Web Sites For Advocacy and Community Organizing: Basics, Essentials, and Best Practices

Emerging Technologies

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Learning Goals

- Survey new technologies which will impact electronic advocacy and organizing
- Understand basics of cell phone text messaging, often referred to as SMS
- Learn about "Voice over Internet" technology and its potential for eAdvocacy
- Explore the value of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in campaigns and advocacy

Cell Phone Text Messaging: SMS

- Cell phone have higher penetration in low-income communities than computers
- Text messaging is fast becoming a standard form of communication
  - "SMS" stands for "Short Message Service"
- "Texting" is particularly popular among youth
- SMS messages reach targets in "real time", are more immediate than email

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Cell Phone Text Messaging: SMS

- Opportunities for leveraging SMS
  - Allows for recruitment and engagement outside of traditional online environments
    - Concerts, rallies, billboards
  - Allows for real-time interaction in the "real world"
    - Elections monitoring, logistical coordination, volunteer deployment
  - SMS "blasters" offer new, real-time one-to-many communication

Cell Phone Text Messaging: SMS

- Challenges in leveraging SMS
  - Phones companies control access to sending
    - Especially tough for 2-directional communication
    - Interactive applications require telco approval
  - Large-scale, dependable tools are still expensive
    - Per-message cost model is still a barrier for many
    - "Recipient pays" model is not optimal, and may offend
  - US uptake with SMS still lags behind other countries

Cell Phone Text Messaging: SMS

- Text Messaging Resources
  - MobileVoter.org – Non-partisan mobile activism
    - TxtVoter.org – Voter registration service
  - UPOC – Corporate service for SMS communities
  - TxtMob.org – SMS "groupware"
    - Delivery may be an issue
  - MobileActive.org – Blog on mobile activism

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Voice over Internet (VOIP)

- Provides support for
  - Phone calls to be placed over internet
  - Phones to interact with databases and web apps
  - Low-cost domestic and international calls
- Reality Check
  - Still "in the future" in terms of eAdvocacy
  - Requires greater telco infrastructure
  - At risk in "Net Neutrality" debate

Voice over Internet (VOIP)

- Potential uses in eAdvocacy
  - Distributed phone banking
    - Supporters dial supporters through web site
  - Automated surveys of supporters
  - Automated event reminders
  - Emergency response networks
    - "Robo-dial" many numbers at critical moments
  - Ad-hoc interactive "info" lines
    - "Press 1 for ..., press 2 for..."

Voice over Internet (VOIP)

- Tools survey
  - Skype.com – Excellent free personal VOIP
  - Asterisk – Powerful open source VOIP PBX
    - "Phone system in a box"
    - Allows call data to interact with web apps
    - Still maturing
  - Vonage – Cost effective VOIP for office / org voice lines

Geographic Information Systems

- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have been around for a while
- The web, and tools like Google Maps and Google Earth, have broadened their relevance and accessibility to nonprofits
- Tools allow you visualize supporter and campaign data in order to broaden reach and focus strategy

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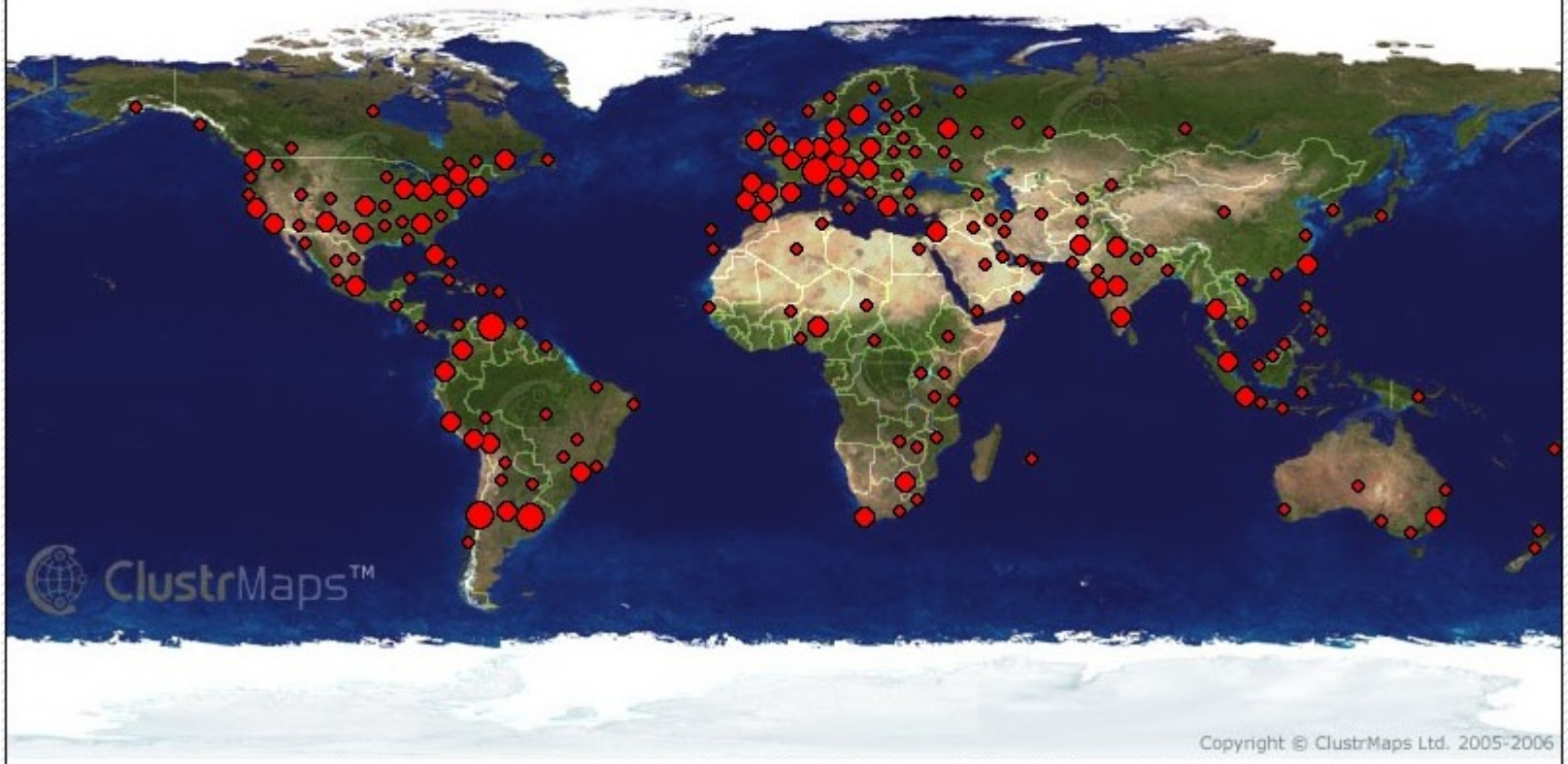

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Geographic Information Systems

- Tool survey
  - Google Maps – maps.google.com
  - Google Earth – interactive desktop app
  - YAHOO maps – maps.yahoo.com
  - Geocoder.us - latitude/longitude of any US address
  - DIY Map – backspace.com/mapapp/
    - Flash-based mapping application

End Of Section

- Questions?
- Comments?

Thank You!

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