcare.

[Is 100 percent of the decrease due to the change to e-mail?]

*Chief of Staff*: Much of the freed-up time is now going to outreach, organizing college workshops, hosting job fairs, helping advisory councils. The military LA and defense fellow focus more on policy. It allows us to have a deeper involvement in the issues. It has made the Member better on policy, while still allowing him to respond to the constituents. I definitely think it has helped the Member be more informed and more involved in the policy decisions.

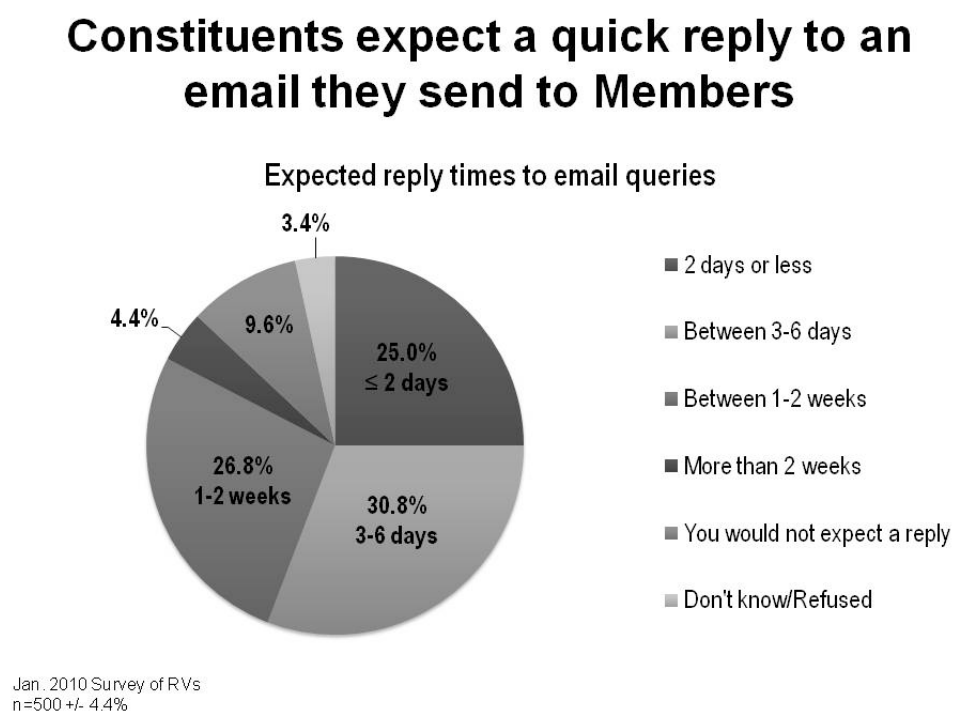
[The late Member] was concerned that the person would forward an email, especially on the sensitive issues, and [the late Member] was also concerned that emails were liable to manipulation.

*Press Secretary*: Sending emails has cut down on the paper costs and cut down on man-hours, too.

*Chief of Staff*: We can be more proactive and send people information on the activities of the member.

**5) House offices typically require between one and two weeks to reply to a constituent email query about public policy, with very specific replies requiring up to a month. But some offices can turn around 90% of their email in two-to-three days**

From a constituent perspective, many Hill offices are not meeting constituent expectations when it comes to turn-around time for email queries. Our survey found a majority (55.8%) expect a reply to an email query within one week. In fact, 25.0% told us they expect a reply within two days.




Our interviews with Hill offices made clear that no two offices process email the exact same way. There are variations between offices that are slight, and others that are major.

One primary factor determining how long it takes to process mail is whether the outgoing correspondence needs to be viewed by the chief of staff and/or Member before heading out the door. This is often where the key bottlenecks occur. It is not usually a problem with the software, or the lower level staffers—it's rooted in what might be termed an "excess of caution" when corresponding with constituents.

Here's how one office handles an incoming email, and this would be viewed as "normal" on the Hill: The legislative correspondent receives the email and batches it with other emails on the same subject. The email is then coded into the office's IQ (constituent management software) program so there's a formal record kept of the correspondence, and a way to reply. The LC then sends an early draft reply to an LA, who weighs in on content, and then the LC will complete the draft of the letter. The text is then sent to the chief of staff, who weighs in as well and makes other edits to the draft. Finally, the letter is given to the Member, who may make some final edits or just sign the letter—and it is a written letter, not an email reply. This typically takes two weeks.

As one office told us about their process, which is very similar to the one described above:

> "It's not the best system; the best thing would be to take one step out somehow, but I am not sure where to remove it. The LA has to look for content, and the Chief of Staff has to look for style. In this office, the Member wants the second set of eyes to look at it—that is his level of comfort. It's cumbersome, but works for the office."

One office described a process that had even more touch points for an incoming email:

> "It goes to an Intern, then the LC, then the LA, then the LD, then the Press Secretary (for important topics), then the Deputy Chief of Staff, then the Chief of Staff, and finally the Member (for important issues)."

So, how do other offices cut their turn-around time when it comes to constituent emails? Simply put, they bypass the senior-level in the office.

One office described it this way:

> "We just have one LC to do everything. The LC writes under his own [the LC's] name; there are not a lot of customs emails that go out under [the Member's] name….The response is usually given immediately, if they get a form letter. It can be as little as five minutes. One to two weeks for the oddball issues. In some cases they just want to know how he is voting—the form letter is helpful then. But if they are venting—the form letter is not as helpful."

In short, the LC is trusted to reply on behalf of the office, and the correspondence process is thoroughly streamlined and accelerated.

In another office we interviewed, the LC also plays a vital role. Here's how the chief of staff and press secretary describe it:

> *Chief of Staff*: We have the LC decide whether the correspondence needs a long or short response. We do have form letters for big issues (like healthcare)—these are not hard. It is the 40 people who are writing about different issues that are problem.

*Press Secretary*: We've gone through different levels of how rigid the process of approval is—but now the more flexible structure works better for us.

*Chief of Staff*: [An incoming email] will get touched by the LC or a trained intern. At that point, it is routed to a batch of letters—IQ has a tool to batch.

