

2007 GOLD MOUSE REPORT

Lessons from the Best Web Sites on Capitol Hill



CONGRESSIONAL
MANAGEMENT
FOUNDATION

*Celebrating 30 Years
of Service to Congress:*

1977-2007

2007 GOLD MOUSE REPORT

Lessons from the Best Web Sites on Capitol Hill



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Acknowledgements

Evaluating every single House and Senate Member, committee, and leadership Web site of the United States Congress (618 in all) was a daunting task. This report is the culmination of a year-long project to research and produce a sound and thoughtful report for Congress on the state of online communications on Capitol Hill. None of this could have been accomplished, however, without an extraordinary amount of dedication and hard work from a large group of contributors. Fortunately, every member of our project team contributed their enthusiasm, knowledge, and professionalism to make this project a success.

Special thanks go to our partners at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, the University of California-Riverside, and Ohio State University: Dr. Kevin Esterling, Dr. David Lazer, and Dr. Michael Neblo. Their expertise brought valuable insight and perspective to our research which greatly enhanced this report. Kevin Esterling was again essential in synthesizing the complex evaluation and analysis process in a way that was easy to understand and accessible to the reader. The willingness of all of our research partners to go above and beyond what was asked of them is a testament to their commitment to our objective: ensuring that the Web becomes a tool for creating a better Congress.

I would like to thank Collin Burden, the primary author of this report, for skillfully crafting the *2007 Gold Mouse Report*. His immense knowledge of congressional Web sites has helped to produce a final product that we hope will be an invaluable resource for congressional offices. I would like to also thank the rest of the CMF staff—Beverly Bell, Nicole Folk Cooper, Kathy Goldschmidt, Leslie Ochreiter, and Meredith Persily Lamel—who deserve deep appreciation and were invaluable through every step in the process—from the Web site evaluations through the writing, editing, and production phases. Their contributions, ideas, and support are reflected in every page of this report.

We would like to extend our gratitude to consultant Nicole Griffin and interns Kate Aizpuru, Gretchen Hahn, Laura Harrington, Jared Malin, and Brad Simmons for their assistance. As always, our faithful editor, Dina Moss, clarified our thoughts and focused our writing. Our appreciation goes to graphic designer Cynthia Wokas whose creative skills greatly improved the accessibility of this report and magnificently presented our 2007 Mouse Award winners. Of course, CMF is also indebted to the many congressional staff in the

House and Senate who patiently answered our questions and sacrificed their time to make this report a success. Their input and participation in our research underscores the value of this project and their efforts to engage and communicate with citizens across the United States.

Finally, we thank the National Science Foundation (NSF) for generously funding this project. For over 50 years, NSF-sponsored research has led to revolutionary breakthroughs in a wide range of disciplines. Their support demonstrates a commitment to studying the impact of technology on democracy and government, and it is our hope at CMF that by improving congressional online communications, we can enhance the connection between citizens and Congress.

Tim Hysom
Director of Communications and Technology Services
Congressional Management Foundation



About this Project

The *2006 and 2007 Gold Mouse Reports* are the heart of our research project “Connecting to Congress,” generously funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) Digital Government program (NSF Award Number IIS-0429452). The project is the result of a partnership between the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) and Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, the University of California-Riverside, and Ohio State University.

The goals of the project are to:

1. Determine how Members of Congress can use the Internet to enhance communication with constituents and promote constituent engagement in the legislative process;
2. Understand how Members and staff learn to use best and innovative practices for their Web sites and Internet communications;
3. Identify how information about technology and innovation spreads among staff and congressional offices; and
4. Identify best and innovative practices for congressional Web site and technology use that can be more widely adopted by congressional offices.

Through this work, CMF is developing resources and services that will help congressional offices improve their Web sites and online communications in order to engage citizens and meet their own goals. Our partnership with the researchers at these universities also provides scholarly insight into the practices of congressional offices and ways in which they can improve.



About CMF

Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2007, the Congressional Management Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting a more effective Congress. Since 1977 CMF has worked internally with Member offices, committees, leadership, and institutional offices in the House and Senate to foster improved management practices. Simply put, CMF advocates good government through good management. CMF engages in three primary activities, outlined below.

Management Books and Research Tailored for Congress

Though there are ample books on the general topic of “management,” only CMF produces publications adapted to the unique congressional environment. Our management handbooks for congressional staff include: *Setting Course: A Congressional Management Guide*; *Frontline Management: A Guide for Congressional District/State Offices*; *The Insider’s Guide to Research on Capitol Hill*, and the *Congressional Intern Handbook: A Guide for Interns and Newcomers to Capitol Hill*. CMF also conducts research on timely topics of importance to managers in congressional offices, which has resulted in reports such as: *2006 Gold Mouse Report: Recognizing the Best Web Sites on Capitol Hill*; *Communicating with Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*; studies on House and Senate office compensation and benefit practices; and a brief on managing the transition process for new committee Chairs.

Office Management Services

CMF provides a range of confidential services to congressional offices including: facilitating office retreats that typically focus on strategic planning and improving office operations; conducting office assessments to examine overall office operations, identify office strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies for improving performance; and conducting assessments to improve constituent correspondence management. CMF also provides consulting services to House and Senate institutional offices, primarily on training, human resources, operational effectiveness, and strategic technology projects.

Staff Training

To meet the distinct needs of congressional offices, CMF provides free training workshops to top level congressional staff on topics including: strategic planning; motivating staff and reducing turnover; assessing management skills; measuring office performance; supervising staff; and improving internal office communications. Under contract with the House of Representatives, CMF also provides orientation programs for interns and staff assistants and courses on writing constituent correspondence.

For more information, contact CMF at (202) 546-0100 or visit www.cmfweb.org.



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Introduction

The Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) has tracked the use of the Internet by Congress since 1998. Our objective has been to identify best practices congressional offices can employ to cope with the challenges and opportunities new technologies have brought and to better utilize technology to meet offices' needs and goals. In that time, we have seen Web sites go from rarities to necessities. In the five reports CMF has published over this period, we have sought to track the changing use of the Internet by Congress. With the *2007 Gold Mouse Report: Lessons from the Best Web Sites on Capitol Hill* we present the progress that has been made on Capitol Hill since 2006.

In 2007 we found progress to be decidedly mixed. The top congressional Web sites have continued to innovate and improve, but the majority of Web sites remain stagnant. While some congressional Web sites are better at providing certain features and tools, most have yet to embrace the concept of creating Web sites that are truly online offices. Though the process need not be extraordinarily difficult or intensive, congressional offices seem to balk at the effort or they focus more on being unique than they do on providing excellent online service. However, the advice we gave last year is still valid: there is no reason to reinvent the wheel. There are excellent blueprints for congressional Web sites; offices merely need to recognize and use them. This report is designed to help them do just that.

The primary purposes of this report are to: 1) recognize the congressional Web sites that successfully utilized the Internet to serve their constituencies and accomplish their goals; and 2) provide practical guidance to all offices on how to improve their sites. To that end, we conducted exhaustive research to identify the best practices, guidelines, and necessary approaches to making a successful congressional Web site. The result of that research is our *2007 Gold Mouse Report*. As an additional resource for offices wishing to improve their Web sites, CMF has also produced confidential, customized reports for each of the 618 congressional Web sites we reviewed.

Our 2006 report focused on describing the five building blocks for successful congressional Web sites and on illustrating how an office could utilize them to translate its priorities and strategic goals into a successful presence on the Web. This report complements that with a focus on what using the building blocks looks like in practice. This nuts-and-bolts approach is centered on what a typical congressional site looks like and what kind of content it contains. By focusing on the standard practices, we are able to provide a context for the best practices we have identified. Thus, we present the findings of our extensive review of all Member, committee, and leadership Web sites as a resource for all congressional offices seeking to improve their presence on the Internet. We encourage all offices to view a dynamic Web site as critical to their job and an integral part of the services they provide Americans.

CHAPTER 1

Key Findings

General

- Congress needs to recognize that the Internet is an essential information and communications medium. Citizens are online, and it is up to Congress to catch up with them. Studies and data gathered about the Internet, technology use, and politics since our last report have only strengthened the validity of this assertion. (Page 5)
- Despite some bright spots, overall the quality of congressional Web sites continues to be disappointing. The most common letter grade earned by congressional Web sites in 2007 was a “D”—the same as in 2006. A full 41.6% of sites were substandard (D) or failing (F). (Page 13) The complete grade breakdown is:
 - “A” – 16.8% (Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Award Winners)
 - “B” – 20.9%
 - “C” – 20.7%
 - “D” – 22.8%
 - “F” – 18.8%
- The underperforming Web sites remain stagnant. Half of the sites that earned “F”s last year received the same grade in 2007, and 63% of Member sites that received a “D” in 2006 received the same grade or slipped to an “F” in 2007. Of the Member sites that earned a “C” in 2006, 42% scored lower in 2007. (Page 15)
- The top performing Web sites continue to improve and innovate. Of the Member Web sites that received “B”s last year, 61% of them either maintained their quality or improved to become award-winners. Additionally, a surprising number of the 2006 freshmen started their term with an excellent site right out of the gate—16% of the class received “A”s, garnering them a Gold, Silver, or Bronze Mouse Award. (Page 16)

- It is possible for any office, regardless of the state of its current Web site, to become an award winner. In 2007, 63% of Member Mouse Award winners won an award for the first time. Freshman Members of Congress and every 2006 letter grade, from “A” through “F”, are represented among the 2007 Mouse Award winners. (Page 19)
- If you distill the best Member Web sites down to their major recurring elements, what emerges are the basic elements of any good Member Web site. (Page 38) Those elements are:



Design and Layout



Press Resources



Legislative Content



State/District Information



Constituent Services



Communication Tools

- The management of a site and the support structure behind it are just as important as what is on it—if not more so. According to the award-winning freshman offices and offices that have won Mouse Awards at least three out of the four times they have been handed out, the keys to managing an excellent site are: getting buy-in from the top levels of management, making the Web site a priority, formulating a strategic plan, allocating the necessary resources, creating a team-oriented approach, and meeting the needs of constituents on their terms. (Page 53)

Chamber and Party Trends

- The Senate continues to outperform the House of Representatives on the Web. The most common letter grade earned in the Senate was a “B” compared to a “D” in the House. In the Senate, 33% fewer sites received a failing grade in 2007 than in 2006, whereas in the House, the percentage of failing sites jumped from 12% to 21%—an increase of 75% since our 2006 evaluations. (Page 22)
- No single category of Web sites improved more than Member sites in the Senate, regardless of party. Both parties have seen a significant drop in the number of failing Senate Member sites, with 33% fewer Democratic sites and 69% fewer Republican sites receiving an “F,” and a significant rise in the number of above-average sites. (Page 29)
- Democratic Web sites performed slightly better than Republican Web sites in 2007. Sixty-one percent of Democratic sites obtained “C”s or better, compared to 55% of Republican sites. While Republican Web sites have 2% more “B”s, they have 4% more sites scoring “D”s and “F”s. (Page 27)

CHAPTER 2

The Internet and Congress in 2007

With more than 70% of American adults online, including significant percentages of the population over 65 and earning less than \$30,000,¹ there is really no longer any excuse for a congressional office not to have a good Web site. Citizens are increasingly using the Internet to stay informed and get involved in politics, to interact with the government, and to participate in democracy. Congress, in turn, needs to engage with citizens online.

CMF's last *Gold Mouse Report* stated that, "Congress needs to recognize that the Internet is an essential information and communications medium." In the year since the release of that report, studies and data gathered about the Internet, technology use, and politics have only strengthened the validity of this assertion. The percentage of American adults with high-speed Internet connections at home has increased from 42% to 50%.² In 2005, as part of our Communicating with Congress project, we reported that postal and e-mail communications to Capitol Hill had increased 300% since 1995—from 50 million to 200 million.³ Our latest 2006 data reveals that in just two years, e-mail communications alone increased by 72%, from 182 to 313 million; a staggering 3000% increase over the number of e-mails Congress received in 1996.⁴

It is important to note that e-mail communication is replacing former modes of communication—not complementing them: while total communication to Congress was increasing 300% from 1995 to 2004, the amount of postal mail decreased 60%—from over 50 million to fewer than 20 million.⁵ Americans are communicating online and looking for information about elected officials and public policy online. In the past year, 59% of online

¹ "Demographics of Internet Users," June 15, 2007, Pew Internet & American Life Project. 19 Nov. 2007 <http://pewinternet.org/trends/User_Demo_6.15.07.htm>.

² "Why We Don't Know Enough about Broadband in the U.S.," November 2007, Pew Internet & American Life Project. 19 Nov. 2007 <<http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/Backgrounder.MeasuringBroadband.pdf>>.

³ *Communicating with Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*, CMF (United States: 2005) 4. <http://www.cmfweb.org/storage/cmfweb/documents/CMF_Pubs/communicatingwithcongress_report1.pdf>.

⁴ House e-mail and postal mail data provided by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives. Senate e-mail data provided by the Office of the Senate Sergeant at Arms. Senate postal mail data provided by the Office of the Senate Postmaster.

⁵ Ibid.

registered voters surveyed had visited the Web site of a candidate or public official.⁶ The time is past due for all congressional offices to make their online presence an integral part of their day-to-day functioning.

