BLOG FOR A CAUSE!

The Global Voices Guide to Blog Advocacy

BY MARY JOYCE

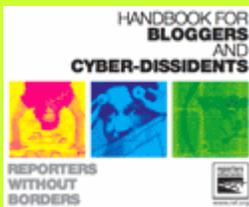# Table of Contents

1.

What is Blog Advocacy?

Blog advocacy is using a blog to fight against an injustice. People use blogs to fight a wide range of injustices, such as wrongful imprisonment, government corruption, environmental degradation, and human rights abuse.

These 2 guides are helpful

An Introductory Guide to Global Citizen Media
<http://rising.globalvoicesonline.org/library/Introduction-to-Citizen-Media-EN.pdf >

The Handbook for Bloggers and Cyber-Dissidents
<http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/handbook_bloggers_cyberdissidents-GB.pdf>

Why should I use a blog for advocacy?

Many people start an advocacy blog because it is a cheap and easy way to create a web site that addresses a particular an issue. Blogs have pre-existing templates that give the site a professional feel. They are also fairly easy to personalize with your own header graphic, colors, and fonts. Also, most blog platforms (for example, Blogger and WordPress) are free.[1] (The next section includes links to videos that show you how to set up a Blogger or WordPress blog.)

However, free and easy set-up is only one of the benefits of launching your cause on a blog. Blogs are also highly interactive. Each post, or article, has a section where site visitors can leave comments, allowing them to become a part of the site's community and thus feel more engaged in your cause. In addition, blogs make it easy to work with multiple authors, allowing you to share the work of updating the blog. Finally, you can embed multimedia content - like photos, video, and audio - into your posts. This kind of eye-catching material is important to make the blog engaging and appealing to users.

Finally, a blog is a great advocacy tool because it allows any individual with an Internet connection to launch a campaign for social change with a potentially global reach. It gives ordinary citizens incredible power to question authority, act as alternative sources of information, organize supporters, and lobby those in power. The means of social change are at your finger tips, so start clicking.

I want to create an advocacy blog but I don't have the technical skills. What should I do?

The best way to start is by trying out some blogging software. Remember that online blogging platforms are built in order to be easy to use by non-experts. I was able to figure out how to personalize a Blogger blog (even learning a little HTML) by spending an afternoon working with the software and searching for terms that I didn't understand on Google. You can also try the following instructional videos. In addition, *The Handbook for Bloggers and Cyber-Dissidents* has some very useful information about setting up and promoting your blog.

Both Blogger and Wordpress are good platforms because they are available in several languages, so you can create the advocacy blog in your own language, rather than having to work in English. Although translating into English will be important if you are trying to launch an international campaign, you should start the blog in your native language because it will be easier for you to maintain.

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1   While Wordpress offers optimal optimization in terms of appearance and structure, the other blog services mentioned, particularly Blogger, are much easier to set up. Choose the platform that best fits the technical skill level of your team.

Create a Blogger Blog
<http://tinyurl.com/339xxr>

Create a WordPress Blog
<http://tinyurl.com/2actbj>

Who should start an advocacy blog?

The word "advocacy" implies that you are speaking for someone else. But do you have the right or the permission to speak for that person or group? This is an important question to ask yourself before you start an advocacy blog.

If you are intimately involved with the cause you are advocating for, if the cause affects you personally or the injustice has occurred in the town or city in which you live, then you probably don't need to worry about whether or not you have the right to start an advocacy blog. But if the issue is occurring in another country or affects someone that you do not know personally, it's advisable to do some checking around before you begin your blog.

First, you need to get in touch with the people most directly connected to the issue to make sure that your blog would actually help them. If you are advocating on behalf of an individual, you must contact that person's close friends or, ideally, a member of their immediate family. You need to be sure that your blog would not replicate something they are already doing. Also, in some cases, starting an advocacy blog may actually *harm* the person or issue you are trying to help and you want to make sure this doesn't happen.

One example of how *not* to start an advocacy blog is the Free Alaa blog[2], which lobbied for the freedom of jailed Egyptian blogger Alaa Abd El Fattah in 2006. I, along with other international bloggers, started the Free Alaa blog without coordinating well with Alaa's wife and friends in Egypt. This was counter-productive because Alaa's wife Manal was trying to organize all information about her husband through their shared blog, Alaa and Manal's Bit Bucket <www.manalaa.net>. In addition, Alaa later revealed that the presence of our blog, which has since been taken down, actually caused him to be held in jail longer because the government saw him as more high-profile and thus as a greater threat.
A more positive example is the recent Free Fouad campaign <http://en.freefouad.com>. Although the Saudi blogger Fouad Alfarhan was taken into custody on December 11th of 2007, Global Voices Advocacy Director Sami Ben Gharbia stayed in touch with his wife and did not begin a formal campaign to free him until after she gave her consent, almost two weeks after his arrest.

Originally, Fouad's wife felt that matter could be resolved quietly and that publicizing the arrest would hurt her husband by causing the authorities to see him as a trouble-maker with a desire to organize against the government. However, as her husband's situation remained unchanged, Fouad's wife decided that a public campaign would help her husband gain his freedom.

These two examples illustrate the complexity of advocacy blogging. This is why it is so important to coordinate with the people directly involved in the issue you care about. The key is *consent*. If you're advocating for someone, it's incumbent upon you to attempt to get consent from them so you can advocate on their behalf.

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2   The Free Alaa blog was built using the Blogger platform. However, a few months ago it was hacked and had its content deleted. The blog no longer exists.