*Press Secretary*: There is the acknowledgement pile, and we can send a response when ready.

*Chief of Staff*: The LC will make all the decisions; the trained intern will help, but the LC will take a look at the batching. There will be a pro and con batch [on each issue]. The intern will never click the print button [which also sends the emails]. <u>No one at the senior level sees the correspondence</u>. We get a weekly report, with hot topics, which helps us decide what goes onto the website. We track the responses going out. IQ prints an executive summary that gives the details of the positions.

## 6) The fall of the "dinosaur media" and the rise of "social media" is radically altering how Hill offices produce news and interact with constituents

The rapid transformation of the media landscape is requiring Members and their staffs to adjust accordingly. One of the most dramatic shifts has been the decreasing number of reporters from home-state newspapers who are stationed in Washington and tasked with covering Members from their states.

Office after office told us that the number of home-state reporters has been reduced to few or none. What this has caused is a shift in tactics in order to get the Member covered at home.

One press secretary told us she spends a lot of time scheduling meetings with in-district newspaper editorial boards when the Member is back home. The idea is that if the newspaper won't come to cover the Member, the Member will go to the newspaper. And, this press secretary told us, one visit to the newspaper could yield three or four stories on different topics.

Another result of the shrinkage of home-state newspaper coverage is that Hill communication directors and press secretaries increasingly find their bosses in the position of not being the subjects of stories written by professional reporters. Instead, these Members are the key players in newspaper stories written by none other than their own staffs.

In some cases, home-state newspapers will print a Member's press release without editing it. Other newspapers will print what are essentially pre-crafted newspaper articles, complete with back-up quotes as supporting evidence, that are produced by Member offices. Short on reporters to cover Members of Congress, these newspapers take what they can get—especially if it's free.

What's particularly noteworthy in this new media realm is the creative role that social media sites are playing.

For example, one Hill office told us that when they produced a news story about the Member for a home-state media outlet, they cited in the piece the personal situation of a constituent who was going to be harmed by a proposed piece of legislation. How did they know about this constituent's predicament? The constituent posted it on the Member's Facebook page.

In another example, one Member told us that when he goes to visit editorial boards in person, the newspaper will ask to videotape the session so it can post it online. And what does the Member do? He takes out his own camera and does the same—in order to keep the newspaper honest. The Member's clips find their way to his official website and his Youtube page.

The greatest perceived value of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, is that it gives the Member new ways of reaching new audiences directly, without the filter of the so-called "dinosaur media."

With Twitter particularly, communications directors, press secretaries, and chiefs of staff believe they are able to get the word out to large numbers of "followers" who they believe help influence the debate on a particular issue, or act as influencers within the Member's Congressional district. And Twitter also is viewed as a way to keep home-state newspaper reporters—those still employed—abreast of the Member's activities in Washington on a continuous basis. As one press secretary told us:

> "Twitter, more than anything, is a tool to let Capitol Hill and reporters get things. They want to know right away and not wait for the press release. It's a window on the day-to-day operations and not the big picture."

Poll results show opportunity to attract the young

Another perceived benefit of social media is that Members are using a cutting-edge medium to reach a demographic—younger voters—who have traditionally been harder to connect with.

In our survey, 55.1% of 18-29 year olds said they check Facebook at least several times a week (and 40.6% check it several times a day). Not surprisingly, 42% of this group either strongly or completely agrees with the statement that "If you knew your Congressman was using it, Facebook would be a great way for you personally to keep up with his activities."

With the older age groups, the percentages of respondents both using Facebook and thinking it's a great way to keep up with their Member are considerably lower.

Twitter has nowhere near the penetration of Facebook, even with the 18-29 demographic. In our survey, just 4.3% of 18-29 year olds said they “tweet” at least several times a week. Perhaps envisioning Twitter’s potential for political purposes, 15.8% of this age group either strongly or completely agrees with the statement that “If you knew your Congressman was using it, Twitter would be a great way for you personally to keep up with his activities.”

Among the older age groups, as with Facebook, the percentages of respondents both using Twitter and thinking it’s a great way to keep up with their Member are lower.

One other point about reaching younger constituents: In our survey, the number one way 18-29 year-olds said they wanted to learn about their Congressman was by being invited to physical town hall meetings. (Number two was to read about him on the Internet). What this suggests is that there’s a place for combining old and new outreach processes to get to this age group.

### “New media” staffing increases on the Hill

Most of the communications staffers we spoke with post online comments on behalf of the Members they work for. But one staffer’s comments made it clear that Members are being transformed by social media:

> “People really enjoy the direct access. They like that they are talking to him. It’s very conversational. They like that they can jump on the computer and they have contacted him. Often times he will stay up until 2 a.m. responding to these people. It’s more personable, especially the video components. They like to see him talking, rather than looking at a picture. We just redesigned our website so you can comment on everything, every press release, every news article.”

The advent of intense social media activity on the Hill has raised the question of whether the typical House office should employ a staffer whose sole duty is to handle this task and tasks related to new media. In speaking with many communications professionals and chiefs of staff, the consistent answer we heard is “no—at least not yet.” The only exception would be for Members who are either in leadership or serve as chairmen or ranking members of committees, where the sheer volume of communications produced by the Member (and the committee) might warrant a staffer to push it out to the public.

Most interviewees believe that a press secretary, communications director, and/or Member himself can handle the current demands of new media day-to-day without a dedicated full-time staffer. (This may change dramatically in the next few years.) As the demands generated by new media intensify, offices may want to shift MRA dollars from more traditional outreach (such as mass franked mail pieces) to more cutting-edge outreach (such as hiring a part-time new media director). One press secretary whose office does *not* employ a full-time new media staffer told us:

> “I spend two to three hours a day on Facebook, including posting [and] linking, [and] an hour posting items and reading messages during the day, and an hour reading things later at night. It’s not labor intensive.”

An unresolved question is whether the modest size of the audiences currently engaged in politics via new media justifies the significant amount of time and attention being given to it by Members and staff. The fact remains that Members of Congress represent approximately 700,000 people each. Yet, most Members who have a presence on Facebook and Twitter have followers who number in the hundreds or low-thousands.