While a majority of Americans use the Internet, the most politically active and influential citizens are even more active online than the population at large. In its 2007 research, the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet (IPDI), found that 81% of politically active opinion leaders (“poli-fluentials”) reported visiting the Web site of a candidate or public official—22% more than other online registered voters surveyed.⁷ By definition, these poli-fluentials are people who volunteer their time and money to political campaigns and vocally share their opinions with others.⁸ Americans are going online and visiting the Web sites of public figures, and those who influence opinion in their own social circles and give money to political causes are even more likely to do so. Thus, having an effective online presence can have strategic benefit for congressional offices.

The Internet has already cemented its place as the standard for communication and information-sharing in the 21st century. In fact, it appears that online interaction is only going to become more elaborate and sophisticated. Social networking sites (like MySpace and Facebook) and sites which allow users to edit and tag content (like Wikipedia and Flickr) are growing ever more popular. These so-called “Web 2.0” applications and functions are becoming more and more commonplace.

The cornerstone of a healthy democracy is citizens’ access to timely information about the activities of their government and their elected representatives. Citizens are online, and it is up to Congress to catch up—and keep up—with them.

⁶ Carol Darr et al, *Poli-fluentials: The New Political Kingmakers*, (Washington: The Institute for Politics Democracy & the Internet, 2007) 19. 19 Nov. 2007 <<http://www.ipdi.org/UploadedFiles/Polifluentials%20Report%20-%20Final.pdf>>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 3.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology: A Brief Description

To assist congressional offices seeking to improve their Web sites, we set out to identify the best practices that would lead to the most effective Web sites on Capitol Hill. Beginning in 1998, we developed a process for assessing the degree to which congressional Web sites utilize these practices. This comprehensive evaluation method, which has been fine-tuned over the years, gauges both quantitative and qualitative measurements of the sites.

Evaluation Criteria

Over the years, CMF has conducted extensive research into what constitutes an effective congressional Web site. Our research included focus groups with constituents, interviews with congressional staff, industry research, surveys of political reporters and advocacy groups, and in-depth evaluations of past and present congressional Web sites. Through this research we identified five building blocks that underlie the success of the most effective Web sites on Capitol Hill. We thus set out to evaluate congressional Web sites by determining the degree to which they incorporated these five building blocks. In order of importance, they are:

- 1. Audience:** The Web site conveys the sense that the office has clearly identified its Web audiences, both those seeking information from the office and those whom the office wants to target, and has methodically built the site around those audiences;
- 2. Content:** The site provides up-to-date information that is specifically targeted to meet the needs of the defined audiences and the goals of the office;
- 3. Usability:** The design and information architecture of the Web site provide quick and easy access to information and services;
- 4. Interactivity:** The Web site fosters two-way communication—both on and offline;
- 5. Innovation:** Creative features enhance visitors' experiences on the site by making it more interesting and easier to use.

Evaluation Process

We evaluated 618 congressional Web sites. This included 99 Senate Member sites, 438 House Member sites, 68 majority and minority committee sites, and 13 leadership sites (at the time of the evaluations there were two vacant House seats and one vacant Senate seat). Because the three types of congressional Web sites (Member, committee, and leadership) have distinct goals, functions, and audiences, they were given unique evaluations that took those differences into account.

Using the five building blocks as our foundation, we devised an evaluation framework that would be fair and objective and that assessed both quantitative factors as well as important qualitative factors that affect a visitor's experience on the Web site. More specifically, we examined each Member, committee, and leadership site for 94, 43, and 40 attributes (respectively) that together measure how well the five building blocks are utilized. Quantitative factors would include the existence of certain specified content or features, such as a site map or search feature. Qualitative factors include the quality and tone of the information presented; the usability and navigability of the site; its look and feel; and the degree to which the information meets visitor needs. Because of the unique and divergent nature of each committee and leadership site, the evaluation of committee and leadership sites necessarily relied less on a large number of quantitative factors, and more on qualitative factors specific to each site's purpose and goals.

Prior to conducting the Member evaluations, every evaluator went through several rounds of training to assure that each criterion—and especially the qualitative criteria—would be interpreted and applied the same way regardless of the evaluator, within a reasonable margin of error. A subset of evaluators re-evaluated archived Web sites from 2006 to further ensure that grading was consistent between 2006 and 2007. For this report, the Web sites of all Members of Congress were evaluated in July and August 2007. For committee and leadership sites, consistent grading was maintained through a single evaluator for all sites. The evaluations were conducted between August and September of 2007.

Analysis Process

In order to assure the comparability between the 2006 and 2007 evaluations, the scores for each type of site (House Member, Senate Member, committee, and leadership) were standardized. The top score in each category from 2006 was given the same value in 2007 (100%) and all of the other scores in each category ranked above or below that as the percent of that score. In this way we were able to accurately compare sites from 2006 directly to those from 2007.

Member Sites

After evaluating all 537 Member Web sites (including those of all House and Senate Members, Delegates, and the Resident Commissioner), the data were analyzed by our research partners from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, the University of California-Riverside, and Ohio State University. Using statistical factor analysis on the collected data, a preliminary numeric score was assigned to each Web site. Extra credit was then given to sites that scored above average in four priority categories:

issue content, constituent casework, timeliness, and usability. The extra credit was then added to the preliminary score to produce a final numeric score. [See “Deal Breakers” on page 11.] The final numeric scores were translated into letter grades and then into the Mouse Award categories shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. BREAKDOWN OF GRADES FOR MEMBER WEB SITES

SCORE	LETTER	GRADE MOUSE AWARD
90-100+	A+	Gold
80-89	A	Silver
70-79	A-	Bronze
50-69	B	
40-49	C	
30-39	D	
0-29	F	

Committee and Leadership Sites

Committee and leadership sites were subjected to a somewhat different analysis process than the Member sites. This is because there are fewer total committee and leadership sites and because committee and leadership sites have distinctly different audiences and purposes, depending upon their role in Congress. The sites were divided into classes based on their target audiences and then their scores were weighted based on the information their target audiences expected. The cutoffs between scores for committee sites, established in the *2006 Gold Mouse Report*, were used to assign letter grades as shown in Figure 2. Because of the small number of leadership sites, grades were curved based on the 2007 scores and a score breakdown is not available in order to maintain the privacy of individual leadership offices (Figure 3).

FIGURE 2. BREAKDOWN OF GRADES FOR COMMITTEE WEB SITES

SCORE	LETTER	GRADE MOUSE AWARD
96-100+	A+	Gold
90-95	A	Silver
86-89	A-	Bronze
71-85	B	
53-70	C	
36-52	D	
0-35	F	

FIGURE 3. BREAKDOWN OF GRADES FOR LEADERSHIP WEB SITES**LETTER GRADE MOUSE AWARD**

A+	Gold
A	Silver
A-	Bronze
B	
C	
D	
F	

For a more extensive explanation of the methodology used to evaluate, rank, and award the Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Awards, please see the Appendix (on page 91).

Using the five building blocks as our foundation, we devised an evaluation framework that would be fair and objective and that assessed both quantitative factors as well as important qualitative factors that affect a visitor's experience on the Web site.

DEAL BREAKERS

To determine the final grades of each Member Web site, four priority categories were given more weight than all the others: extra credit was given to those sites that scored above average across all four of these categories. While these categories may seem obvious at first glance, a surprising number of congressional sites either inadequately addressed them or overlooked them entirely.

Timeliness

The Internet is a fast-paced medium, and users expect up-to-date information. No matter how well-designed a site is or how extensive its content, it's not going to be useful for visitors if the most current information they can find is a year old. Our evaluation assessed whether or not the information on a Web site was clearly from the 110th Congress.

While 98.3% of Member sites have content about national issues, just 63.1% of them included information from the 110th Congress.

Usability

All the content in the world is not going to be helpful to users if they cannot find what they are looking for. Because everyone has a different level of familiarity with the Internet, as well as with Congress and their own Representative or Senator, it is important that every Web site make its content as easy to find and as easy to navigate as possible. Our evaluation took note of how easy it was to find content and move throughout the Web site.

On a scale of 1 to 5 (five being the highest), the average Member Web site score for "Navigation" was 3.5.

Issue Content

All sites, regardless of their audiences, need to have information about legislative activities and the work of the office. This should include information about legislative issues of national, state, or local interest. It is a Representative's primary responsibility to keep their constituents informed about his or her actions. Our evaluation measured the breadth and depth of the issues covered.

On a scale of 0 to 5, the average Member Web site score for "National Issue Content" was 3.1.

Constituent Casework

Citizens typically access congressional Web sites for a specific reason. Seeking assistance from the Senator or Representative is one of them. When they access a Web site they are seeking information online, not offline. It is essential that congressional offices provide information and guidance about constituent services online, rather than requiring citizens to contact the office by phone to get answers to even basic constituent service questions. Our evaluation examined the type of casework information and quality of the guidance given on the site.

On a scale of 0 to 5, the average Member Web site score for "Constituent Casework" was 2.9.

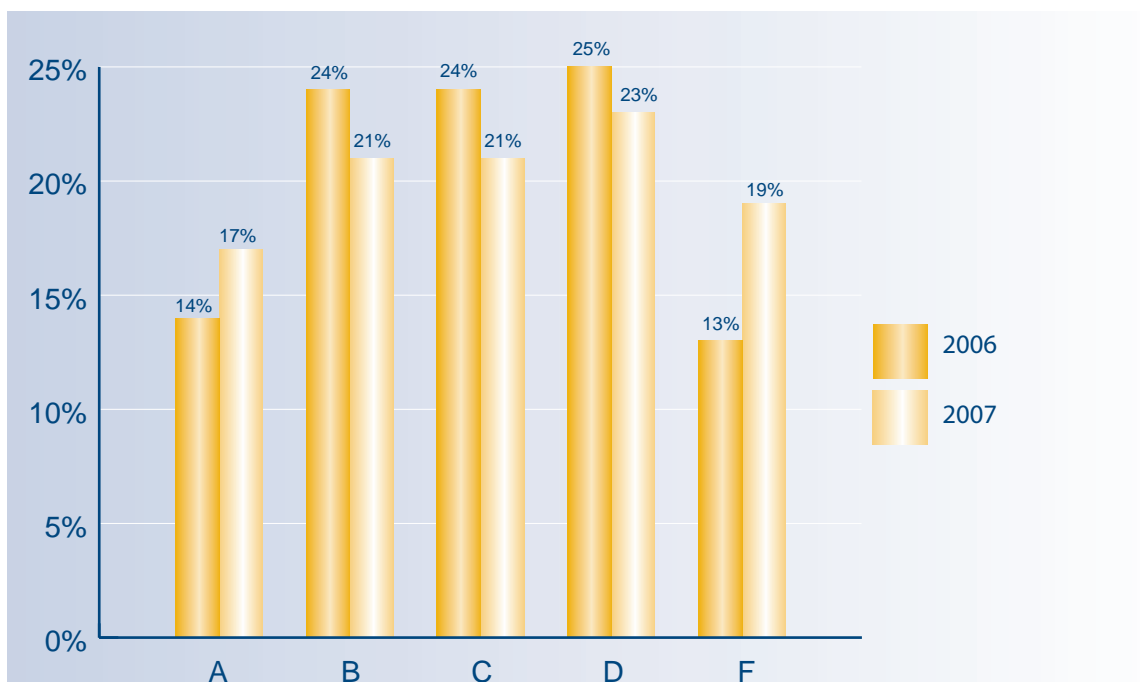
CHAPTER 4

Analysis

Beginning in July and continuing through September 2007, we evaluated the 618 Member office, committee, and leadership Web sites of Congress. This included 438 House Member sites, 99 Senate Member sites, 68 committee sites, and 13 leadership sites (at the time of evaluations there were 2 vacant seats in the House and 1 in the Senate). What follows is an assessment of how congressional sites fared, a general description of the chamber and party trends, and important facts and themes that emerged after a thorough analysis of the evaluations. It should be noted that percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding, and Members were grouped with the party with which they caucused.

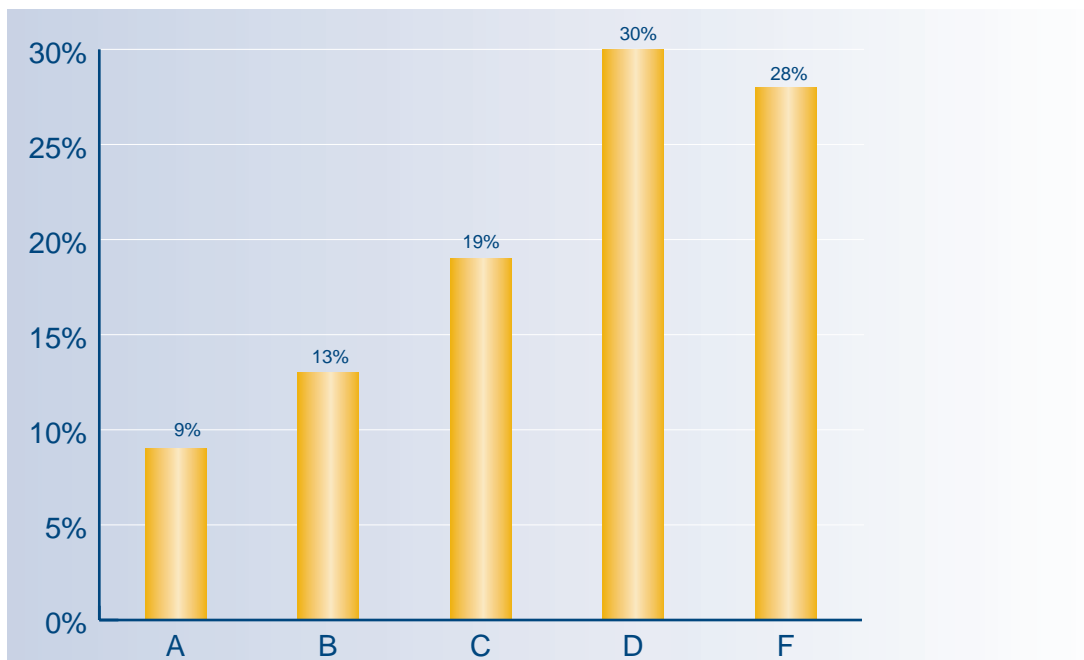
Overall Findings

Despite some bright spots, overall the quality of congressional Web sites continues to be disappointing. The quality of congressional Web sites, as a whole, remains less comprehensive and accessible than one expects from an institution with broad public audiences. The most common letter grade earned by congressional Web sites in 2007 was a “D”—the same as it was in 2006. Last year 38.6% of sites were substandard (D) or failing (F). This year that was true of 41.6% of congressional sites (see Figure 4). In particular, the underperforming Web sites remain stagnant, failing to improve (see Figure 6). Half of the sites that earned “F”s last year received the same grade in 2007, and a full 63% of Member sites that received a “D” in 2006 received the same grade or slipped to an “F” in 2007. Of the Member sites that earned a “C” in 2006, 42% scored lower in 2007. This was the only grade category in which more sites received lower grades than received the same grade again. In addition, the 110th Congress freshmen elected in 2006 performed much like the rest of their veteran colleagues in Congress—approximately one-third of the 65 earned above average grades (“A” or “B”), while approximately 2 in 5 were substandard or failing.