What are the different types of advocacy blogs?

2.

There are many different types of advocacy blogs, and this guide is full of examples of them. However, it might be helpful for you to think of advocacy blogs as falling into two distinct categories: crisis blogs and issue blogs. Categorizing blogs in this way can help blog advocates shape their strategy, though if this categorization isn't helpful to you, feel free to ignore it.

1. CRISIS blogs

A crisis blog addresses an injustice which can be resolved quickly. It has a short time-frame. Crisis blogs usually have a relatively straight-forward goal. Most blogs demanding the freeing of jailed bloggers, like the Free Monem <www.freemonem.cybversion.org>, Free Fouad <http://en.freefouad.com>, and Free Kareem <www.freekareem.org> blogs, begin as crisis blogs. Don't Block the Blog, which sought to remove a temporary block on Blogger blogs in Pakistan in 2006 <http://help-pakistan.com/main/dont-block-the-blog>, is another good example of a crisis blog.

2. ISSUE blogs

An issue blog addresses an on-going situation of injustice which has no quick or easy answer. It has a long time-frame and often several complex demands. Examples of issue blogs include Rights Action Group T&T, which focuses on environmental issues in Trinidad and Tobago <www.rightsactiongroup.blogspot.com>, Motic, which opposes Internet filtering in Morocco <http://motic.blogspot.com> and FACT Thai, which opposes Internet censorship in Thailand <http://facthai.wordpress.com>. Other notable issue blogs include Kubatana, which promotes the use of the Internet by Zimbabwean human rights activists <www.kubatana.net>, and Don't Forget Burma, a photoblog dedicated to keeping attention focused on the political situation in that country <www.dontforgetburma.org>.

<http://censorship.cybversion.org>

Type: Crisis Blog to Issue Blog
Cause: To draw the public attention to the aggressive censorship prevailing in the country
Country: Tunisia
Language: Français, English, Arabic

Unblock Dailymotion in Tunisia

SEA-EAT
<http://tsunamihelp.blogspot.com>
Type: Crisis Blog
Cause: To provide news and information about resources, aid, donations and volunteer efforts following the 2004 tsunami.
Country: International
Language : English

Kubatana
<http://www.kubatana.net>
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To promote the use of the Internet by civil society organizations in Zimbabwe.
Country: Zimbabwe
Language: English

3. When a CRISIS blog becomes an ISSUE blog

Sometimes a blog that begins as a crisis blog becomes an issue blog when the injustice is not resolved in a short amount of time. A good example of this trend is the Free Kareem blog, which began as a crisis blog in November of 2006 to demand the freedom of the detained Egyptian blogger Abdel Kareem Nabil Suliman. Subsequently, Kareem was sentenced to four years in prison for contempt of religion and defaming the president. At this point, the short time-frame of the crisis blog became a long time-frame as it became clear that, even if Kareem were released, the campaign to free him would be a long one.

Another example of a crisis blog becoming an issue blog is The Tsunami Help blog (also called the SEA-EAT blog) <www.tsunamihelp.blogspot.com>, which acted as an information and aid clearinghouse in the wake of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, and then began taking on other natural disasters.

When a crisis blog becomes an issue blog, keeping people engaged can become a challenge, as volunteers tend to become fatigued by long campaigns. Developing innovative actions is important in maintaining the interest of volunteers. It is also important to maintain organizational function over the long term in order to take advantage of key events (like elections) which create opportunities for your cause to assert itself. An ability to take advantage of these moments of political opening is essential in achieving victories in long-term issue campaigns.

Examples of Advocacy Blogs
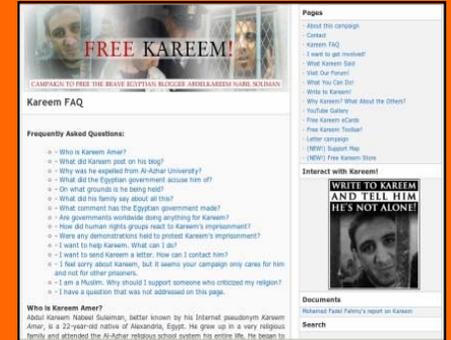
Free Kareem
<http://www.freekareem.org>
Type: Crisis Blog to Issue Blog
Cause: To push for the freeing of jailed Egyptian blogger Abdel Kareem Nabil Suliman
Country: International
Language: English

Rights Action Group T&T
<http://rightsactiongroup.blogspot.com>
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To promote good governance and clean, sustainable development.
Country: Trinidad and Tobago
Language: English

<http://netzpolitik.org>

Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To promote open source issues, internet-users' rights and free expression in cyberspace.
Country: Germany
Language: English, German

Netzpolitik

<http://beyondthestars.wordpress.com>

Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To promote the environmental preservation campaign in Hong Kong.
Country: Chinas
Language: Chinese

Beyond the Stars

What Every Advocacy Blog Needs

Background Information

1. **What** is the cause you are advocating for?
2. **Why** are you advocating for the cause (why is the current situation unjust)?
3. **Who** is the victim of this injustice and who perpetrated the injustice?
4. If you are protesting an unjust event (like an arrest), **When** and **How** did it occur?

Example: "About" page on the Free Monem blog <http://freemonem.cybversion.org/about/>
People must be able to get up-to-date information about your cause from the blog.

Current Update

People must be able to get up-to-date information about your cause from the blog.