When asked about this apparent disparity, our interviewees typically referred to the ripple effect inherent in social media. In other words, a single “tweet” or Facebook posting by a Member would be viewed by hundreds of people, but invariably it would be forwarded to thousands more by “re-tweeting” or “re-posting.”

(One very useful research study, which would probably require the cooperation of Facebook and/or Twitter directly, would analyze this ripple effect of Member postings to see how far and wide the typical posting travels on the Internet.)

### “Message of the Day” Strategy

Some offices have proactively begun to build a communications strategy around new media. One office told us that it has developed a “message of the day” that is translated into a “tweet” and Facebook post when the Member is not in the district physically. As the chief of staff to this Member noted:

> “Especially take this quarter [4Q09]—there have been few opportunities to be in the district. The social media creates a virtual presence in the district. It is a presence of doing something, of accomplishment—it is a record of what he is up to. It is a way for us to manage that message.”

What’s intriguing about this approach, as the senior staff told us, is that “not every message culminates in a press release.” Sometimes the message of the day is literally a headline, and nothing more.

The benefits to this “message of the day” approach are that it imposes order on an unruly communications process; it creates a predictable communications flow outbound to journalists who follow/cover this Member, as well as to his base supporters; and it ensures that days don’t pass when there are no updates—so it conveys continuous activity to the recipients and viewers.

Another chief of staff described how daily social media posts provide a perspective that otherwise might not be available:

> “We update new media at least once a day. With it, there is personal interaction with people; some think that [the Member] is doing this personally [when actually

> the staff is posting on his behalf]. Sometimes we will print the Facebook page [with viewer reaction] for [the Member] to see. For instance, C-SPAN interviewed him one day about Afghanistan, and the callers disagreed with him, but the wall [on the Member's Facebook page] showed that he had supporters on this issue. It gave us access to another new point of view. "

This chief of staff noted that during the healthcare debate in the House, her office was posting updates on Facebook and Twitter every half hour. This helped keep grassroots activists informed and engaged—and enhanced the impression that the Member was highly engaged.

Offices that think strategically can also use social media to piggyback off of high-profile events. One office told us:

> "The number one benefit is getting ourselves placed in media we would not normally be placed in. We try to take advantage of major events—like the State of the Union—and [my boss's] response has been in the *Seattle Times* and the *Times* of London. It also goes to the grassroots followers, who re-tweet and send it along. It goes to people previously untouched by us."

We asked what benefit accrues to a Member from the Mid-Atlantic region to be quoted in Seattle or the U.K. The press secretary replied:

> "When you do an internet search for him on Google, it will come up, especially if it's a bigger site. It gets us into the media, and reporters will then come to us, rather than my calling them."

<u>Other uses of social media tools</u>

Other offices have used social media tools to promote physical events in the district. One communications director told us:

> "We had a healthcare town hall and used Google ads [targeted paid ads that appear whenever constituents conduct a Google search on their computers] and social media to market it. It went viral and we had 3,000 attendees. There was heavy traditional media interest, but we used social media because it was quick and easy."

His chief of staff added:

> "With the healthcare town hall, we asked people to send RSVPs just to see how many seats to set up. However, the tea party crowd saw this, and took this to mean we were using it as a way to weed out people; they forwarded it to others, and this got it to people who wouldn't have heard it."

The attitude toward the entire "new media" phenomenon can be summarized by what one press secretary told us:

> "[With new media] we can shape a personality for the Member. I just started blogging a little bit, and am changing it to his perspective. I've been the one in the beginning getting him into this. I would like him to do Twitter more on his own. I've been doing 'twit pics,' and then other people on Twitter re-tweeted it—so people who know [the Member, who is in leadership] now know who [my boss is], and have friended him on Facebook. I take a photo with a Blackberry, and then put the picture on Twitter. I took a picture, and put on the Twitter feed, which then goes to Facebook feed. [This Congressman in leadership] re-tweeted this picture, and his friends saw it. It increases his space in the fight….Part of my initial thing was getting YouTube set up, getting social media set up. To me that was important as local media."

What's critical is that all this new and social media be integrated, so that one update appears on not only Facebook, but also Twitter, Youtube, and on the Member's official site.

**7) In addition to the benefits, using social media to communicate with constituents has plenty of shortcomings**

As Members think through the amount of staff time dedicated to social media, there are several shortcomings that offices raised with us that should be taken into consideration alongside the benefits. These shortcomings include:

- Twitter is limited to 140 characters per "tweet," so it's difficult to have a substantive discussion that way. Offices need to add a link to a press release or speech to tell the full story.

- If a policy-related question from a constituent comes in via Facebook or Twitter, and it requires a specialized answer (not one that can be referenced to a page on the Congressman's website), the communication needs to be entered into IQ and formally processed—and the office will not have the constituent's full contact information available. As one chief of staff told us: "A Facebook posting is not part of the communications 'system.' We try to redirect them into the system, and [IQ] database, for a formal reply. We don't monitor Facebook for casework or policy. It is for getting information out."

- Even though they are very time-pressed, some Members are adding the duty of responding themselves to Facebook postings.

- Members who are using real-time Internet video broadcast tools such a Qik.com may convey something unintended because of the informal setting in which the technology is employed (such as during a interview conducted walking down the street). The informality might lead the Member to say something unintended—something that might not have been said if interviewed in a formal setting, such as a TV or radio studio.

- Conversely, the informality of social networks also means that constituents dash off messages to Members they may later regret sending. Members have had to deal with constituents who apologized to them for sounding off without thinking.

- Then there's the vulnerability to criticism: "The shortcoming is that you are laying yourself out there. You can't throw the punch unless you can take the punch. You can have a whole swarm of people attacking you," as one staffer said. Another said, "You can get some folks who don't like [the Member] very much. You get people spouting off. None has gained traction, but it could."

- Members who need to approve every Facebook posting or tweet are a bottleneck to faster communication and a cause of additional stress for staff.

- Offices are concerned about breaking House rules inadvertently. One communications director said, "I wish there were more regulations to let me know what I can and can't do."