FIGURE 4. COMPARISON OF OVERALL GRADE DISTRIBUTIONS IN 2006 AND 2007**FIGURE 5. CONGRESSIONAL WEB SITE GRADES BY CATEGORY**

	A	B	C	D	F	Total
House Member	65	79	93	104	97	438
Senate Member	24	31	16	17	11	99
Committee	12	15	17	16	8	68
Leadership	3	4	2	4	0	13
Total	104	129	128	141	116	618

FIGURE 6. GRADE DISTRIBUTION IN 2007 OF AVERAGE (C), SUBSTANDARD (D), AND FAILING (F) WEB SITES FROM 2006



*Last year 38.6% of sites were substandard (D) or failing (F).
This year that was true of 41.6% of congressional sites.*

The top-performing Web sites continue to improve and innovate. Of the Member Web sites that received “B”s last year, fully 61% of them either maintained their quality or improved to become award-winners. Only those that failed to keep their sites updated dropped below average. Additionally, a surprising number of the 2006 freshmen started their term with an excellent site right out of the gate—16% of the class received “A”s, garnering them a Gold, Silver, or Bronze Mouse Award. The 2006 award-winning sites in particular continued to excel and even raised the bar for excellence in congressional Web sites. In fact, 14 Member, committee, and leadership Web sites scored higher than the highest-scoring site in their respective category last year. Of the 2006 award-winning Member Web sites, 44% won Gold, Silver, or Bronze Mouse Awards again this year. In addition, 19 more sites overall received a Gold, Silver, or Bronze Mouse Award this year and twice as many sites earned a Gold Mouse Award (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 7. GRADE DISTRIBUTION IN 2007 OF ABOVE-AVERAGE (B) AND AWARD-WINNING (A) WEB SITES FROM 2006

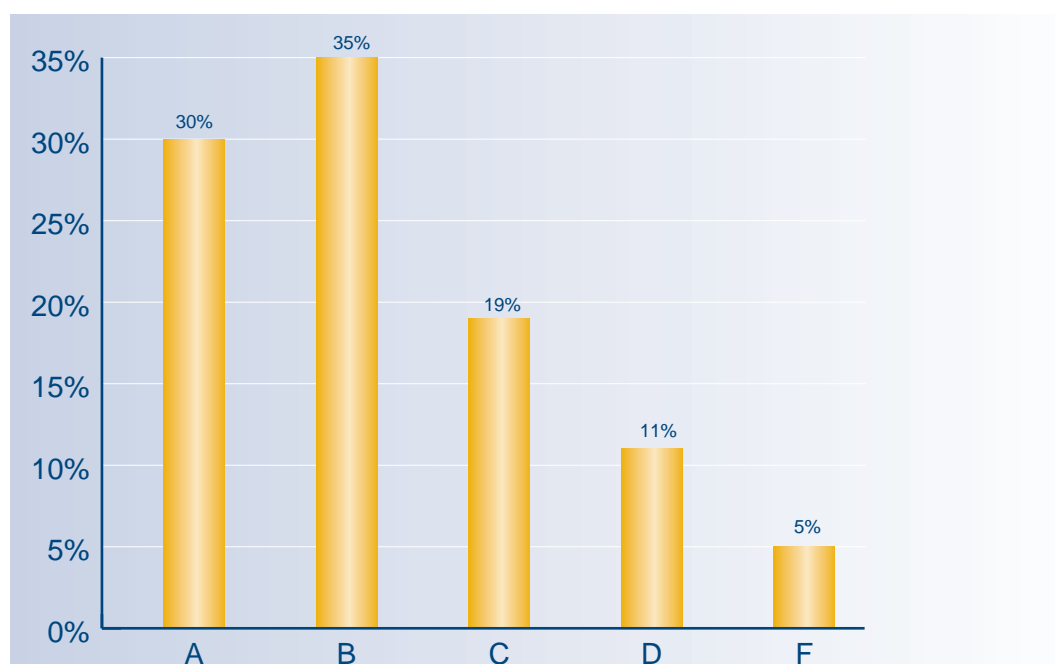
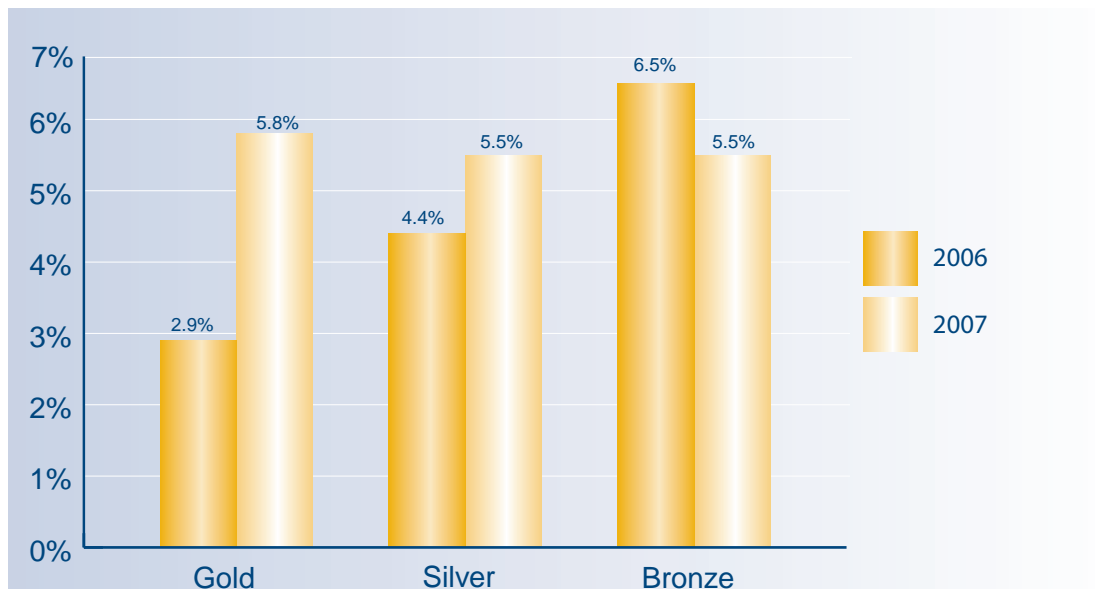


FIGURE 8. COMPARISON OF OVERALL MOUSE AWARDS IN 2006 AND 2007**FIGURE 9. MOUSE AWARDS BY CATEGORY**

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
House Member	26	20	19	65
Senate Member	4	10	10	24
Committee	5	3	4	12
Leadership	1	1	1	3
Total	36	34	34	104

FIGURE 10. MOUSE AWARDS BY CHAMBER

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
House	30	24	23	77
Senate	6	10	11	27
Total	36	34	34	104

OF MICE AND MEMBERS

CMF has bestowed Mouse Awards to exceptional congressional Web sites four times since 2002. Eleven Members of Congress have received Mouse Awards at least three of the four times. Both admirable and enduring, these sites exemplify ideal congressional practices online.

Three Members of Congress have won Mouse Awards every single time they have been awarded. **Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)**, **Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA)**, and **Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)** have maintained a distinguished online presence every time they have been evaluated. These sites are at the pinnacle of consistent congressional Web site excellence.

Eight Members of Congress have won Mouse Awards three of the four times they have been awarded. The following Members of Congress have cultivated outstanding Web sites with remarkable dependability:

- **Congressman Tom Allen (D-ME)**
- **Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)**
- **Senator Larry Craig (R-ID)**
- **Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)**
- **Congressman John Larson (D-CT)**
- **Senator Carl Levin (D-MI)**
- **Senator John Thune (R-SD)**
- **Congresswoman Heather Wilson (R-NM)**

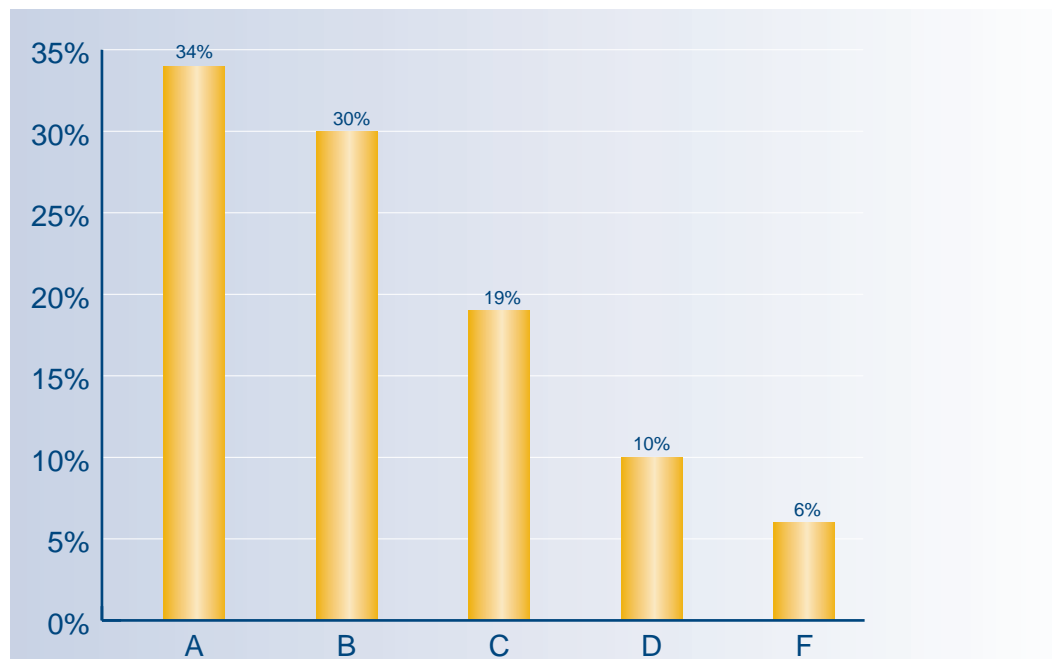
FIGURE 11. MULTI-YEAR MOUSE AWARD WINNING MEMBERS

Member	2007	2006	2003	2002
Rep. Tom Allen (D-ME)	Gold	Bronze		Silver
Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)	Silver	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)	Silver	Gold	Gold	
Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID)	Silver	Silver	Silver	
Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)	Silver		Silver	Silver
Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA)	Gold	Gold	Silver	Gold
Rep. John Larson (D-CT)	Silver	Gold	Gold	
Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT)	Bronze	Gold	Gold	Gold
Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI)	Bronze	Silver		Silver
Sen. John Thune (R-SD)	Gold	Bronze		Silver
Rep. Heather Wilson (R-NM)	Silver		Bronze	Silver

It is possible for any office, regardless of the state of its current Web site, to become an award winner. In 2007, 63% of Member office Mouse Award winners won an award for the first time. Every letter grade from 2006—“A” through “F”—is represented among the 2007 Mouse Award winners (see Figure 12). New Members of Congress are represented as well. Admirably, ten of the 64 freshman Members in the 110th Congress won Mouse Awards for their Web sites. They are: Congressman **Bruce Braley (D-IA)**, Congressman **Christopher Carney (D-PA)**, Congressman **Brad Ellsworth (D-IN)**, Senator **Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)**, Congressman **Nick Lampson (D-TX)**, Congressman **Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)**, Congressman **Patrick Murphy (D-PA)**, Congressman **Ed Perlmutter (D-CO)**, Senator **Bernie Sanders (I-VT)**, and Congressman **Peter Welch (D-VT)**.

We said it last year, and it is true again this year: any office can have a great Web site. We conducted an analysis on a variety of factors to identify any that seem to contribute to the quality of a Member’s Web site. We looked at the age and tenure of the Member, the population of the state or district, the average income of the state or district, the percentage of households with Internet connections, and many other factors. None of them revealed any significant patterns. This emphasizes the simple fact that, with the right management and focus, any congressional office can turn its Web site into a substantial and successful resource for constituents. It is possible, even in a few short months, for an office to transform a substandard Web site into a Gold Mouse Award winning site.