A Clear Goal

What do you think would be the best way to resolve the injustice you are fighting against? Clear and simple goals are the best because they are easy to communicate and serve as more effective motivation for supporters. Your goal is the mission of your advocacy blog, and you should be able to state it in one sentence.

Example: "SASOD is a group based in Guyana which is committed to eradicating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation." <http://sasod.blogspot.com>

A "Get Involved" Page

People who visit the blog should find a list of actions that they can take to get involved in your cause (find examples of actions on page 16)

Examples:
→ "What You Can Do!" page on the Free Kareem Blog <www.freekareem.org/what-you-can-do>

→ "Activist Resources" page on Save Darfur Blog <http://savedarfur.org/pages/activist_resources>

A Contact E-mail

Members of the press and potential supporters need to be able to get in touch with you, the writer of the blog. Be sure to clearly display an e-mail where you can be reached.

Example: YourCause@gmail.com

Creating an Advocacy Blog

3.

1. Choose a Goal

It is very important to choose a goal before starting your advocacy blog. Do you just want to provide information about your cause? Do you want to push for policy change? Do you have a specific change in mind or are you simply looking for generalized reform? Your goal will not only be important to you in defining your strategy. It will also be important in motivating your volunteers and defining success. (How can you succeed in achieving your goal without having selected a goal to achieve in the first place?) Having a clear goal, such as "raising awareness of X" or "opposing X law" will also be very helpful to you in the next step of the blog advocacy creation process: forming a team. Saying "I want to build a blog as the center of a campaign to free Kareem from prison, to provide information about his condition and suggest ways that people can help him" is a much more powerful appeal than saying "Kareem is in prison and I think we should do something." Knowing the goal you want to achieve from the very beginning will be a benefit throughout the life of the campaign.

2. Form a Team

It is possible to create an advocacy blog by yourself, but to make it succeed you'll need a network of friends and allies. Here is a list of the kinds of people you will need to help you run a first-rate advocacy blog. Think about friends and other people you know who could fill each role. You can also reach out to online communities, like Global Voices, to find people to fill these roles. Don't worry if you can't find someone to fill every task. Just try to find as many skilled collaborators as you can.

→ **Writer(s):** Writing frequent posts with the latest news about your cause is your most important task as an advocacy blogger. Ideally, you should write a new post at least every other day (daily is best). Try to find co-authors to assist you in writing content.

→ **Coder**: Depending on how elaborate you want your blog to be, you may need someone who is able to edit code. You will certainly need someone who understands HTML, which is used to change the style of your blog (font, background color, etc.) and you may even be able to teach yourself how to do this. Other computer languages, like PHP and Javascript, are useful for creating widgets like animated blog badges, but these codes are more difficult to learn.

→ **Designer**: If you want your blog to look professional, you will need someone who is good at design, or this may even be something you could do yourself. (I like to use a free graphics program called GIMP to make banners and badges). To make more elaborate graphic presentations, like videos, it would be

Examples of Advocacy Blogs

Free Fouad
<http://en.freefouad.com>
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To oppose the illegal detention of Saudi blogger Fouad Alfarhan.
Country: International
Language: English, Arabic

SASOD Guyana
<http://sasod.blogspot.com>
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To oppose discrimination in Guyana on the basis of sexual orientation.
Country: Guyana
Language: English

good to find someone who specializes in video creation.

→ **Networker**: When promoting your campaign, it is very important to have a large number of good contacts. You will need someone who knows other bloggers and (ideally) has contacts with NGOs[3] and journalists.

→ **Translator**: This person will help you translate your blog. As mentioned in the introductory section, you will need to translate some basic information into English if you want to create an international campaign. You may also need to translate into other languages, depending on your target audience.

3. Build the Blog

Building the blog is the most obvious step in advocacy blogging, but it often takes the least time. In fact, one of the benefits of using blogs for advocacy is that it is possible to launch a fully-functional web site in 24 hours or less. If you don't have the skills necessary to build the blog yourself, this is a great opportunity for you to make use of the team you just formed.

Here is some content you might like to include on the blog:

→ **The Basics**: As outlined on page 7, every advocacy blog needs:

- ⊙ **Background information** on your cause (what, where, when, who, why, and how)

- ⊙ **current updates** about the cause

- ⊙ **A goal** for how you'd like this injustice to be resolved (example: Free Kareem!)

- ⊙ **A "get involved" page** (actions people can take to support your cause)

- ⊙ **A contact e-mail address** so supporters and members of the media can get in touch with you.

→ **Images**: Ideally, every post should have an image. It makes your blog look more appealing to visitors. If you are advocating for a person, adding photos of that individual to the blog is important in creating an emotional appeal. The Flickr Zeitgeist is an animated badge that allows you to present photos from your Flickr account on your blog's side bar <http://flickr.com/fun/zeitgeist>.

→ **Video**: If you have a team member with video production skills, consider creating a video that explains your cause. Then post it on video-sharing sites like www.YouTube.com and www.DailyMotion.com so it will gain wider exposure and so that other bloggers will be able to embed the video in their own blogs to support your cause. (Here are some good examples of advocacy videos: http://freemonem.cybversion.org/video_multimedia).