- Members need to maintain separate "official" and "unofficial" Facebook accounts if they want to post material that is both related and unrelated to official business. The same holds true for Twitter. This creates confusion for supporters and added work for staff. As one communications staffer put it: "I think that the biggest shortcoming is that there is so much we cannot do because the House rules are so restrictive. The franking rules applied to online communication supposedly prohibit you from making it primarily personal, where the whole point is to make a persona for yourself."

- "Coming up with new content every day is hard. I don't want to let 10 days lapse between tweeting. People know that you are not engaged if you do that," one staffer said. But as another said, "We are still trying to assess the benefits to tweeting half the day. This is all a big experiment."

- “We are hitting a smaller audience. We have to dedicate staff time each day to it, and depending on the issue, it might not get a big bite.”

- “The sheer volume makes it tough because you cannot respond to it all. People do not think through it as much, and people expect a response. Do we log it into the database? There is not a good way to manage it, and it is labor intensive—you don’t get all the information—if any. You don’t know who’s a constituent sometimes,” one staffer observed.

**8) While there are myriad ways Members structure and maintain their presence on Facebook, no broad consensus exists about which approaches are the best, and there’s insufficient evidence to suggest any one approach is better than another**

In the year since our last report, which focused exclusively on Facebook, Members’ engagement in social media has expanded significantly—along with the size of their fan bases. At the same time, however, no “one best way” has emerged to guide Members who are entering the social media world for the first time—or enhance their presence if they’re already there.

Facebook remains in a constant state of flux. This flux, and the absence of long-standing, “traditional” ways of doing things there, means there are many ways to establish a Member’s viable presence on Facebook. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, and generally reflects the personality of each Member.

Behaving as if Facebook were a Chinese restaurant menu, Members are plucking what they like from different sets of options. And in 2010, it remains difficult to offer firm guidance in terms of avoiding one approach and embracing another—other than to stay mindful of House guidelines that require keeping official business and campaign business separate.

There are three basic ways for a Member to maintain a presence on Facebook:

<u>Official Page</u>: Think of this as an extension of a Member’s official website, operating in the Facebook environment. On an official page, Members engage “supporters.” (Other types of celebrities engage “fans.”)

<u>Campaign Page</u>: Think of this as an extension of a Member’s campaign website, operating in the Facebook environment. Similar to an official Facebook page, the

campaign page also has "supporters." Importantly, Members cannot migrate supporters from an official page to a campaign page, or vice versa.

<u>Profile</u>: This is the kind of presence that the typical Facebook user maintains. These typical users don't have supporters; they have "friends." (It's a peer-to-peer relationship, rather than a celebrity-to-fan relationship or a Member-to-supporter relationship.) One reason some Members like to maintain their presence via the profile is that it causes the typical Facebook user to view the Member more informally—as someone who's approachable (and not on a pedestal). A shortcoming, however, is that Facebook limits the number of friends to 5,000 per account, and there are Members who have (or are about to) hit that limit. No such limit exists for the two other types of pages (official and campaign).

Our research found that some Members maintained all three types of presence on Facebook. Others maintained two of the three, while others maintained just one (or none at all).

While Members will judge for themselves how extensive a presence they should maintain on Facebook, what's important is that they view it as a tool that will have increasing value as the years pass. In an average Member's district, there are more than 200,000 constituents using Facebook. According to Facebook, half of these log on at least once on any given day. This is not an audience that Members can or should ignore—it would be like not having a telephone when 200,000+ constituents use one.

At the cutting edge, Members are using Facebook to:

- Build a relationship with the most informed and engaged constituents
- Alert constituents about upcoming votes, tele town halls and physical town halls
- Encourage constituents to call the state's senators in advance of a vote
- Create a Member-sponsored forum for discussion among supporters
- Recommend other media items for supporters to view (news articles, videos)
- Find constituents to act as the "face" of an issue for them

**9) While Member websites remain the focal point of most offices' Internet presence, a comprehensive strategy seamlessly integrates an official website into social media and takes advantage of programs to track visitor behavior**

Members are *not* in any way giving up on their official websites in order to build a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Rather, all these sites are being integrated by the most wired Hill offices, so every Facebook posting also becomes a tweet, as well as an update on the Member's website. In short, using Internet tools such as hootsuite and ping, the same update appears in a Member's multiple web locations simultaneously.

As one chief of staff described it, the website is his office's "information hub." One could view the social media sites as the spokes.

Furthermore, a number of offices we interviewed had updated (or were planning to update) their official websites to reflect the rise of social media. Besides giving their sites a more modern look, Members have been integrating links to Facebook and Twitter (and other web features) onto their home pages. Video posted on Youtube is commonly linked to the website. What all this integration usefully signals to online visitors is that their Member is active in the same social media that they are—and that constituents are welcome to join them there.

Where there is a huge opportunity going forward is to tailor websites to more effectively meet the expectations of constituents—and to better meet constituents' needs.

For example, Google offers a tool called "Google Analytics" that enables a Congressional office to track visitor behavior. This tool enables an office to know such critical items as:

A) How many people are visiting their website in any given time period
B) What the web traffic was on a particular day
C) What percentage of these people are from within their states vs. neighboring states or even other countries
D) Which cities in their states are originating the most visitors
E) What percentage of visitors to the website are first-time vs. repeat visitors—and if repeat, how many times they returned since their first visit
F) Whether visitors came directly to the home page, or entered the website via a search engine, or from a link from another site
G) Which particular pages on the website visitors viewed—with the total number of visitors for each page quantified
H) How long visitors stayed during their visit

We analyzed the data from one freshman Member's website, and uncovered some interesting material, such as:

A) As of January 7, 2010, the website was visited more than 35,000 times since tracking began in late March 2009.

B) About two-third of the visits were unique; the other one-third were from people who had visited in the past.
C) More than eight percent of the visitors had visited the website more than 100 times in a nine-and-a-half month period.
D) The average amount of time spent on the website was less than three minutes, suggesting that either visitors found what they needed quickly, or determined they could not find what they wanted quickly enough—and left.
E) Perhaps most importantly, in looking at which pages people actually did visit when they got to this Member's site, we found that about half the visitors do not venture beyond the home page. Among those who *do* go beyond, the most frequently visited page is the one that tells them how to contact the Member; the next-most-commonly-visited page contains the Member's bio. This argues for making the "contact me" and "about" links on the home page as prominent and easy to use as possible.