FIGURE 12. 2007 MOUSE AWARD WINNING WEB SITE GRADES IN 2006



FEATURES: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

Congress has work to do if it wants to increase the quality of its presence on the Web. Like the quality of congressional Web sites overall, progress in adopting useful information and features is mixed. What follows is a glimpse at the implementation of various features from 2006 to 2007. It is important to note that long term progress and consistency—which is more important than a point-in-time snapshot—cannot be assessed in just two years.

Congressional Web sites are slowly adopting next-generation Internet technology.

- **RSS Feeds** – 14% more Member sites in the House and 16% more Member sites in the Senate offered syndicated online content (RSS feeds) in 2007 than 2006. Of committee Web sites, 13% more did so. A total of 160 of the 618 Member, committee and leadership sites offered RSS feeds.
- **Video** – 20% more House Member sites and 11% more Senate Member sites offered video clips. Video Webcasts are offered on 9% more committee Web sites than in 2006. A total of 349 of the 618 Member, committee and leadership sites offered video content of some kind.
- **Podcasts** – 2% more House Member sites and 9% more Senate Member sites offered online syndicated audio feeds for subscribers (podcasts). A total of 69 of the 618 Member, committee and leadership sites offered podcasts.

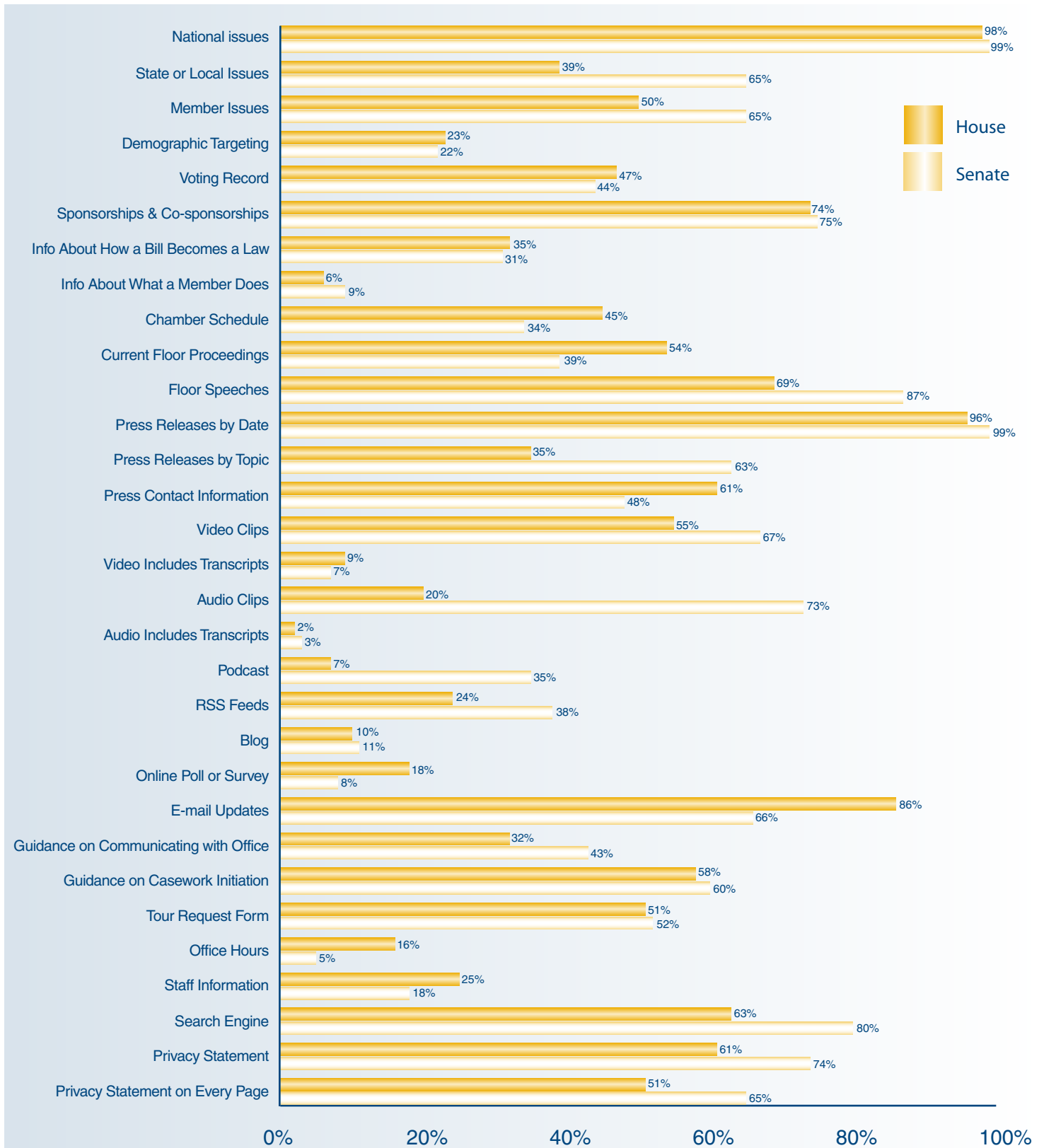
More Member Web sites are covering the basics.

- **Voting Record** – 11% more House Member sites included information on the Member's voting record this year than last. In the Senate however, the number of Member sites that did so actually decreased 2%.
- **Current Floor Proceedings** – 6% more House Member and 18% more Senate Member sites had information about House and Senate floor proceedings.
- **Press Releases by Topic** – 7% more House Member and 11% more Senate Member sites offered press releases sorted by topic.

Key features are not being utilized effectively.

- **Search Engine** – 12% more House Member and 11% more Senate Member sites had functional search engines in 2007 compared to the previous year. While this is encouraging, it is alarming that a third of House Member sites and a fifth of Senate Member sites did not have them at all. Among committee Web sites, from 2006 to 2007 there were 23% more sites that did NOT have a functional search engine.
- **Sponsorships and Co-sponsorships** – While the number of House and Senate Member sites offering bill sponsorship and co-sponsorship information rose by 6% and 9%, respectively, the number of sites that offered them for the current congress, versus previous congresses, has actually decreased by 5% and 19%, respectively.
- **Committee Information** – While the number of committee Web sites offering statements by the chair increased significantly (by 57%), the number of sites offering a hearing schedule for the committee and publications or reports produced by the committee decreased by 22% and 11% respectively.

FIGURE 13. COMPARISON OF FEATURES ON HOUSE AND SENATE MEMBER WEB SITES



Note: This is a selection of the more interesting features—and not an exhaustive list—of what we looked for in our evaluations

House versus Senate

The Senate continues to outperform the House of Representatives on the Web.

The most common letter grade earned in the Senate was a “B” compared to a “D” in the House (see Figure 14). In the Senate, 33% fewer sites received a failing grade in 2007 than in 2006, whereas in the House, the percentage of failing sites jumped from 12% to 21%—an increase of 75% since our 2006 evaluations (see Figures 16 and 17). More than half of the Senate sites received an “A” or “B”—a 20% increase over 2006—compared to just one-third of House sites that did the same. However, at the top, both chambers saw an increase in “A”s and, therefore, in their total number of Mouse Award winners.

FIGURE 14. COMPARISON OF HOUSE AND SENATE OVERALL GRADES (MEMBER, COMMITTEE, AND LEADERSHIP)

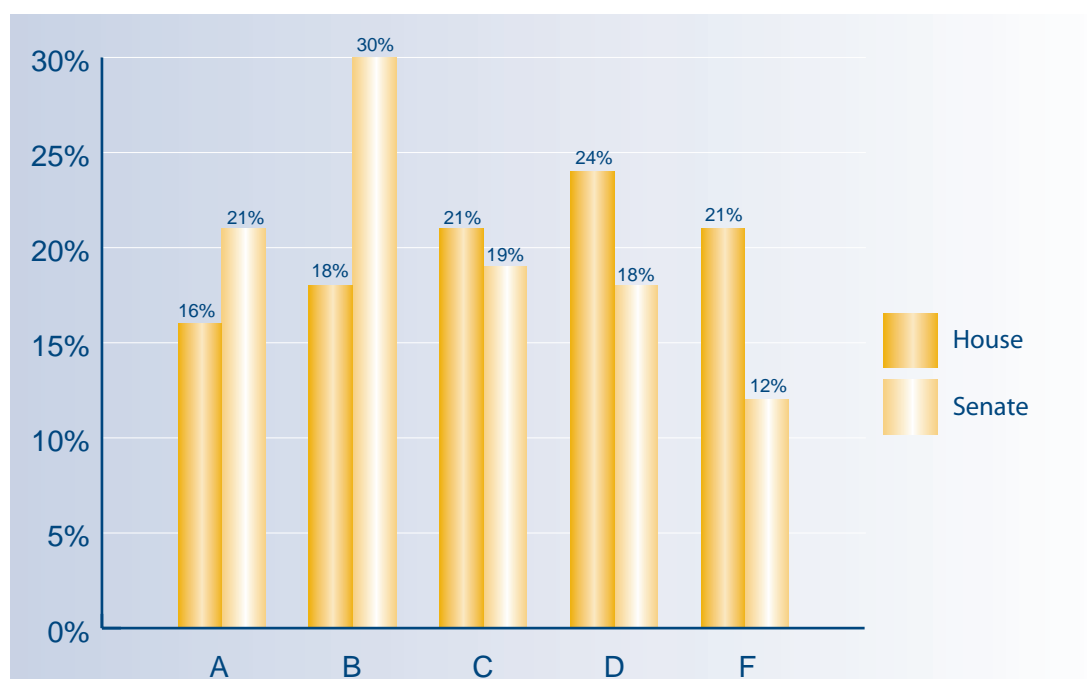


FIGURE 15. GRADES BY CHAMBER

	A	B	C	D	F	Total
House Member	77	90	103	118	101	489
Senate Member	27	39	25	23	15	129
Total	104	129	128	141	116	618

FIGURE 16. COMPARISON OF SENATE GRADES IN 2006 AND 2007 (MEMBER, COMMITTEE, AND LEADERSHIP)