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3   non-governmental organizations

Examples of Advocacy Blogs

Don't Forget Burma
<http://www.dontforgetburma.org>
Type: Crisis Blog to Issue Blog
Cause: Began to support the monks' protest, now a space where people can show that although the media spotlight on Burma may have dimmed, they are still thinking of Burma every day.
Country: International
Language: English

Motic
<http://motic.blogspot.com>
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To document Internet censorship in Morocco.
Country: Morocco
Language: Français

→ **Badges**: This is another task for your Designer. A badge is a small graphic which other bloggers can embed on their own blogs to show support from your campaign. You can create a badge for your campaign that is simply an image or, if your Designer has a higher skill level, you can also create animated badges. (Here's a nice example of an animated badge from Free Fouad: http://www.alfarhan.org/archives/175)

→ **Links to Other Actions**: If you are working on a famous cause, there may be other individuals and groups also creating actions and content in support of your cause. It is very important to keep in touch with the other people involved with your cause so you can make sure that you are coordinating your actions and promoting each other. If another group creates an effective action, promote it on your blog and link to them on your sidebar and ask them to do the same for you.

→ **Tags**: Tags are keywords that you add to your posts to help people find your content. The site <www.technorati.com> is one of the most popular blog search engines and has its own tagging system. You embed a piece of code from the Technorati web site into each of your posts and then people can find your post on the Technorati site by searching for those terms.

4. Promote Your Blog

You have a team and you have created a blog. Congratulations! Now the real work begins. You need to promote your cause to try to correct the injustice that you are fighting. Like any other advocacy campaign, you need to determine your target: the person or group who has the power to correct the injustice that your blog is fighting. Then you need to pressure that person or group to in order to achieve your goal.

For example, the injustice that the Free Monem blog <http://freemonem.cybversion.org> was fighting was the illegal imprisonment of the blogger Adbel Monem Mahmoud. Their goal was that Monem be released from prison and their target was the Egyptian government. In the end, they were successful because the Egyptian government gave in to their demand and Monem was freed on June 2, 2007.

As in the case of Free Monem, the target of many advocacy campaigns is the government. You want your blog to directly influence the government, but you can't just send an e-mail to the president and expect him to listen to you. Influencing the government is a little more complicated than that. But don't worry. All will be explained.

The graphic on the next page shows four different pathways for influencing the government and explains which ways work and how to use these methods. If you find the graphic looks a bit complex, read the explanation and it will become clear.
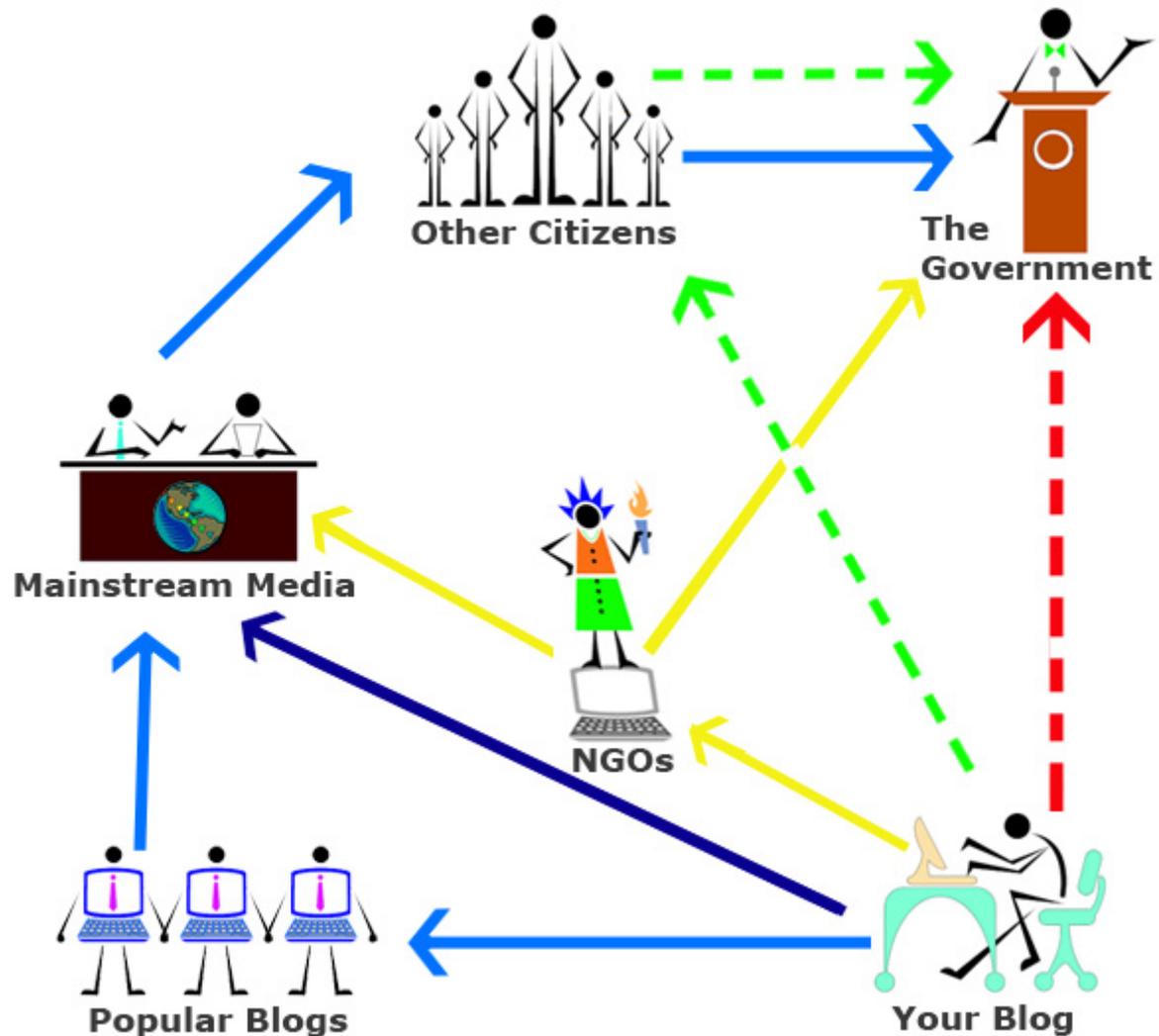
Examples of Advocacy Blogs

