

# Obama 2012 campaign to go beyond email, text

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In this June 3, 2010 file photo, President Barack Obama uses his BlackBerry e-mail device as he walks at Sidwell Friends school in Bethesda, Md. Call him the Digital Candidate: President Barack Obama has asked supporters to use Facebook to declare “I’m in” for his re-election campaign and has begun using Twitter to communicate with his nearly 9 million followers. If Obama broke new ground using email, text messages and the Web to reach voters in 2008, Obama version 2.0 aims to harness the expansive roles that the Internet and social media are playing now in voters’ lives. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak, File)

(AP) -- Call him the Digital Candidate: President Barack Obama is asking supporters to use Facebook to declare "I'm In!" for his re-election campaign and is using Twitter to personally blast out messages to his nearly 9 million followers.

Emails to supporters seek small-dollar donations in exchange for campaign coffee mugs or a chance to win dinner with the president. The campaign's website helps supporters find local events, plan meetings and raise money while its digital team develops the next big thing.

If Obama broke new ground in 2008 using email, text messages and the Web to reach voters, Obama version 2.0 aims to take the Web campaign to the next level - harnessing the expansive roles that the Internet and [social media](#) are playing in voters' lives.

The Republican presidential field has also embraced the Web and social media, turning to Facebook and Twitter to launch their campaigns and directing supporters to Facebook sites for videos, messages and online discussions.

"The successful campaign is going to be one that integrates all the various elements of the digital channel - email, text, website, [mobile apps](#), and social networks - together as one digital program and also mixing the digital program together with the offline reality of field organizations," said Joe Rospars, the Obama campaign's chief digital strategist.

"In the end," Rospars said, "all the digital stuff is in service of the offline reality of knocking on doors, making phone calls and ultimately persuading voters and turning them out."

Obama took advantage of a strong Internet campaign in 2008 to raise an estimated \$500 million online while regularly communicating with supporters through text messages, an email list estimated at more than 13 million and content on his <http://www.BarackObama.com> website.

When Obama was close to announcing his vice presidential selection of [Joe Biden](#), the campaign encouraged supporters to find out by [text](#)

[message](#), a move that prompted more than 2 million people to sign up.

Three years later, social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter have exploded, smart phones and apps are more prevalent, tablet computers are on the rise, and most Americans are online. When Obama announced his presidential campaign in 2007, Facebook had fewer than 20 million users worldwide. That number has now surpassed 500 million.

"There's no online and offline organizing. There's organizing," said Jeremy Bird, Obama's national field director, during a session at Netroots Nation in Minneapolis.

Digital strategists say Obama's campaign has an advantage over the Republican field because of the work his camp conducted in 2008 and the months it will have before Republicans coalesce around a challenger.

The Obama campaign declines to say how many of its supporters have clicked the "I'm In!" button, but Facebook brings Obama's campaign to millions of news feeds, allowing supporters to share content, plan events and recruit friends in ways that email couldn't in 2008.

"If you're my friend and I see that you're going out to canvass this weekend for [Barack Obama](#), I'm much more likely to participate because I know my friends are doing it," said Stephen Geer, a former director of email and online fundraising for Obama for America. He's now vice president of new media at OMP, a Washington fundraising and communications firm.

Facebook has grown in prominence in political campaigns since 2008 - for example, more than 12 million people clicked the "I Voted" button in 2010, signifying that they had cast ballots, compared with about 5.4 million in 2008. A recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that Facebook users are more likely to engage in political

activity than someone who browses the Internet or uses other social media services.

Twitter, meanwhile, was still in its infancy when Obama first ran for president and played little role in that campaign. This time, Obama has signaled the value of his (at)barackobama handle, telling supporters he'll regularly send personal tweets signed "-BO."

His campaign has set up separate Twitter accounts for all 50 states to communicate with supporters. By its nature, Twitter allows the campaign to monitor public opinion on a minute-by-minute basis, respond to critics and shape the news.

While social media may generate new interest in 2012, technology could play an important role in the more mundane, shoe-leather work of registering new voters and turning them out.

In 2008, campaign supporters who knocked on doors of potential voters largely used paper "walk sheets" that were printed out at local headquarters. The results of the door-to-door meetings were keyed into databases to guide the campaign's work to persuade voters on Obama's behalf.

This time, the campaign is exploring ways of streamlining the process, from bringing more uniformity to how the information is taken down and entered into a database to using mobile devices, tablet computers or improvements to the website to help volunteers find key households or input data gathered at doorsteps. The approach could save time and help the campaign be more strategic about the households it targets.

The Democratic National Committee, for example, experimented with an app in 2010 that used global positioning systems to help canvassers find targeted households in certain neighborhoods, something that could

be used more broadly in the presidential campaign.

Email is still king when it comes to fundraising, and online strategists consider the Obama campaign's massive [email list](#) a gold mine. The campaign has replayed some of its greatest hits in fundraising pitches - offering small donors a chance to win dinner with Obama and Biden and matching the contributions of \$5 or more from first-time donors.

Pivoting off the "birther" controversy, the campaign created a "Made in the USA" mug, with a picture of Obama's long-form birth certificate on the back, for supporters who gave \$15 or more.

Online advertising, meanwhile, is also expected to grow in sophistication. Political campaigns have been ramping up their use of online ads, turning to ads of 15 to 30 seconds that appear before video clips running on websites like Youtube and Hulu.

"We're getting a lot of questions now from people thinking strategically on how to drive their message next year online," said Andrew Roos, a political ads executive with Google.

Rospars, the mastermind behind Obama's digital success in 2008, cautions against looking at 2012 as the Facebook or Twitter campaign. Instead, it's about making all things digital work in harmony to pay off in November 2012.

"It's tempting to sort of pile onto the one new thing and sort of put all your eggs in one basket," Rospars said. "But I think in the history of campaigns, big bets like that don't tend to pay off. It's actually about integrating everything."

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