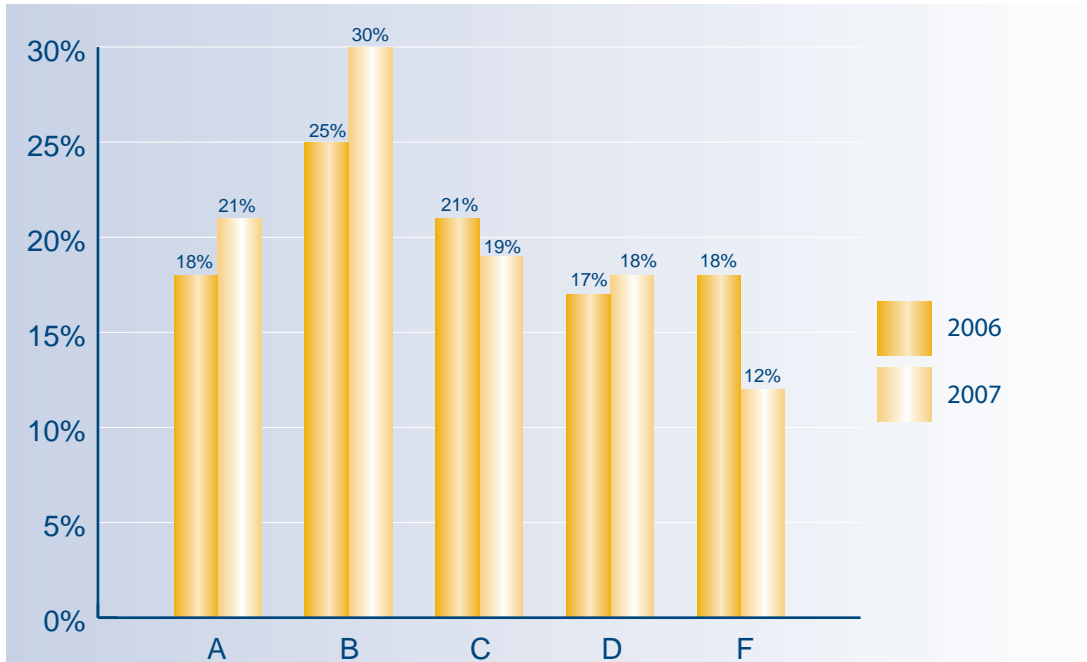
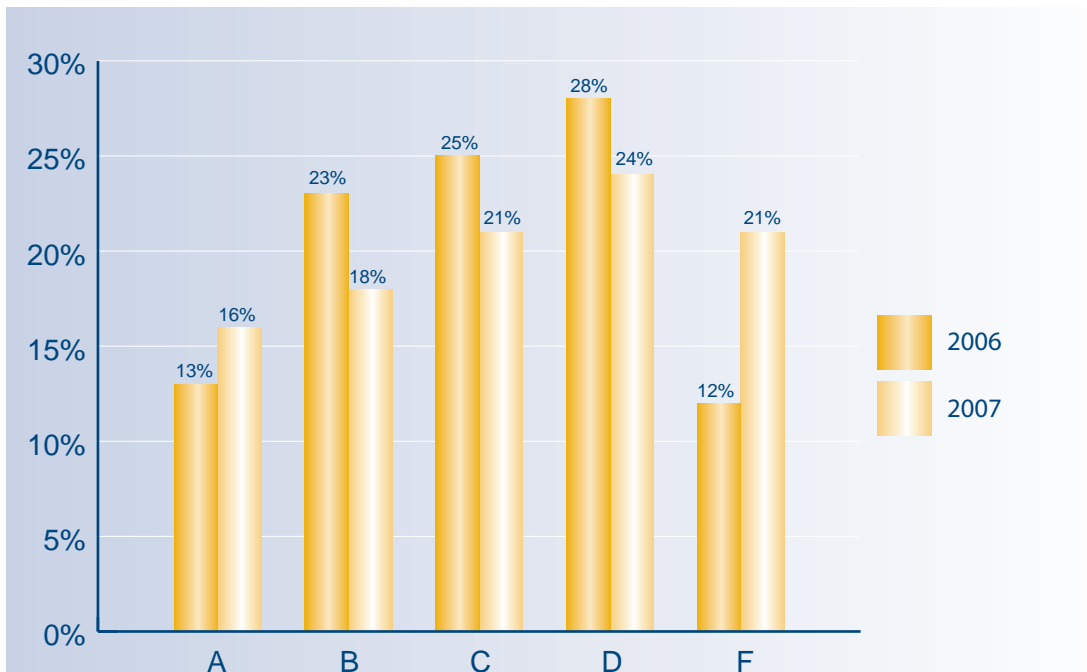
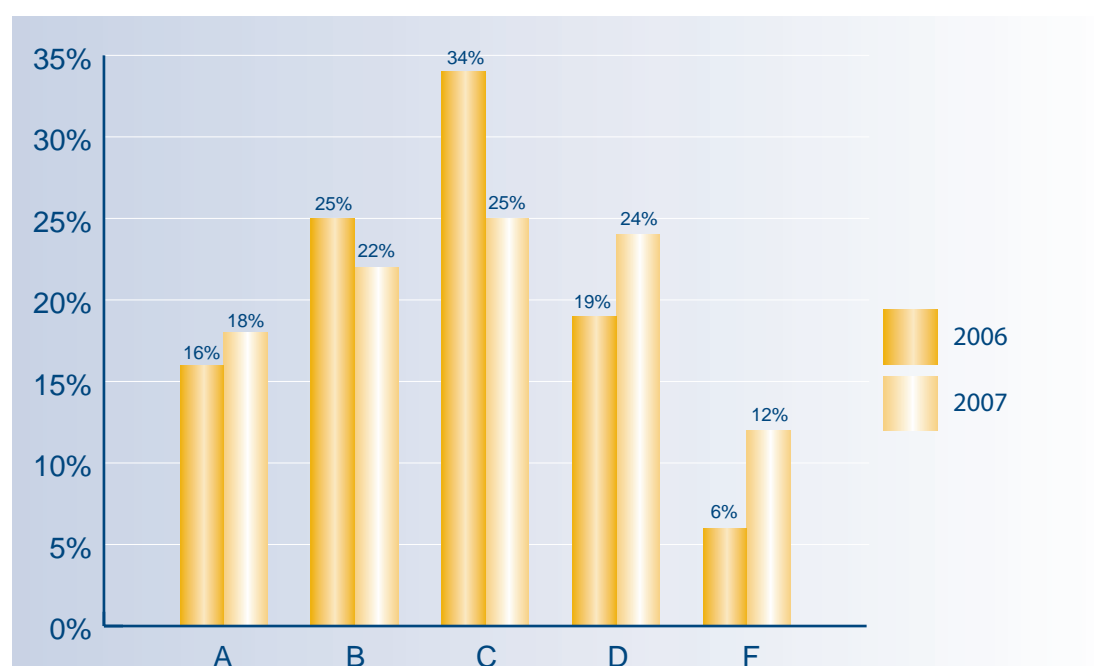


FIGURE 17. COMPARISON OF HOUSE GRADES IN 2006 AND 2007 (MEMBER, COMMITTEE, AND LEADERSHIP)



Committee Web sites are doing worse overall. The percentage of substandard or failing committee sites (both majority and minority) increased 44%; the percentage of House and Senate committee Web sites that scored an “F” actually doubled between 2006 and 2007 (see Figure 18). This is not altogether surprising, however, given that both houses of Congress have switched party control since the 2006 evaluations and, as a result, both the majority and minority committees had to completely reevaluate their Web strategies and offerings.

FIGURE 18. COMPARISON OF COMMITTEE GRADES IN 2006 AND 2007 (HOUSE AND SENATE, MAJORITY AND MINORITY)



Overall, Senate committee Web sites are performing better than House committee Web sites. The overall progress for House committee Web sites is disappointing; 39% of House committee sites scored a “D” or “F” compared to 28% of Senate committee Web sites. The news is not all bad for House sites, however, as both the House and Senate have the same percentage of sites that earned either “A”s or “B”s (40%), and 21% of the House committee Web sites are award winners—compared to 12% of Senate committee Web sites (see Figure 19). This is a reversal from 2006, when House committee Web sites performed better than Senate committee Web sites across the board (see Figures 20 and 21). Again, this is likely attributable, at least in part, to the fact that all committees—majority and minority alike—have taken on new roles after the 2006 election and must reevaluate their Web strategies as a result.

FIGURE 19. COMPARISON OF HOUSE AND SENATE COMMITTEE GRADES

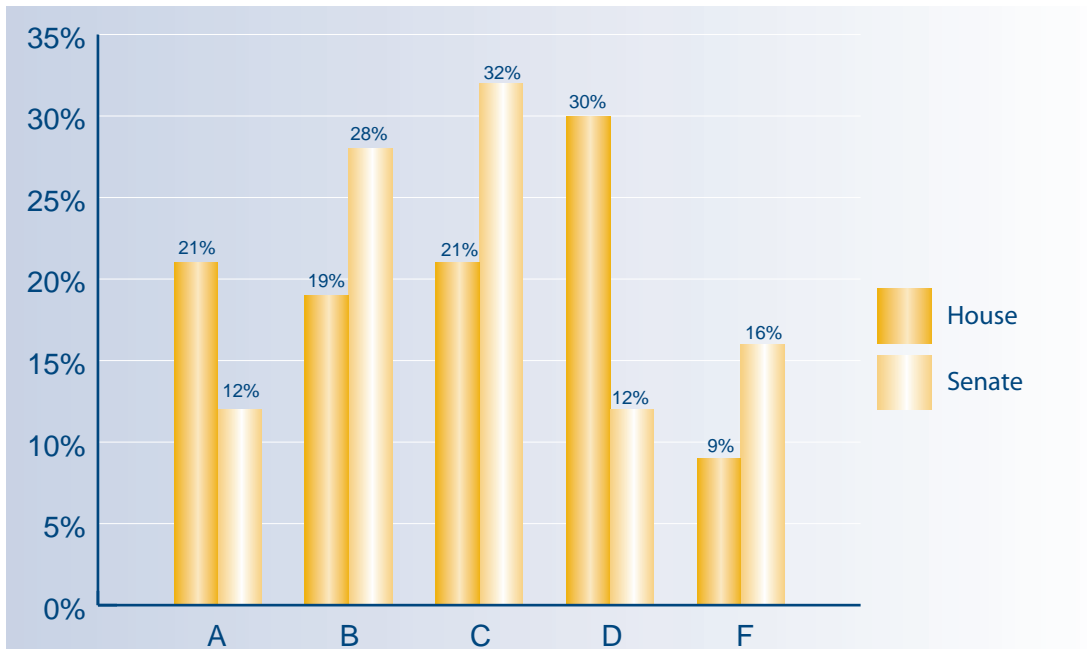


FIGURE 20. COMPARISON OF HOUSE COMMITTEE GRADES IN 2006 AND 2007

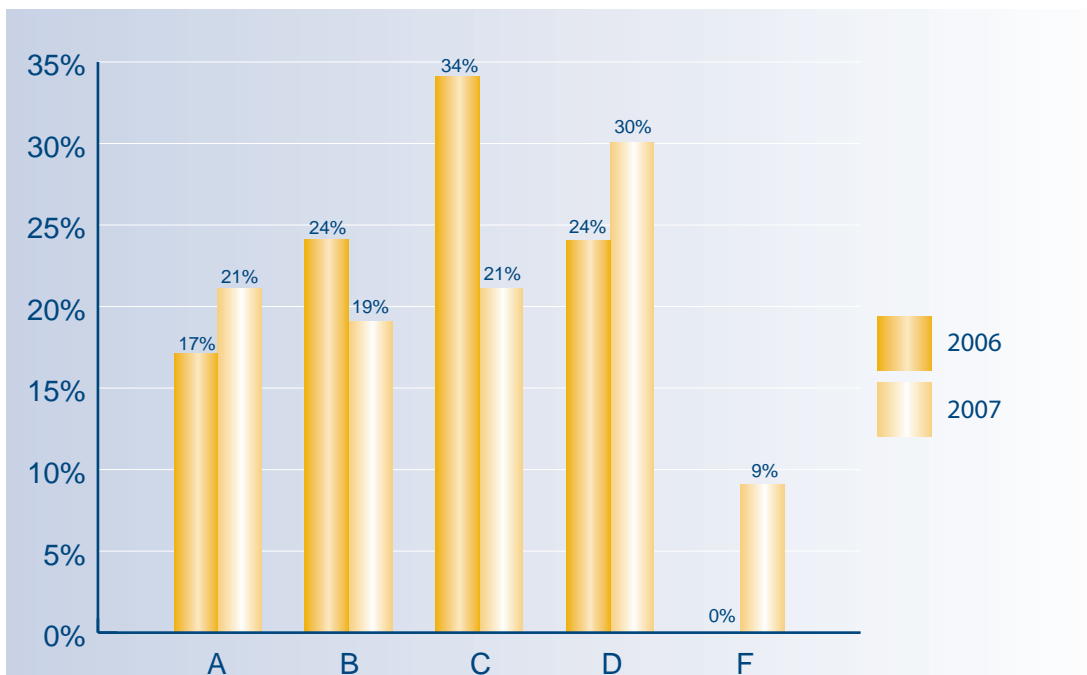
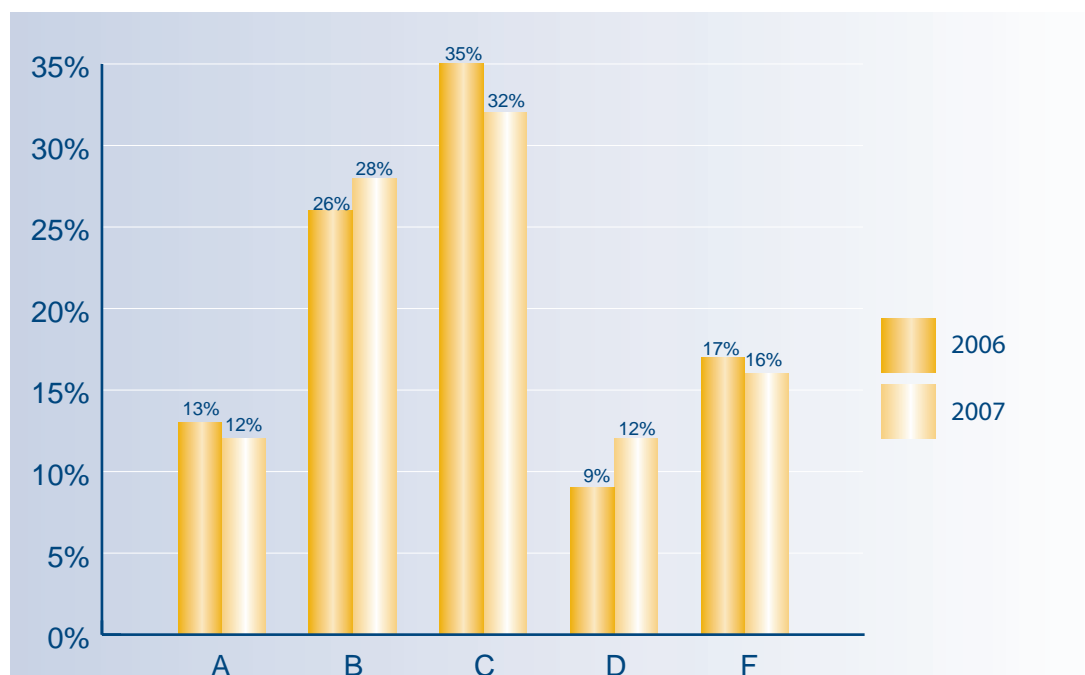


FIGURE 21. COMPARISON OF SENATE COMMITTEE GRADES IN 2006 AND 2007

The overall progress for House committee Web sites is disappointing; 39% of House committee sites scored a “D” or “F” compared to 28% of Senate committee Web sites.

Democrat versus Republican

Overall, Democratic Web sites performed slightly better than Republican Web sites. In 2006, Republican Web sites performed slightly better than their Democratic counterparts. In our 2007 evaluations, however, Democratic sites hold a slight edge over Republican sites; 61% of Democratic sites obtained “C”s or better, compared to 55% of Republican sites (see Figure 22). While Republican Web sites have 2% more “B”s, they have 4% more sites scoring “D”s or “F”s. The difference cannot be completely attributed to the switch in party control of the committees, either. The number of Democratic Member sites with “C”s or better increased by 3% from 2006 to 2007, while for Republicans the number of Member sites earning those grades decreased by 7% (see Figures 24 and 25).