While the Google Analytics software does not provide identifying information about each website visitor, the aggregate data certainly can help guide offices to create the most user-friendly websites available by tracking behaviorally what previous viewers were looking for. (This could serve as the basis for future research on Congressional website design.)

We also interviewed one chief of staff who deliberately does *not* shower a lot of attention on his office's website because he believes doing so would not advance the Member's strategy to focus office resources on higher-priority constituents. This chief of staff says, "If I hit 100,000 households with a tele-town hall, why am I beating my brains out with a website that gets a few thousand visitors a month?"

**10) New technologies help build efficiencies in Congressional offices, as well as provide new and varied ways to reach out**

Most offices we interviewed embraced new technologies in order to increase either their efficiency or their outreach capabilities. But several staffers were quite candid that while technology creates greater efficiencies in some respects, it generates new types of work that never existed before (such as replying to Facebook and Twitter posts). One chief of staff remarked:

> "New media is increasing the workload—formerly you would just answer calls from reporters; now you are more active, producing video, press releases, etc. It has increased the staff resources needed."

The new technologies most often cited as efficiency-boosters were email, e-newsletters, and tele-town halls, given their capacity to reach large numbers of people at little cost. As one tech-savvy office told us, the mantra there is “do more with less”—and be sure to tout to constituents they didn’t spend their full MRA.

Other technologies might not make the office more efficient, but rather more innovative. A few offices have taken advantage of “flip-cams”—low cost video cameras—to capture video of the Members and/or his staff and upload it onto sites such as Youtube. The footage is then accessible through the website and promoted via Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites. One chief of staff handed us a pile of favorable press clips about her boss after he videotaped an impromptu office-roaming interview with his DC staff and posted it online; the local media liked that the Member humanized for the folks back home what was previously viewed as an anonymous staff.

Another office we interviewed uses Qik.com to conduct live broadcasts from the Member to viewers over the web; these are archived for future viewing by those who missed the live broadcast.

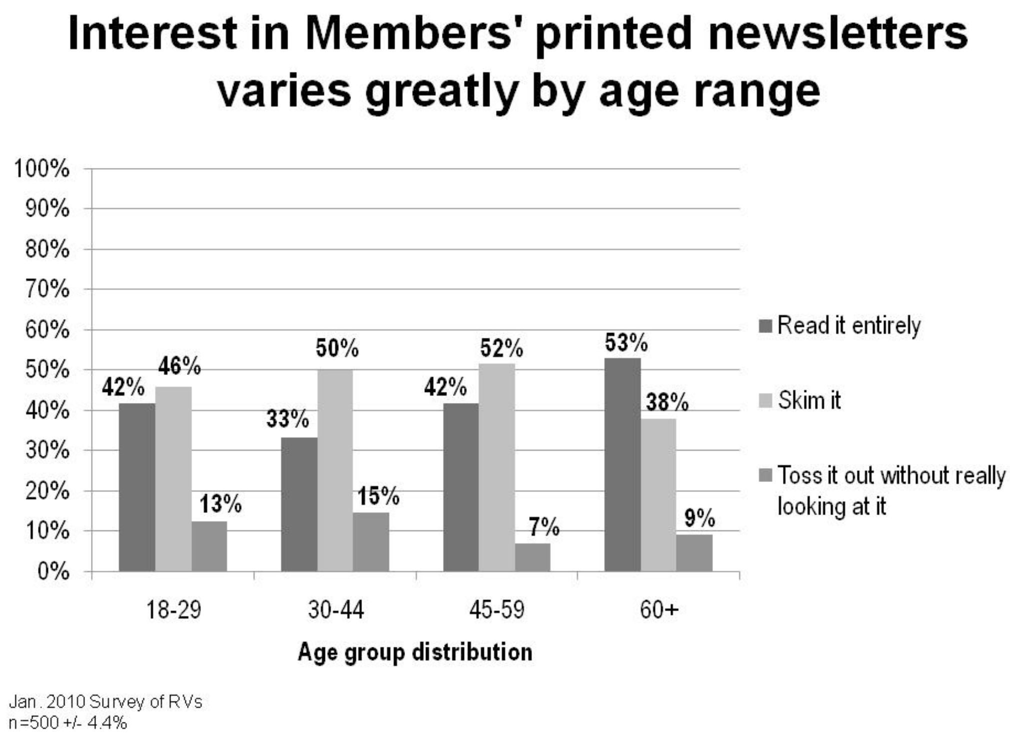
Other technologies offices are using include:

- Sending mass text message updates to supporters who sign up to receive them
- Conducting “cot-side chats” from the Member’s cot in his office (he sleeps there during the week) and posting online
- Creating a Facebook group, independent of a particular Member, to build a constituency for a particular cause
- Promoting a “Service Academy Day” through targeted online ads
- Using satellite to piggyback on major events (like a Presidential address to Congress) to appear on TV back home
- Conducting video tele-town halls, so constituents can watch on their computers as they listen

**11) Use of mass franked mail is on the decline, but targeted 499s are in, as well as highly-targeted smaller mailings of 3,000 to 5,000 pieces**