OurKingdom
<http://ourkingdom.opendemocracy.net>
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To advocate for a democratic constitution in the United Kingdom.
Country: United Kingdom
Language: English

Free Monem
<http://freemonem.cybversion.org>
Type: Crisis Blog
Cause: To push for the freeing of jailed Egyptian blogger Abdel-Monem Mahmoud.
Country: International (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, USA, Syria)
Language: English, Français, Arabic

Figure 1: How Your Blog Can Influence the Government
This graph shows five pathways for influencing the government

1. Contact the Government
2. Contact Other Citizens
3. Contact the Mainstream Media
4. Contact Popular Bloggers
5. Contact an NGO

We will discuss all of these pathways and explain which methods of pressuring the government work best. You can also use this strategy to apply pressure to other powerful targets, like international corporations.

1. Contact the Government

If you are a political activist, your end goal is to influence the government, so it seems like your best course of action would be to contact the government directly and demand that they listen to you.

Unfortunately, this strategy is unlikely to work. Even if you are a famous blogger that all the government officials are aware of, that does not guarantee that they will listen to you. Trying to pressure the government directly is unlikely to work because the government has no incentive to listen to you, a lone blogger (that's why the **[red line]** in the diagram is dashed, not solid).

If you are only one person the government can easily ignore you and experience no negative consequences. What you need to do it convince the government that it is in their best interest to listen to you. To do this you will need other people to help you apply pressure to the government.

2. Contact other Citizens

Now you realize that you will need other people to help you pressure the government. This means that your goal is to convince other citizens of the value of your cause, so they will help you in pressuring the government **[green line]**.

Unfortunately, as you can see from the graphic on the previous page, the green line is dashed instead of solid, meaning that it is not an effective option for promoting your cause. The reason that this is a less effective option is that most people do not know that your blog exists. So how are you going to inform all these people about your blog and your campaign?

3. Contact the Mainstream Media

Most people get their information from the mainstream media (TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines). One strategy for publicizing your blog and your cause is to tell the mainstream media about it so that the can inform citizens **[dark blue line]**. If members of the media think your cause is important, they can write an article about it in a newspaper or magazine or mention it a news broadcast. People who hear about your cause in the mainstream media can then go to your blog to get up-to-date information about your cause and to learn how they can get involved. By getting involved, they will help you pressure the government.

FACT Thai
<http://facthai.wordpress.com>
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To oppose Internet censorship in Thailand.
Country: Thailand
Language: English, Thai

Free Keyboard
<http://www.freekeyboard.net >
Type: Issue Blog
Cause: To help people surf the net freely by posting tips on evading filtering and posting news about digital censorship.
Country: Iran
Language: Farsi

World Bank President

<www.worldbankpresident.org>

Type: Issue Blog

Cause: To shine a light on "the media coverage, insider gossip, official reactions and civil society activity on the World Bank president," increasing transparency.

Country: USA

Language: English

Save Darfur

<http://savedarfur.org/blog>

Type: Issue Blog

Cause: To raise funds and awareness about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur.

Country: USA

Language: English

So, which media outlet should you try to contact? In deciding who to contact you should be guided by these two questions:[4]

1. Who do you want to be aware of your news?

Is your issue local, something only people in your town or city should be aware of? Then you need only concern yourself with local newspapers, radio, and TV. If you think that your issue is worthy of international attention, then you might like to contact an international news agency, like The Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, or Reuters. Many newspapers around the world get their stories from these agencies.

However, bear in mind that exposure and ease of access are inversely proportional. The international media will give your cause more exposure but it is harder to get noticed by the international media because there are so many stories competing for their attention. Conversely, it is easier to access a local newspaper or TV station but they amount of exposure they can provide for your cause is also smaller because they only have a local reach.

2. Who is free enough to report news about your case?

The second factor you need to think about is which media outlets are free enough to report news about your cause? Many countries have media that is tightly controlled by the government. In this case, the local media might not report your story, especially if it criticizes the government, and you should think about reaching out to the international media.

However, as in the first scenario, freedom and ease of access are also inversely proportional. The international media is often freer to broadcast a story that is critical of the national government of a different country, but it is harder to get noticed by the international media because there are so many stories competing for their attention. Conversely, it is easier to access a local newspaper or TV station but they may not be free enough to report your news.

Don't Block the Blog

<http://help-pakistan.com/main/dont-block-the-blog/>

Type: Crisis Blog to Issue Blog

Cause: To oppose Internet censorship in Pakistan

Country: Pakistan

Language: English

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4   Thanks to journalists and blogger Michael Anti for providing this framework.