FIGURE 22. COMPARISON OF DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN GRADE DISTRIBUTION (MEMBER, COMMITTEE, AND LEADERSHIP)

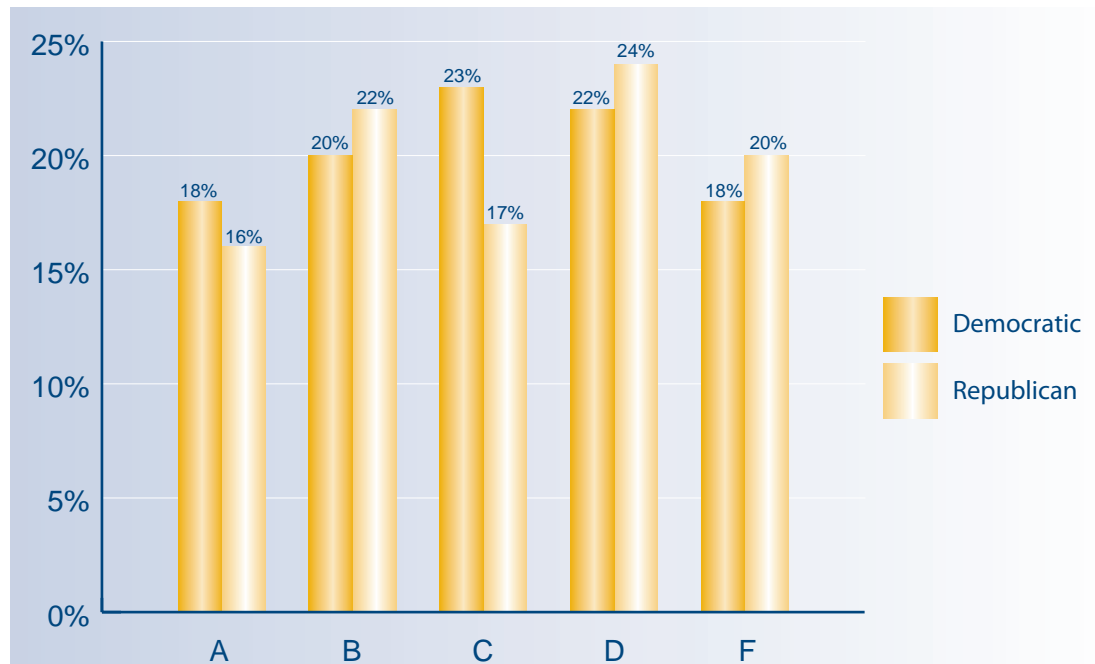


FIGURE 23. GRADES BY PARTY

	A	B	C	D	F	Total
Democratic	59	66	79	74	59	337
Republican	45	63	49	67	57	281
Total	104	129	128	141	116	618

FIGURE 24. COMPARISON OF GRADES FOR HOUSE AND SENATE DEMOCRATIC MEMBER WEB SITES IN 2006 AND 2007

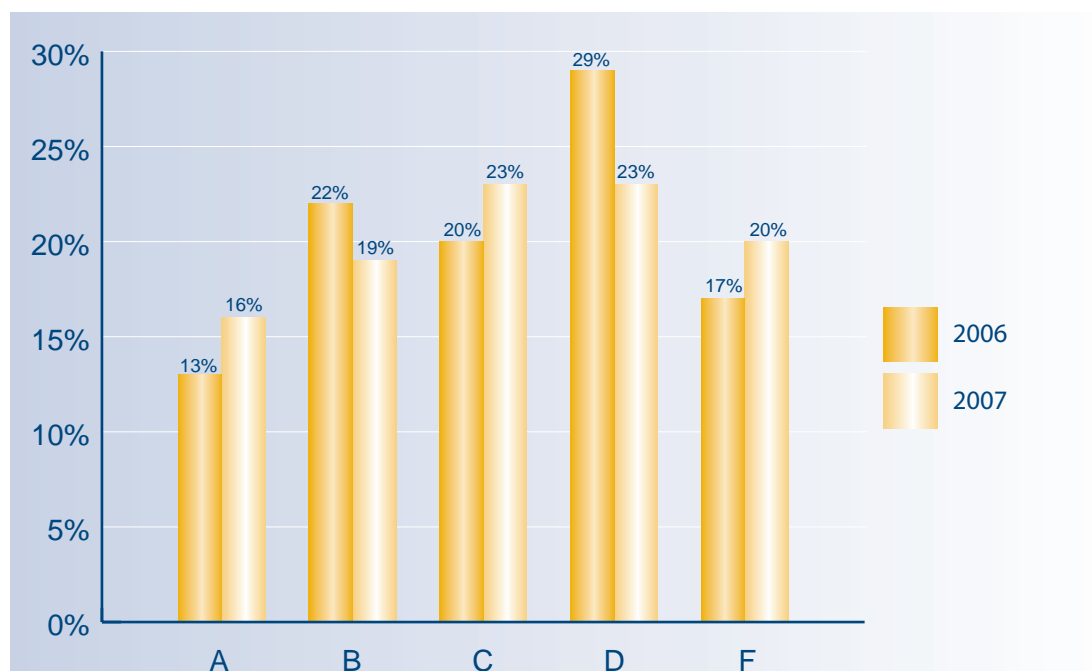
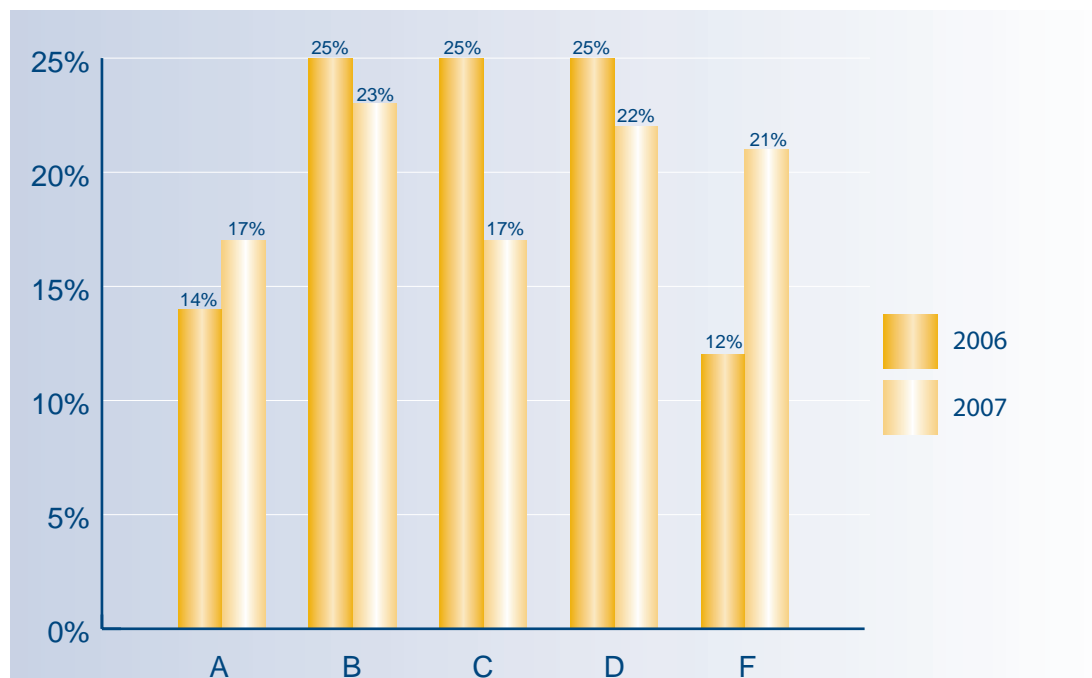


FIGURE 25. COMPARISON OF GRADES FOR HOUSE AND SENATE REPUBLICAN MEMBER WEB SITES IN 2006 AND 2007



For both parties, Senate Member sites have significantly improved. No single category of Web sites improved more than Member sites in the Senate, regardless of party (see Figures 26 and 27). Democratic Members have almost doubled the percentage of “A”s they received over their 2006 level, and the percentage of above-average (those earning an “A” or “B”) Republican Member sites has increased from 57% to 71%. Both parties in the Senate have likewise seen a significant drop in the number of failing Member sites—33% fewer Democratic sites and 69% fewer Republican sites.

FIGURE 26. COMPARISON OF GRADES FOR SENATE DEMOCRATIC MEMBER WEB SITES IN 2006 AND 2007

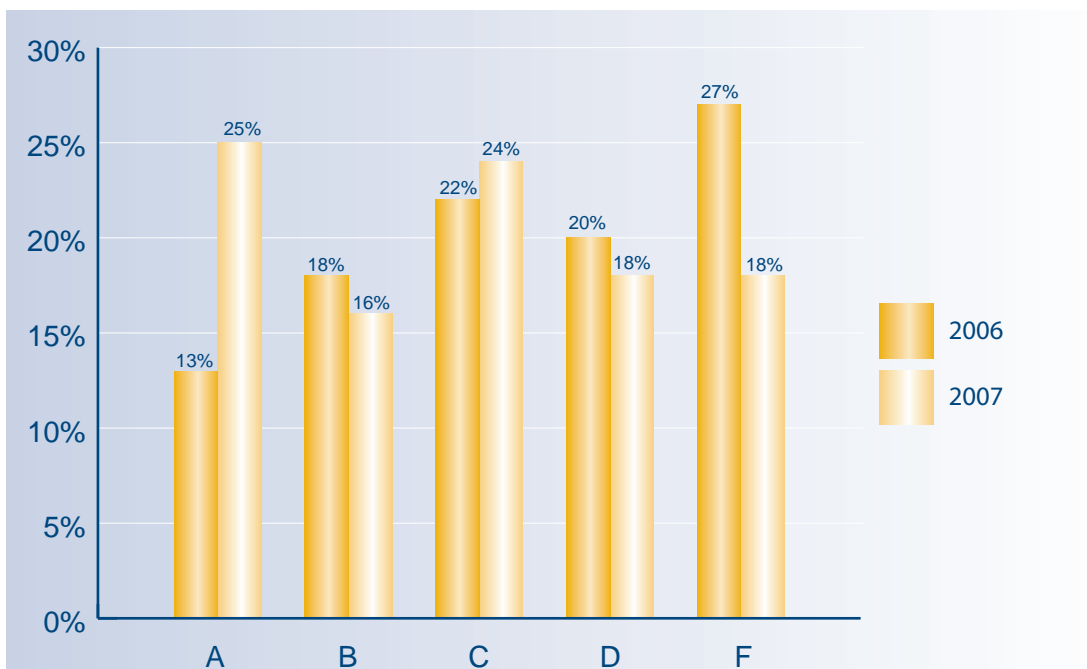
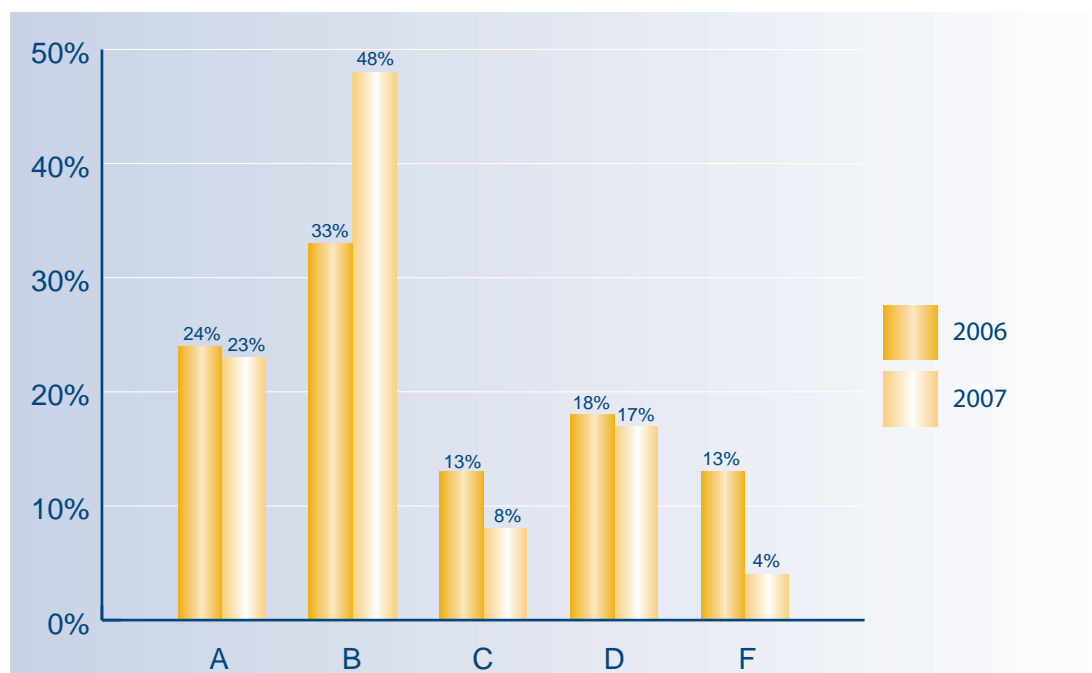


FIGURE 27. COMPARISON OF GRADES FOR SENATE REPUBLICAN MEMBER WEB SITES IN 2006 AND 2007



In our 2007 evaluations, Democratic sites hold a slight edge over Republican sites; 61% of Democratic sites obtained “C”s or better, compared to 55% of Republican sites.

