

LaborTech Conference 2006

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, November 18-19, 2006 @ USF (www.labortech.net)

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Workshop Panelist:

- Web Sites, and Using Technology to Build Organizing and Information Networks.
- Video/Audio Blogging, Social Networks and Labor.
- Pod/Video Casting and Cell Casting.

PANELIST NOTES: Below are my “**LaborTech 101**” suggestions for building an effective Internet presence—starting with a good website and e-mail foundation—and adding creative new technologies along the way as needed. Technology will always outpace our ability to keep up with it, so don’t be discouraged. You can do this! Just communicate regularly (weekly-monthly) with members using content you already have and don’t worry as much about looking “cool” with all the latest bells and whistles. Add audio/video, blogs, community forums, e-commerce, secure dues payment options, etc. only as your online strategy calls for it. Take one step at a time. These notes will only scratch the surface of possibilities so keep perspective. By the way, I don’t work for any of the companies or websites I list below. They are only starting points for you to check out and learn from. **Best of luck! —Colette**

1. **WEBSITES 101:** Maintaining a good website is essential to developing a strong Internet presence. Your site should be **current, easy to navigate, and answer most basic questions about your organization** from the homepage or within one click. Too many offerings on the homepage can overwhelm visitors, causing them to leave quickly, so **keep it simple** and **use colors that are easy on the eyes**. Invest in **website statistical software** to keep track of user trends (number of visitors, most/least popular pages, etc.), and tailor your site accordingly. Check out: www.webtrends.com. **Provide easy ways for site visitors to signup** for your alerts, **join** your movement, and **donate** to your causes or campaigns. This involves using online forms. Consider investing in **search engine positioning services** so that your site ranks high at popular search engines. Compare: www.customermagnetism.com and www.beanstalk-inc.com to start.
2. **E-MAIL 101:** Build your e-mail lists from **members, donors, supporters, family, friends, events, activists**, etc. You can also rent or purchase e-mail lists for limited/targeted uses but this is considered SPAM until/unless people actually **signup or opt-in to receive your alerts**. Methods for **unsubscribe** should always be made clear to recipients. Building a strong e-mail mobilization network takes time and effort. Lists must be **regularly updated and properly categorized** so that alerts can be customized to specific groups and interests. Offline e-mail lists should routinely be **synchronized with your central database**.

Sending public e-mail to groups (100+) from a personal/work computer/desktop can put the **company domain (URL) in jeopardy of being permanently tagged as SPAM** so I strongly advise against it. Also, never send e-mail to large groups where e-mail addresses are visible in the “to” line. **E-mail privacy is important** so if you must send a public/external e-mail to a group from a personal/work computer, please always use the “BCC” line (**Blind Carbon Copy**) with your own e-mail address in the “to” line.

E-MAIL 101 Continued:

Invest in applications/services that enable you to send mass e-mail alerts using third party servers that protect your domains. Check: www.groundspring.org (small), www.capwiz.com (medium), or www.getactivesoftware.com (large). These services vary in scale, functionality, and cost. The internal questions to answer are: **What is your organization trying to do, and what tools are needed to accomplish the goals?**

3. **VIDEOS AND FLASH 101:** Flash animations (see www.jibjab.com) can take a fair amount of **time and money to produce but can become “viral”** (getting passed around the Internet) when done well. If **budget and creative resources** allow for it, this may be the way to go. If not, then check out www.YouTube.com. When **I wrote the rap song *About Time for 89*** for the Yes on Prop. 89 campaign (sponsored by the California Nurses Association), **we immediately made it into a music video and uploaded to YouTube** along with several other videos for a combined total of **over 60,000 views** by people who may not have known about us otherwise—**and it was free!** Compare that to the cost of Television advertising. While YouTube may be the most popular, there are other free web video services out there: <http://video.google.com>, <http://video.yahoo.com>, and this new one for **political junkies**: www.thepeoplechoose.org. **Have some fun with this!**
4. **BLOGS 101:** A **blog (aka WebLog) is like a diary** listed in reverse chronological order (most current entry is on top). Creating a blog is relatively easy but **maintaining it and building a presence in the blogging community takes some dedication**. If you have the resources, **designate someone in your organization** to build and maintain your blog(s) and **share links with other bloggers** on related topics. There are many **free blog services** out there including www.blogger.com, www.ourstory.com, and www.blogstream.com. Some of them enable you to **upload photos and text sent from your cell phone**, which is great if you’re traveling and want to post from the field. Your **cell phone must have Internet access, photo, and text capabilities** to do this.
5. **SOCIAL NETWORKS 101:** Perhaps one of the most **popular online community spaces** among young people right now is www.myspace.com but more and more, it is being used to build friends for political campaigns, promote musical groups, and to basically drive parents nuts when their teens won’t log off. At the college level, www.facebook.com is being used for campus organizing, politics, and for **networking with others looking to become part of online communities**.
6. **PODCASTS & VODCASTS 101:** You see people on BART and everywhere these days bobbing their heads before realizing they have tiny headphones shoved in their ears. **The iPod is like a jukebox in your pocket** and you can also enjoy **TV, videos, movies, games, and audiobooks** on the tiny mobile device. All you need is the iPod (roughly \$250 – or a cheaper/similar product from another brand), QuickTime, and iTunes. **Both QuickTime and iTunes can be downloaded free** at: www.apple.com/itunes. Once you have these tools, you can begin synchronizing your **Podcasts (audio files) and Vodcasts (video files)** to and from your **iTunes media library**.

What’s the connection to labor organizing and iPod user outreach? Remember that cool video you just uploaded to YouTube? Why not also turn that into a Vodcast? And remember that great sound bite you recorded of your fearless leader’s speech last week? Why not turn that into an mp3, add it to your iTunes, synch it to your iPod, and share it with hundreds of thousands of head-bobbing mobile device users? **Check out this short video to learn more and get started:** <http://www.apple.com/dotmac/publish.html>.