Once you have made a decision of local versus international, how do you find reporters to contact with your news? First, talk to the members of your team and see if anyone has media contacts (this is really a job for the Networker). Then write a press release and send it to the media outlet you have selected. (Press releases are also extremely useful for contacting NGOs.)   Remember that if you want to contact the international media, you may need to write the press release in English, a job for your Translator. Here is the format of a press release[5]:

[Title]

For Immediate Release

[Your Name, Cell Phone number, E-mail]

[Body of the Press Release]

The first paragraph of the press release should include the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* and *how* of your story. If a reporter reads only the first paragraph, she should have everything she needs to propose the story to an editor. The following two or three paragraphs can include quotes (from you), details, and specific stories, or an explanation of the importance.

After you send the press release, be prepared for the journalist to call you and ask you questions. Remember that journalists are under deadlines, so if a journalist calls you, call them back immediately and be ready with a list of talking points so you can create good quotes. When you talk to journalists you should also have all the key facts of the case on hand so you can answer the journalists' questions quickly and accurately. If you are lucky enough to get a mention of you cause in the media, be sure to link to it on your advocacy blog. Being mentioned in the media gives your cause credibility, so feature it prominently on your site.

4. Contact Popular Bloggers

If you don't have direct contact with the media, you can use other, more popular blogs to help you increase your visibility. In most countries with active blogospheres, reporters keep an eye on a few key blogs to get ideas for news stories. What you need to do is write to one of these popular bloggers and ask them to write about your cause **[light blue line]**. With any luck, a reporter will see the story on the popular blog and write about it. (In some countries, like China, reporters also check popular online forums, so find out which are the popular online sources for reporters in your country.)

5. Contact an NGO

There is another very important way to promote your cause and increase pressure on the government, and that is by contacting an NGO. (NGO stands for non-governmental organization.) NGOs represent the interests of groups of citizens. Some NGOs are apolitical, like community and religious groups, but many NGOs promote causes. There is probably an NGO in the world that would be interested in helping you promote your cause.

NGOs can help you in many ways. Many NGOs have close connections to the mainstream media, so they can help you get press coverage for your cause [straight yellow line]. In addition, some NGOs have connections to members of the government. This means that they can directly lobby the government on your behalf

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5   Thanks to Zephyr Teachout for providing information on how to write a press release.

[curved yellow line]. This would be immensely helpful to your cause. Also, NGOs have a lot of experience in advocacy, so they can give you lots of useful advice about creating a successful campaign.

You should consider contacting both local and international NGOS to see who can help you. It is a good idea to start with local NGOs. Finding an NGO and a person you can contact at the NGO is a job for your Networker. Often local NGOs have contacts to international NGOs, which are often effective at putting international pressure on the government of your country.[6]

In a recent example of using an NGO to promote a cause, the Free Fouad Blog <http://en.freefouad.com>, which was created to oppose the December 2007 imprisonment of jailed Saudi blogger Fouad Alfarhan, worked with an NGO called The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) to promote their cause.

One of the blogger involved in the Free Fouad campaign, Sami Ben Gharbia, had a friend at the CPJ and contacted this friend to tell him about the imprisonment of Fouad. Then the CPJ used its ability to lobby foreign governments by sending a letter to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia demanding the release of Fouad. The CPJ also used its connections to media outlets and other NGOs to promote Fouad's case.

The week that the CPJ sent its letter, many newspapers and TV networks around the world began reporting on Fouad's case, including The New York Times, BBC, and CNN. As of the writing of this guide, Gen. Mansour al-Turki, an Interior Ministry spokesman, said that Fouad would be released shortly.

Working with NGOs can increase the influence of your campaign dramatically.

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6   For more about international advocacy campaigns, see the book "Activists Beyond Borders" (Cornell University Press, 1998) by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink.

4.

You are the Leader of a Community

Realize that you are the leader and organizer of a community and that people who come to your blog are interested in the topic and want to help[7]. Give them a clear mission to motivate them, show them how they fit into that mission, and tell them what they can do to help.

→ Be aware that the people in your community are likely to be "*influentials*."[8] Influentials are people who are civically and politically active, have lots of friends and acquaintances, are able to influence these friends and convince them to get involved in your campaign, and like to read the latest news. If you make influentials happy and use them effectively, your campaign will thrive.

Know Your Community

→ Once you have a community, you need to make the most of these community members. Ask them what expertise they have and then ask them for help.

→ Ask them for ideas about how to improve the campaign and then listen seriously to their suggestions. The comment sections of posts are great for this.

→ Next time you are considering an action or a new feature, it might be a good idea to poll community members to see how they feel about it. Remember, if you propose an action and no one takes part in it, it cannot succeed. (You can create a free poll at www.freepolls.com or www.pollhost.com and embed it in your blog.)

→ Track how many hits you get per day and which countries your visitors come from. ClustrMaps <www.clustrmaps.com> allows you to display this information visually.

Select an Action

→ Now you have a community. It's time to give them an action to take part in. The purpose of an action is to put pressure on your "target" - the person who has the power to correct the injustice you are fighting against. If the injustice is political, your target is most likely a politician. If your cause is about corporate wrong-doing, your target may be a manager in a corporation.

→ Often it is unclear who exactly has the power to correct the injustice. Many power hierarchies do not reveal who is responsible for an action in order to avoid being held accountable. When in doubt, aim high. If you are a political activist, target the President or a member of the national legislature who represents the area where the injustice occurred. If the injustice was committed by a corporation, target the CEO.

→ Your "Get Involved" page should include several actions people can take to support your cause. Ideally, the actions should involve different levels of time commitment to appeal to different kinds of supporters.