Democratic committee Web sites scored better than Republican committee Web sites. Given the differences in resources and budgets for each, it is not surprising that the majority party would outperform the minority on the Internet. Additionally, with the change in leadership in the House and Senate, the existing majority committee sites could be revised and retained (at each committee’s discretion) rather than starting from scratch with an entirely new site. While 79% of Democratic committee sites earned grades of “C” or better, a full 63% of Republican committee sites were substandard or failing (see Figure 28). As the new 110th Congress majority, however, Democratic committee Web sites performed slightly better out of the gate than did the Republican majority in 2006 (see Figure 29). They earned 7% more “A”s and subsequent awards, and slightly fewer “F”s in 2007 than the Republican majority did in 2006.

FIGURE 28. COMPARISON OF DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN COMMITTEE WEB SITE GRADES

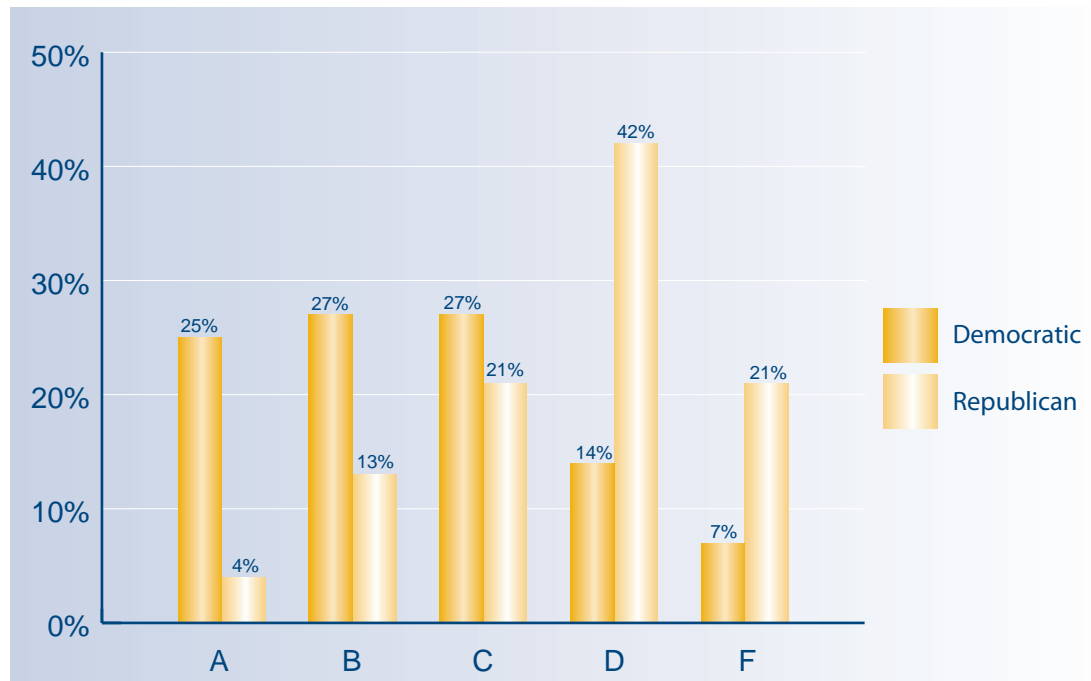
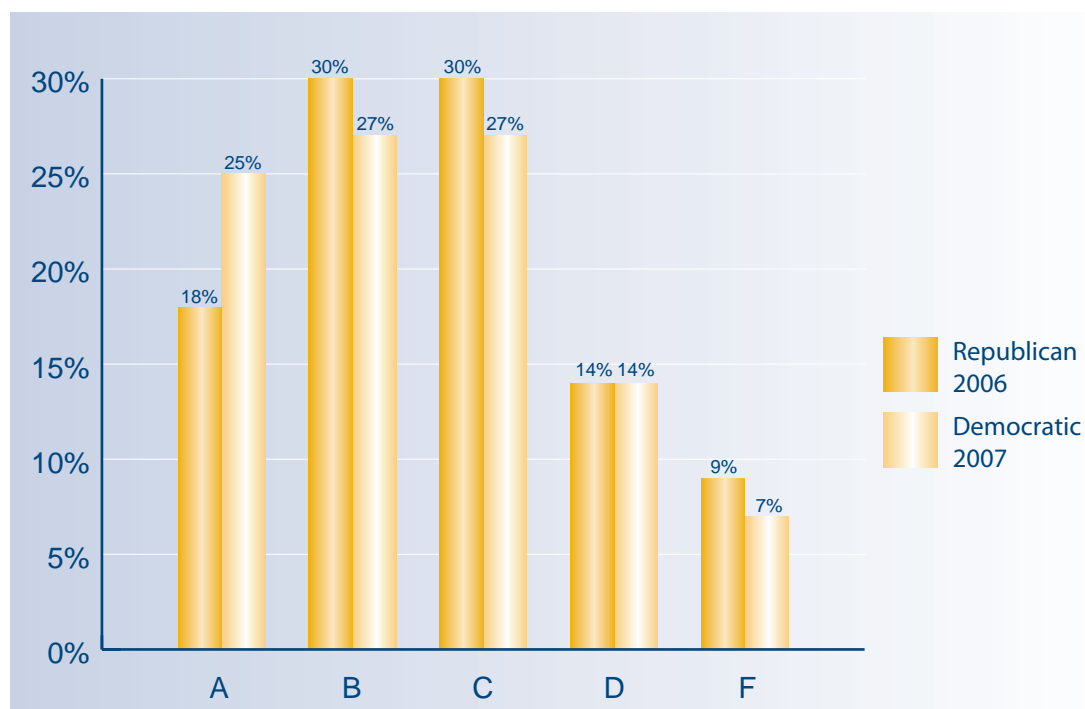


FIGURE 29. COMPARISON OF MAJORITY PARTY'S COMMITTEE WEB SITE GRADES IN 2006 AND 2007



Republican and Democratic sites earned almost identical proportions of Gold Mouse Awards. Republican Web sites captured 16 Gold Mouse Awards and Democratic Web sites captured 20. Democratic Web sites earned the greatest number of Mouse Awards overall, and their percentage of Gold and Silver Mouse Award winners have increased (see Figure 32). The number of Gold Mouse Award winning Republican Web sites has doubled, even as the party went from majority to minority in both chambers (see Figure 33).

FIGURE 30. MOUSE AWARDS BY PARTY

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Democratic	20	23	16	59
Republican	16	11	18	45
Total	36	34	34	104

FIGURE 31. COMPARISON OF DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN MOUSE AWARDS (MEMBER, COMMITTEE, AND LEADERSHIP)

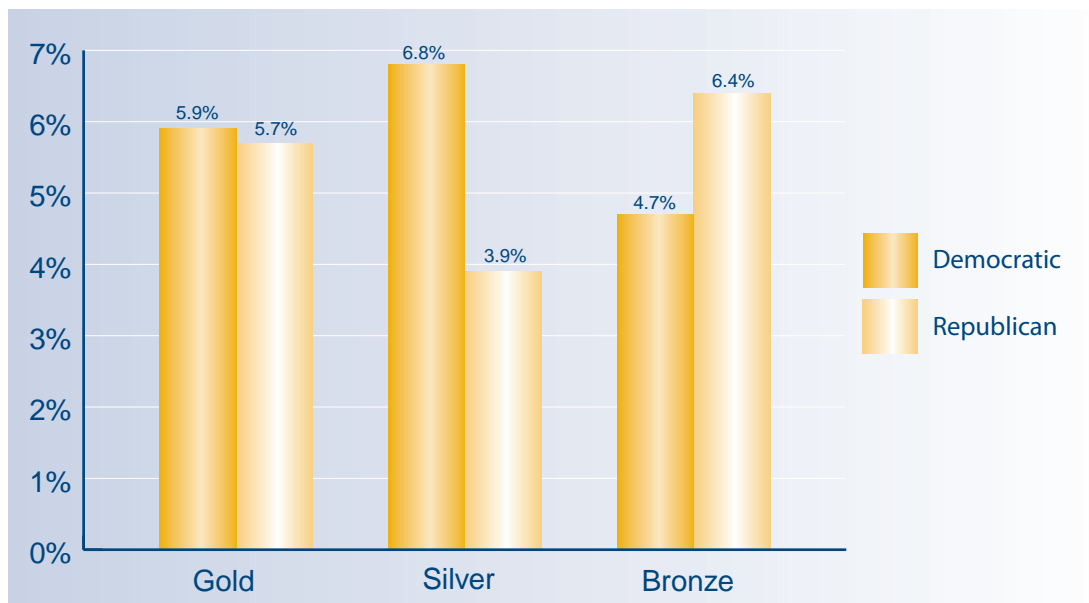


FIGURE 32. COMPARISON OF MOUSE AWARDS FOR DEMOCRATIC WEB SITES IN 2006 AND 2007 (MEMBER, COMMITTEE, AND LEADERSHIP)

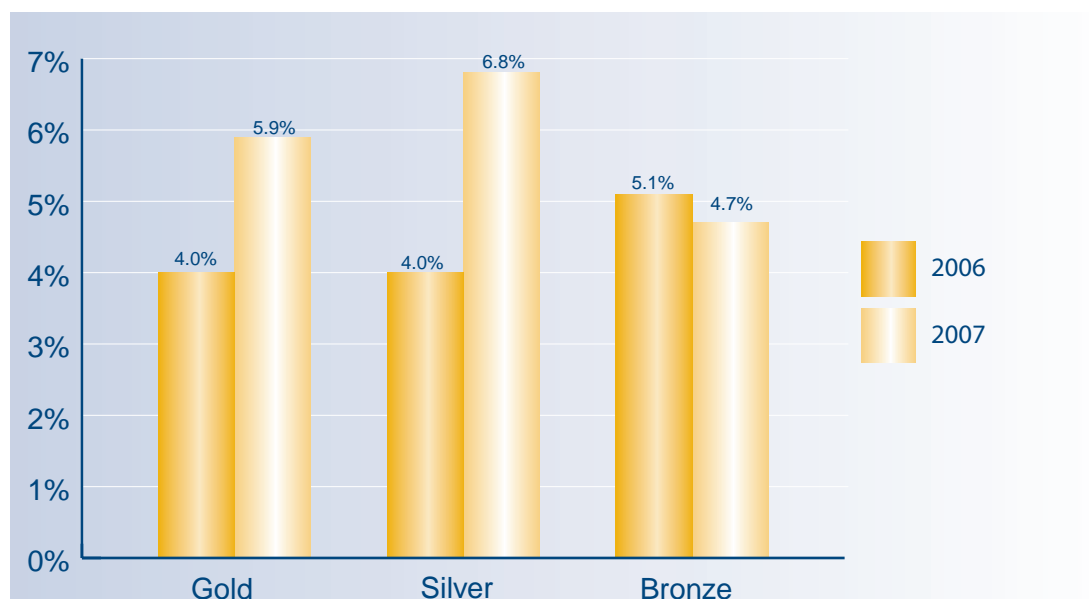


FIGURE 33. COMPARISON OF MOUSE AWARDS FOR REPUBLICAN WEB SITES IN 2006 AND 2007 (MEMBER, COMMITTEE, AND LEADERSHIP)

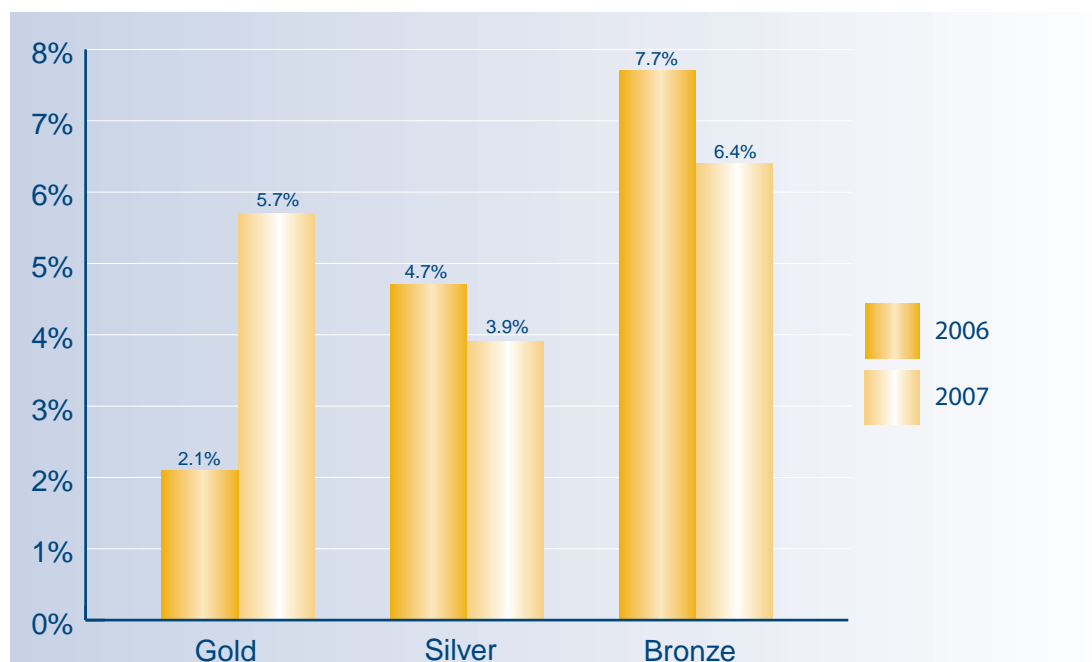
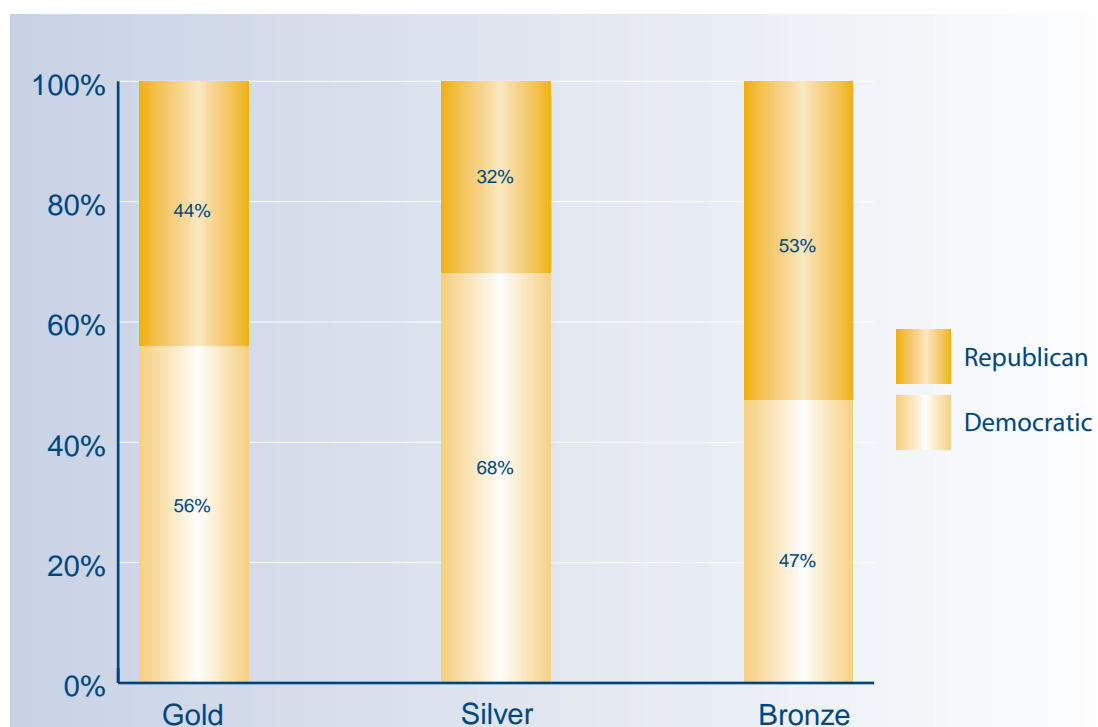