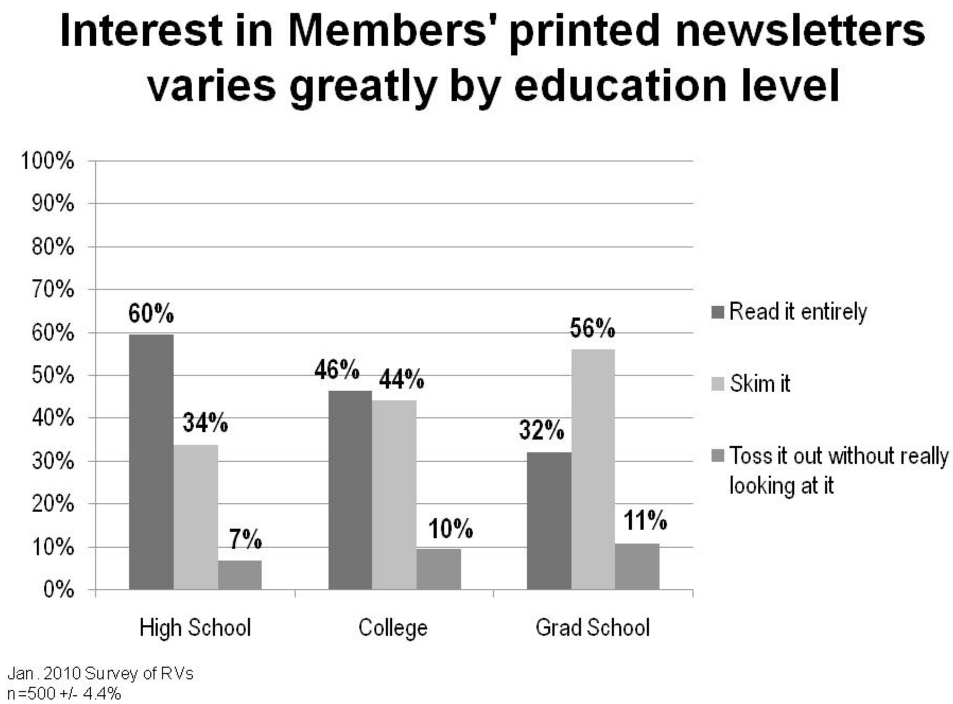
There are some widely-held perceptions about mass franked mail pieces. One is that it is read far more by older voters than by younger ones. Indeed, our survey results back this up.

Among those ages 60+, 52.9% say that when they receive a printed newsletter from their Congressman, they read it entirely (as opposed to skimming it or just tossing it). Among those in younger age groups, the “read entirely” percentages are 11 to 19 percentage points lower than those age 60+, depending upon the age range.




Another perception is that there is a large amount of waste associated with sending printed newsletters. One chief of staff told us, “People see it as self-serving: it goes from their hand to the trash.”

While that might be the case for some recipients, the printed newsletter also has particular value to constituents who are not well educated, as this chart shows:




The fact is that mass mailings have a place in Capitol Hill discourse—if they are targeted appropriately. As one press secretary told us:

> "There are some people without internet, let alone DSL, and don't even have running water—and they can still vote. Perhaps in 20 years [postal] mailing will not be done, but not yet."

And a chief of staff said:

> "We are using all traditional communications less, but not jettisoning them. There are a lot of seniors in the district, and we don't want to alienate people."

Given offices' abilities to target their mailings more accurately by using demographic information and known interest area of constituents, many staffers commented on their offices' increasingly reliance on 499s sent both via USPS and e-mail.

These 499s derive their name from House regulations that require unsolicited mailings of 500 or more substantially-identical pieces to receive franking approval before being sent to constituents. To spare themselves the franking review process, House offices will send batches of mail right up to the 500 limit—literally 499 pieces exactly—without actually reaching the limit. Furthermore, 499s can be sent during the "blackout" periods immediately preceding elections. Both "snail mail" and e-newsletters fall under the 499 category.

The advantages of 499s over mass mail pieces were described by one Hill staffer as follows:

> "[In 2009 we] sent one glossy to 19,000 vets, when Obama wanted them to pay for their healthcare. It was too good to pass up. We have two senators [from our state] who don't use [glossy mass mail pieces], so the unfriendly press can hit us on using the money during economic downturn, when these mailers are considered an election tool. There are two major unfriendly papers who would smack us upside the head for using them. We try to do a 499 for every press release he does—we target people from a zip code, by topic, by interest code, to places where we did not do so well. We have sent out 25-30 [499s in 2009]. A lot of them go out by email, but we send some by snail mail. Ten to 15 have been done by snail mail. These are distinct from the [large scale] email newsletter [which this office sends out once a month]….We check the people who we want to hit [with the 499], and send them to those who have email, and snail mail to those who don't."

We spoke to offices that send out 499s as often as weekly. Most of them do it at least every month or two. But there were a few that reported never sending out 499s at all in 2009.

The 499s offer many distinct advantages, such as not being subject to pre-election blackout periods, and not needing pre-approval from the Committee on House Administration. Members cannot use them for any purpose other official business.

One office we interviewed aggressively sends highly-targeted mail in small batches (3,000 to 5,000) based upon known narrow interest areas (or lifestyle areas) of constituents. For example, it will rent lists of constituents who are concerned about animal welfare, or those who are likely to use a particular type of energy to heat their homes, or those likely to have student loans, etc. Then they will match this list against some recent vote that the Member cast—one that would be of potential interest to each person on a particular list.

As this chief of staff observed, his boss cast "1,200 votes last year. All of them are important to somebody….We find people who benefit from legislation and tell them [what the Member supported]."

What's interesting is that this office does not use 499s generally for these types of mailings—instead they're using franked mail pieces that are approved by House Administration. Their use of 499s is generally scheduled for the blackout period, and during this time it's standard practice in this office to mail 90 different 499s. They target 14,970 households (comprising 30 distinct groups of 499 each), and each household receives three distinct 499s in the month preceding the election, spaced 10 days apart.

Another practice of this office is to execute an ongoing program called "Congress on Your Corner." It is a four-part exercise where the Member:

a) Mails a postcard to households in a portion of the district to announce an upcoming event
b) Places a robo pre-call shortly before the event to these households
c) Conducts the event
d) Mails a follow-up letter to the households telling them about the event

As the chief of staff said, "The Member does not go anywhere in the district where we don't send a letter about it."

Not surprisingly, this office spent $250,000 on mail in 2009.