Here is a list of possible actions to take in support of your cause. You can create your own actions too. Creating new and original actions is a way to keep people dedicated to your cause and grab the attention of the media and target you

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7 This section was co-written with Carol Darr, former Director of the Institute of Politics, Democracy and the Internet at George Washington University

8 "Poli-fluentials: The New Political Kingmakers," available at www.ipdi.org/Publications/default.aspx

are trying to pressure. **Sign an e-Petition**: An online e-petition is one of the quickest and easiest kinds of actions because a supporter can sign a petition in a few minutes.

- ◉ You can create a free petition at www.thepetitionsite.com/create-online-petition or www.ipetitions.com, then put a link to the petition on your advocacy blog.
- ◉ The international digital activism organization Avaaz <www.avaaz.org> often uses petitions in their advocacy. You can go to their web site to see some examples of the wording they use.
- ◉ Once you feel that there are enough signatures on your petition, print it out and present it to the person whom you have the target of the petition.
- ◉ If you feel it is safe, you might even like to create a video of you presenting the petition to the target official (or trying to do so) and then post that video on your advocacy blog.

→ **Write to Your Political Representative**: Signing a petition is one way for people to show that they support your cause. However, there is often a greater impact if you ask people to write a letter to the target official, rather than just signing their name on a petition.

- ◉ This action requires more time, so you are more likely to achieve success if you ask your Core Volunteers (see next section) to do this action.
- ◉ For a letter-writing campaign, you need to post information on your site that helps people identify who their local representative is. You must also provide contact information as to where the letter can be sent (ideally, the supporter should be able to send their letter by e-mail, as this is easier than asking them to drop it in the mail).
- ◉ In writing the letter, it is important to give people a form letter to personalize or a list of bullet points to include in their letter to make the letter-writing process quicker and easier.
- ◉ In general, original letters based on bullets are more effective than form letters where all supporters letters are the same. This is because an original letter takes longer to write and is thus a more effective display of commitment to the cause. However, supporters are more likely to send a form letter because it takes less time. Supporters should be given the option of sending a form letter, but with pullet points they can use to personalize it.
- ◉ You can also do Phone Your Political Representative campaigns if you have access to politicians' phone numbers. If your volunteers know how to use Skype, you can even do this action internationally.

→ **Boycott X Product**: If your target is a corporation, considering boycotting one of their products. You can announce the boycott on your advocacy blog.

- ◉ One way to promote the boycott is by creating blog badges stating "I boycott X" that other bloggers who are part of the boycott can post on their blogs to show their participation in the boycott and promote the boycott to their readers.

→ **Sign a Pledge**: To encourage people to honor a commitment that they have made to your campaign, it is often a good idea to get them to sign a pledge or contract stating that they have made this commitment.

- ◉ The web site www.PledgeBank.org has many pledges on it that you can look at to see some examples.
- ◉ Signing a pledge serves two purposes:
  - • First, it makes it more likely that people will actually honor their commitment, because they have made a formal declaration of commitment.
  - • Second, you can collect the names of all the people who make the pledge (with their permission, of course) and make them into a list to present to the target of your action, similarly to how you would present a petition.

→ **Organize an Offline Action**: Advocacy blogs are good ways to organize offline actions, like protest rallies or teach-ins (events where members of the public come to learn about your cause).

- ⊙ You can promote an offline action by posting it on your blog and mailing it out to your mailing list.
- ⊙ Most offline actions are local. For example, students in Chile in 2006 used photoblogs to promote awareness of mass protests demanding better quality education.
- ⊙ You can also promote international offline actions, as the Free Kareem campaign has done, organizing rallies at Egyptian embassies around the world to raise awareness of the imprisonment of Egyptian blogger Abdel Kareem Nabil Suliman.

→ **Amplify Silenced Speech**: "Amplification" actions involve disseminating speech which has been silenced, either through content being removed from the Internet or an activist being imprisoned.

Examples of Badges

- ⊙ There are some actions that particularly well-suited to particular groups of volunteers and particular causes. For example, amplification is best targeted at bloggers and best used in support of cases of censorship and imprisonment.
- ⊙ A leading organization using amplification as a digital activism technique was Amnesty International, whose Irrepressible campaign <http://irrepressible.info> asked bloggers to post badges on their blogs which scrolled through a quotes of online content that has been censored.
- ⊙ Subsequently, the Free Monem campaign created a badge which scrolled through the quotes of the jailed imprisoned blogger Abdel Monem Mahmoud. The Free Fouad campaign has a similar badge <www.alfarhan.org/archives/175>.
- ⊙ The message of amplification is clear: imprisoning an activist doesn't silence activists speech, it amplifies it.

→ **Make a Display**: I've already mentioned displays in the context of other actions, but I'd like to discuss it in a little more detail. A display is a visible sign that shows your allegiance to a cause.

- ⊙ Advocacy blog badges like the ones discussed in this previous two example are examples of online displays.
- ⊙ You can also use a blog to organize offline displays, like asking people to wear red on a particular day. This is what supporters of the 2007 Burmese democracy rallies did. They used online web sites, a Facebook group, and blogs, to asked people to wear red on September 21, 2007. Then they asked people to photograph themselves in red and upload it to the Burma Facebook group <http://harvard.facebook.com/group.php?gid=24957770200>.
- ⊙ Bringing offline displays online is key. An offline demonstration will only be seen by a few people in a given location, but if you photograph or videotape the display and post that on your advocacy blog, then many more people will be able to see it and become aware of your cause.
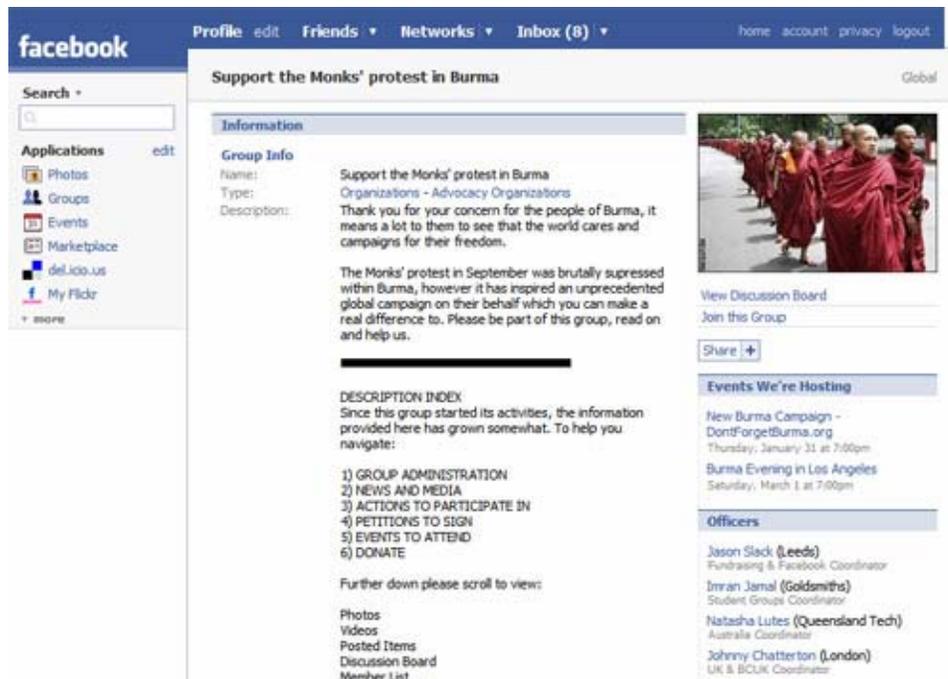
Mobilize Your Community: Make it EASY

→ Community members are the volunteers who make your action succeed.

→ As you may have noticed from the examples in the previous section, your goal in creating actions for your community of volunteers is to "make it easy."

→ Realize that volunteers have limited time and respect that time by making actions as easy and self-explanatory as possible. The easier an action, the more people will take part, and the greater the success of the campaign.

→ Think of your community of volunteers as a pyramid. Most people are normal volunteers <**red**> and are willing to give very little time to your cause. A much smaller number of people are core volunteers <**orange**> and are willing to devote a significant amount of time. Only a handful of people <**green**> will volunteer for leadership roles and actually help you run the campaign. You need to have a strategy for working with all three groups.

→ The key is to have actions on your "Get Involved" page which are for each level of commitment. Then the supporter can choose the action which works best for her.

Figure 2 : Your Advocacy Blog's Volunteer Community

→ **Normal Volunteers** Most community members are busy people. Make any action you propose to them as short as possible. This is one of the reasons that e-petitions are so popular these days. It only takes 2 minutes to sign. Calling or sending an e-mail or SMS to a politician can also be quick if you provide the contact information. For bloggers, asking bloggers to post a badge promoting your cause on their blog is a quick and easy action. It's the digital equivalent of posting a bumper sticker on a car!

→ **Core Volunteers** For the small number of "core" volunteers who are really committed, you can ask them to do more complicated actions, but the "make it easy" rule still applies. If they are organizing an event like a rally, give them a kit or check-list of things they need to do to make planning the event easier. And always be ready to provide personal guidance and support. Remember, their work is helping your campaign succeed.

→ **Leadership Team** The leadership team is there to help you with strategy and with the day-to-day tasks needed to make your campaign effective. If you listen to them and consult with them you will benefit from their expertise. If you merely order them around they will simply stop listening to you and the campaign will suffer.

5.

Anonymous blogging prevents what you say in your blog from having an impact on your job, your privacy, and your safety. There are several ways to maintain your anonymity while blogging.

1. Do no use any personal information on the blog, such as your name, employer, school, or home town.
2. Use a pseudonym or do not use any name at all.
3. Never post a photo of yourself on your blog.
4. Do not use a paid blogging or e-mail service. Your payment information can be used to track your identity.
5. Sign up for an e-mail account using false information (don't use your real name, address, etc.)
6. Use different computers to post to your blog so that your blog cannot be connected to a single IP address (the unique series of numbers connected to each computer on the Internet). Identifying the computer from which the posts were uploaded is only one step away from identifying you.
7. Use a "proxy server" to browse the internet (this hides your IP address).
8. To achieve maximum security, ask a friend in a freer country to run the advocacy blog for you, sending them the information they need through an anonymous e-mail account (see #5).
9. Global Voices Advocacy recommends that you use the Tor proxy server and the Wordpress blog platform.

This is only a brief introduction to online security, for more in-depth information and detailed instructions about how to use the technologies mentioned in the list, please consult the following guides:

→ Title: "Anonymous Blogging With Wordpress and Tor"
Published by: Global Voices Advocacy (2007)
Download: http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/tools/guide/

→ Title: "Handbook for Bloggers and Cyber-Dissidents"
Published by: Reporters Without Borders (2005)
Download: http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/handbook_bloggers_cyberdissidents-GB.pdf

The End

← **Now go out and change the world!** →