### 12) E-newsletters provide inexpensive outreach to thousands of constituents, and opted-in constituents can be emailed during black-out periods

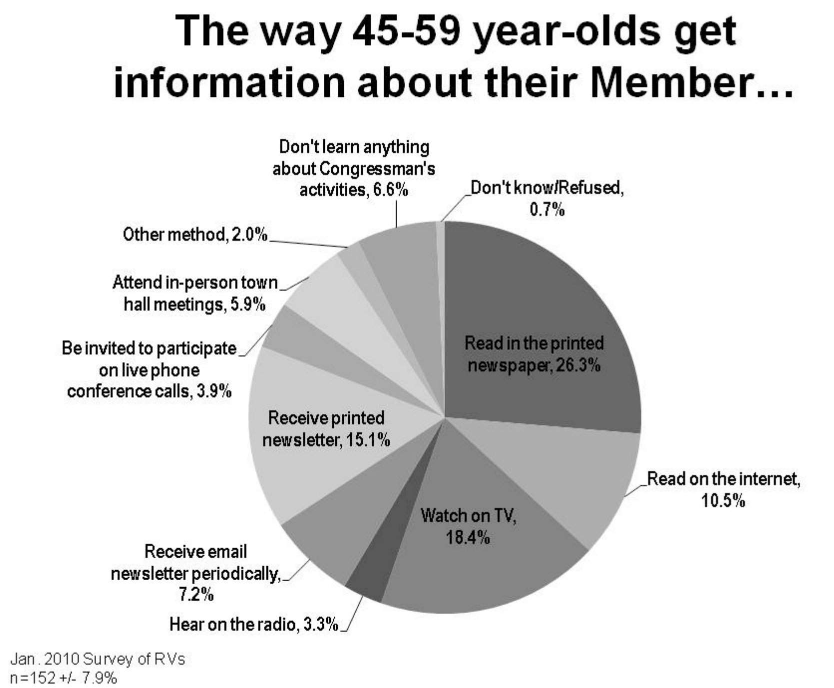
We interviewed offices that rarely send e-newsletters, and others that do so every week. We found offices with very small lists of "opt-in" constituents, while others make it a core component of their strategies to build their "opt-in" lists to be as large as possible. One office we interviewed has 60,000 opt-in subscribers ("Opt-in" status for constituent emails gives the Member the opportunity to contact these constituents during 90-day blackout periods.)

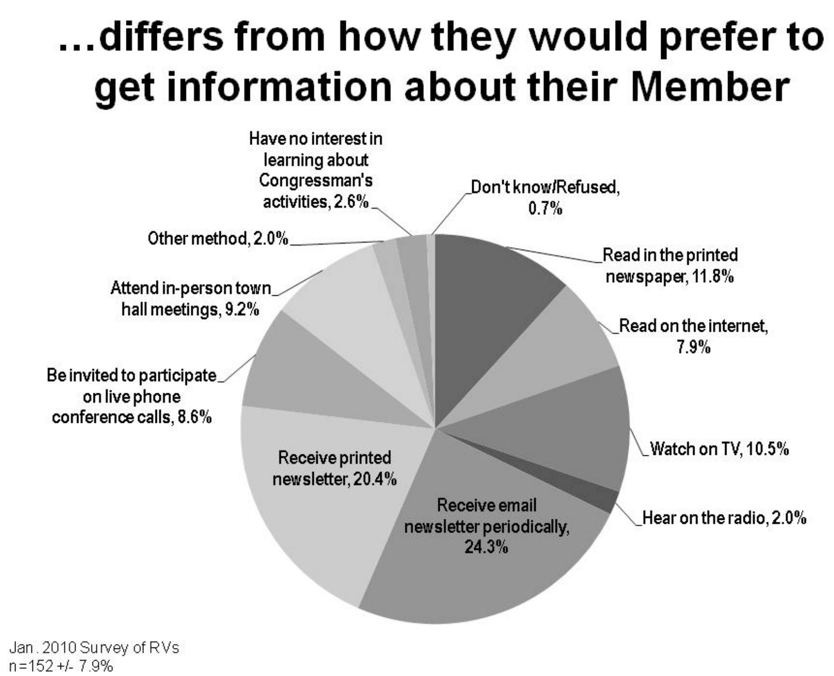
There are various strategies to build an opt-in list. Some offices will rent lists from list brokers and then seek "opt-in" approval from the constituents they contact via email. Others will work to build the "opt-in" lists through reply cards that are part of mass franked mail efforts. And many Member websites also seek to bolster the "opt-in" list by giving constituents a location to subscribe to the e-newsletter. Some receptionists are instructed to get email addresses for every visitor to the office.

For offices that send mass e-newsletters each week, they face what's viewed as a somewhat onerous task of getting franking approval on a continuous basis. These most active offices have set their expectations so that if they submit a document for approval on a Monday, for example, they should be able to send it out to constituents by Thursday.

As with so many forms of electronic communication, e-newsletters lend themselves to be linked to Facebook and Twitter. In fact, one office created a "sharing" link of their e-newsletter so it could be reposted by constituents on Facebook and Twitter. To build interest for the e-newsletters, many include a survey option so Members can receive instant constituent feedback.

It turns out that among middle-aged constituents in particular, e-newsletters were rated as the single most preferred way they would like to get information from their Member. Right now, it's far down on the list of how this age group actually gets that information:



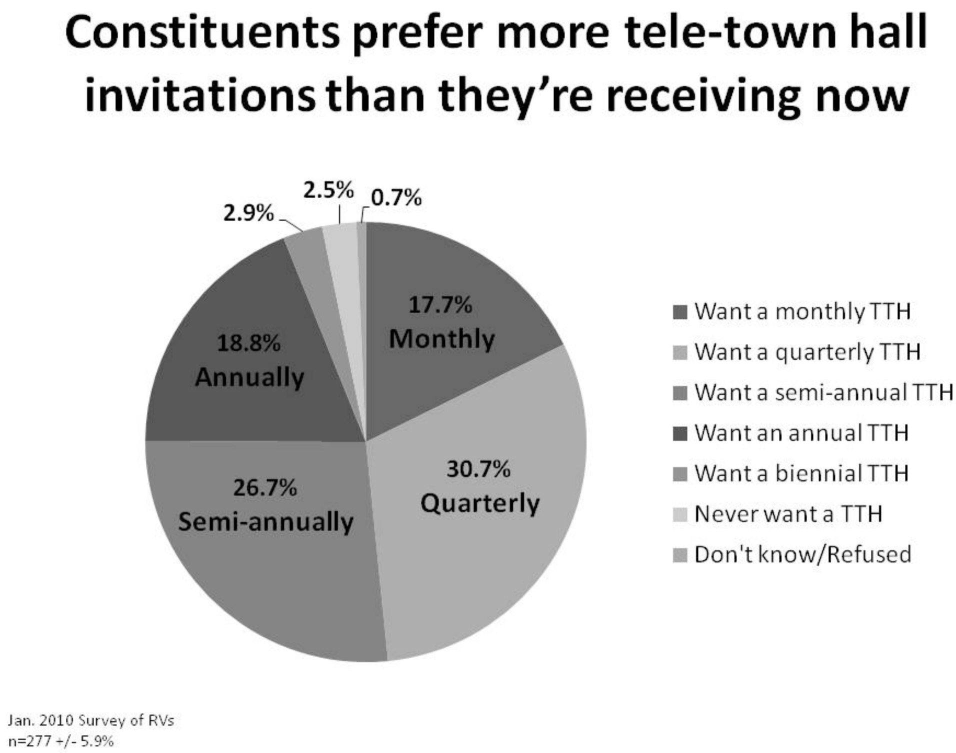



**13) Tele-town halls (TTHs) remain popular but under-utilized, given the willingness of constituents to participate in them over and above the current frequency of Member outreach, and given their remarkable ability to generate valuable data**

Judging from all the positive comments we heard from Hill offices, Members and their staffs are generally bullish on tele-town halls (TTHs). As one staffer put it, "Tele-town halls are heaven-sent." They are now an accepted part of Hill life, and offer the flexibility to call large numbers of constituents at a time that is most convenient for Members. Since they are not announced in advance, they can also be postponed due to last-minute votes without disappointing constituents who would otherwise be expecting a call.

Yet, despite all their popularity on the Hill, tele-town halls occur at nowhere near the penetration and frequency rates that constituents indicate they should be. We found on our survey:

- Only 16.8% of respondents said they'd been invited to join a tele town hall in the past year;
- 48.6% of respondents said they had never been invited but would like to be invited onto future calls;
- Among those who have been called or would like to be called, 17.7% would like to participate monthly; 30.7% would like to do so quarterly; and 26.7% would like do so semi-annually




The other under-utilized aspect of tele town halls is all data that each one generates. The capacity exists to "mine for data" easily after each event, and link the names (and contact information) of each person who was on the call to:

- how many minutes each person spent on the call
- whether they got into the queue to ask the Member a question
- how they answered each touch-pad survey question posed by the Member during the call
- whether the person left a message at the end of the call

What does this mean, practically speaking? Well, a Congressional office could, for example, decide to target tele town hall calls to precincts in the district where the Member would like to enhance his reputation. He could dial 40,000 phone numbers, and reasonably expect about 13% of the households (5,200) to spend at least one minute on the call. Since there is a lot of drop-off within the first few minutes, the Member could expect about 4.5% (1,800) to remain on the call for 20 minutes, and 3 percent (1,200) to stay on for 40 minutes. He could also expect about 57% of the outbound calls (22,800) to be fielded by answering machines.

Here's a plan to build constituent goodwill around these benchmarks:

- <u>Use each TTH as a research opportunity</u>: During the first 20 minutes of the call, be sure to survey participants to determine which one issue, from a list of four or five, is most important to them. This will give you valuable information about 1,800 constituents' priorities—information you can use in the future to snail-mail or e-mail them 499s.

- Build your email database: Towards the end of the call, ask participants to leave their email addresses on the voicemail so that you can add them to your "opt-in" e-newsletter database.

- Pay attention to "soft" constituents: Focus a follow-up franked mail piece on the 3,400 people who stayed on the call for less than 20 minutes. You might want to thank them for joining the call, recognize that you might have called at an inconvenient time, and direct them to other ways they can be in more frequent contact with you (via e-newsletter, Facebook, etc.)

- Take a second pass at the answering machines: Conduct a follow-up tele-town hall with the 22,800 households where you left answering machine messages.

- Study data patterns to identify your biggest TTH fans: Over time, conduct tele town halls at least quarterly with this group of 40,000, and track through ongoing database analyses which households always (or almost always) participate in the tele-town halls. Send a separate correspondence to these households, thanking them for all of their interest in spending time with you. These are people who are uniquely interested in your work, and should be invited to in-district events where they can meet you and get to know you better.

Several offices pointed out that gathering and processing all this TTH data is time-consuming for staff. It also is difficult to integrate into the IQ system so that it can be harnessed easily for future use. While this is undoubtedly true, offices would benefit from taking the steps outlined above, but should be aware it likely requires constructing a new, separate database. If staff time does not exist to do it internally, this could be accomplished by outside consultants.

Currently, tele town halls are far too often viewed as stand-alone events. Once they've concluded, the follow up consists solely of answering the concerns of constituents who left a message at the end of the call. This should change, and a far more robust approach to tele town halls should become the norm on Capitol Hill.

One final point on TTHs: It has become common practice for Members to leave voicemail messages for constituents whose answering machines they reach during the process of outbound calling. We wondered whether this, on balance, is a smart practice. Our survey suggests it is.

We asked the following question: “Assume your Congressman called your home to invite you onto a live conference call taking place right at that moment, but no one picked up the phone to receive the call when he dialed your number. Would you want your Congressman to leave a brief message on your answering machine, alerting you that he tried to include you?” In response, 84.6% said yes.

**A “check list” to reach more constituents:**

1) Invite every household in the district to join a tele-town hall at least four times a year. Structure and script the tele-town halls to allow for meaningful data-gathering, and use the data to target constituents more effectively in the future.

2) Send printed newsletters to all households with people age 60+ living there.

3) Rent email lists, and begin emailing monthly newsletters to those ages 18-59; continue to build your own opt-in list simultaneously.

4) Host more town halls in the district, and target those under 30 to attend. Consider targeted online ads as a way to locate them.

5) At the end of each quarter, ask yourself this question: “Did we directly touch each household in the district at least once this quarter?” If not, you’re not reaching your full outbound communications potential.