FIGURE 34. DISTRIBUTION OF MOUSE AWARDS BY PARTY



Conclusion

As the analysis of congressional Web site scores indicates, progress in the improvement of congressional Web sites was inconsistent across the institution. The below average sites have not made the improvements necessary to create a meaningful presence on the Internet. Above average sites in general, and Senate Member sites in particular, have made significant strides toward creating and maintaining more effective and useful online offices for their various audiences. Collectively, Democratic Web sites and Republican Web sites are comparable, and while the 110th Congress majority saw slightly improved committee site scores compared to that of the 109th Congress majority, the need for improvement overall is equal between the two parties. In order to improve, it takes the right tools on the site and the right support within the office, both of which we will turn to in the next two chapters.

In 2007, 63% of Member office Mouse Award winners won an award for the first time. On the other hand, every letter grade from 2006 –“A” through “F”–is represented among the 2007 Mouse Award winners.

CHAPTER 5

Building a Successful Web Site

Building a successful congressional Web site—determining its structure and purpose, identifying content to populate it, and figuring out how to develop it and keep it fresh—can often feel like a Sisyphean undertaking to an already-overburdened office. Most of the research and guidance about using technology and the Internet is geared toward the commercial world and thus is inapplicable or ill-suited for the unique environment in which congressional Web sites operate. However, it is the Congressional Management Foundation’s mission to help congressional offices function better. Since its founding 30 years ago, CMF has tracked, studied, and provided guidance to congressional offices on the use of technology as it applies specifically to their work and function. For almost ten years, a large part of our technology research has focused on congressional use of the Internet.

Those years of study and research led to the identification of the five building blocks for successful congressional Web sites: audience, content, usability, interactivity, and innovation. The foundation of any good Web site is a firm idea of who the target audiences are and what they need. With the audiences’ needs in mind, the next step is to determine what content they will be seeking on the congressional Web site, and offer these resources to them. It is also essential to present the content with an eye toward usability, as all the content in the world is not going to be helpful if users can’t find or understand it. The Web offers unique opportunities to establish two-way communications with constituents, and users therefore expect Web sites to be interactive. Finally, the best congressional Web sites employ innovations that add value to the content, usability, and interactivity of the site, and aren’t just bells and whistles without substance.⁹

In this chapter, we will address what it looks like to effectively use these five building blocks on a congressional Web site. As each of our evaluators quickly learned, congressional Member Web sites generally fit a standard format. After all, there are 535 Members of

⁹For more information about the building blocks, explanations of how they are used, and a handy list of DOs and DON’Ts, see last year’s 2006 Gold Mouse Report <http://www.cmfweb.org/storage/cmfweb/documents/CMF_Pubs/2006GoldMouseReport.pdf>.

Congress and each one has roughly the same job description. It isn't surprising, therefore, to see trends, themes, and basic structures emerge. Distill the best congressional Web sites down to their major recurring elements, and what emerges are the basic elements of any good Web site.

This section focuses primarily on Member office Web sites both because they make up the bulk of congressional Web sites and because of their similarities in mission and purpose. Most of the advice is also generally applicable to committee and leadership sites. Where possible, we included specific advice and guidance for committee and leadership offices. However, because of the divergent nature of each committee and leadership office's goals, priorities, and audiences it is difficult to give general advice that is applicable to every committee or leadership site. As a result, it is even more important that committee and leadership offices identify their target audiences, tailor their content to meet their audience's needs, and make available online all of the resources and information provided by the physical office.

What follows are descriptions of the basic elements necessary to building a successful Member Web site. Key considerations for each element and the typical associated tools are also outlined. It is essential to keep in mind that this is a broad template or blueprint for creating an effective Web site, not a set of explicit directions. The best Member office Web sites have elements of innovation and creativity that cannot be prescribed, which is exactly what sets them apart. Additionally, CMF is not advocating that every Member Web site have the exact same content and structure. There remain significant variations in both content and quality across congressional Web sites. The best sites have generally mastered the basic structure and gone beyond it in a way that added value and showed an innovative way of approaching their Web offerings. However, given that so many Member Web sites continue to be sub-par, CMF saw the need for guidance on standards that can and should be applied for every Member site to become a resource that meets the basic needs of online constituents. It is that guidance which this section seeks to provide.

FIGURE 35. THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF A QUALITY CONGRESSIONAL WEB SITE



The Elements of a Quality Congressional Web Site

Design and Layout



To develop a quality congressional Web site, the first element to consider is the site's overall **Design and Layout**, which is how the content is arranged and presented to users. It encompasses everything from the text fonts and menu options to the headers and footers of each page on the site. This is an area where most of Congress lags far behind standard practices in the business world and even most other governmental agencies. Quite frankly, there are too many congressional Web sites that employ designs and layouts that look more like neglected afterthoughts than official online offices of Members of Congress. There are still others which, apparently for the sake of individuality, break Web site design and layout standards that Web users have come to expect. In both cases, the offices are making their sites unnecessarily difficult to use, given that the design and layout of a site has a significant impact on the usability of the site. See Figure 36 for a list of the most important aspects of design and layout and how to use them to make the site as usable as possible. This is one principle that transcends the type of site and is applicable to Member, committee, and leadership office Web sites alike.

When creating and maintaining the design and layout of the site, it is important to keep the user's needs and experience on the site in mind, as well as the standards in use throughout the Internet. Congressional Web sites attract a diverse audience: newcomers and experts from on and off the Hill with a variety of backgrounds. To create a design and layout that will serve all audiences, offices should utilize the established and widely-adopted practices of other Web sites in a way that complements the goals of their particular Web site. For example, a site should provide easy and quick access to contact information including each office's telephone number, address, as well as a link to an e-mail contact form on every page. This is a standard for Web sites in Congress and the Internet at large, so it is more likely that users will expect the information on every page. It also reinforces the accessibility of the office to the user. Requiring use of the browser's back button to access different sections of the Web site can frustrate users, reduce the likelihood of their finding the information they are looking for, and may even drive them away all together. Confusing and constantly changing menu options can yield the same results; clear and complete menu options are viewed as critical to the effectiveness of any Web site. To make these and other improvements, take a look at this year's Mouse Award winning sites for inspiration and guidance. If at all possible, have a constituent—or at least someone off the Hill and unfamiliar with Congress—test drive the site and provide feedback on what does and does not work.

FIGURE 36. KEY ASPECTS OF DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Navigation

- **What it is:** Visitors should be able to move quickly and smoothly through the site using the navigation tools, menu options, and links provided.
- **Key considerations:** Consistency and clarity are key; they are the most important contributions to an easily navigable site. Many users come into the site in ways other than through the homepage, so consistent tools will also broaden those users' experience and show them what else your site has to offer.
- **Standard tools:** a functional search engine, site map, and “breadcrumbs” which indicate what specific section of the site the user is in.

Readability

- **What it is:** While it seems basic, it is essential to present the content in a way that all users can read. Stay away from fonts, colors, or backgrounds that make the text difficult to read.
- **Key considerations:** While moving text and animations may look flashy, they can impair the readability of the information, distract the user, and reduce the usefulness of the site. Long lines of unbroken text and long scroll bars also impair the readability of the site.
- **Standard tools:** Giving users the ability to change text size and the use of color and the contrast of the text with the background.

Scannability

- **What it is:** Until they find exactly what they are looking for, Internet users scan Web pages, rather than reading each line word for word. The best congressional Web sites adapt their content for this method of reading.
- **Key considerations:** Web users are looking for the meat in each page. Writing should be concise and clear with the most important information toward the beginning. Links should be descriptive and clear enough that the user can tell where it leads. Also, watch out for individual page lengths—users aren't inclined to scroll through long lists or pages of undifferentiated text.
- **Standard tools:** Embedded links, short summary paragraphs with links to more complete information, bullets, and headers.

Accessibility

- **What it is:** Government Web sites, including those of Members of Congress, should be easy for all Americans to use, including constituents with disabilities. The audiences of a public Web site have a wide range of technical knowledge and ability and will access the site with a variety of hardware, software, bandwidths, and access devices. For these reasons, public Web sites must be designed to be accessible to anyone.
- **Key considerations:** To be as accessible as possible, think about limiting the use of flashy and bandwidth-intensive technology; including transcripts and alt-tags for visual and audio content such as graphics, video, and podcasts; maintaining consistent design and navigation; and writing in language that all users—regardless of age, ability or whether they are inside or outside the beltway—will understand.
- **Standard tools:** privacy statements, text only options, Section 508 compliance (information available at <http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/standards.htm>).

Legislative Content



The **Legislative Content** is often what offices struggle with on the Web, particularly if the Member has been in Congress for a long time. For a ten-term Congresswoman or a three-term Senator, combing through a career's worth of press releases, sponsorships, and floor statements to determine what should go online can be a daunting task. However, well-conceived legislative content can accomplish many important goals at once. It can: provide services to constituents and stakeholders; support the goals and legislative priorities of the office; strengthen public understanding of Congress; foster public trust in the democratic process; and attract and retain visitors to the site. The benefits of making as much of this content as possible available on the Web site outweigh the costs in terms of time and effort to do so. Newer offices have an advantage in this respect. If the mechanisms are put in place early to get the work of the office onto the Web site in a timely manner, they can achieve the same result without having to invest time and resources playing catch up.

There are three broad categories of legislative information that can be offered: educational information about Congress, information about congressional action, and information specific to the given Representative or Senator. That is, information about: how Congress works; what Congress is doing; and what the Member is doing in Congress. See Figure 37 for a more detailed description of each of these areas. While the first two aspects apply to committee and leadership sites as well, see Figure 38 for typical legislative content more appropriate for these offices.

Most of the information about Congress and what it is doing can be easily provided and kept up-to-date simply by linking to other official resources, such as information on the official Web sites of the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. The information about the Member, however, must be produced by the office itself. As long as offices utilize what is already being produced by the office—from press releases and op-eds, to answers to constituent mail or floor speeches—in crafting the legislative content for the Web site, it need not be the daunting task it appears. More time can be spent on presenting the content in the most useful way possible, rather than creating the content itself.

Legislative content can be presented in a variety of ways. Typically, congressional sites have an “Issues” section which contains most of that content. It can include national issues (e.g. health care, war in Iraq), local issues (e.g. how the clean-up of a local river or the state economy is affected by federal legislation), and issues of particular importance to the Member (e.g. women’s rights, fiscal discipline). Each issue usually has its own page with a description of the issue and the Member’s position and the most recent action to take place on the issue, as well as the resources the office can provide related to the issue—from sponsored legislation to CRS reports. More information about the Member of Congress and what Congress is doing is often placed in a “Biography” section or “Resources” section, respectively. Educational information about how Congress works is put almost anywhere—from the “Kids/Students” section to an “Issues” section, or even a links page. The best place to put the different information depends on the layout and approach each office takes in the creation and maintenance of their Web site. It is essential, however, to have the information identifiable and accessible. Use clear menu options and section headings—“What’s happening in Congress” rather than “Congressional

resources.” Don’t bury the information, either. A simple link to “Ben’s Guide” in the “Kids” section isn’t enough. Guide the user to the information with descriptive links in prominent places. What about adults who don’t live and breathe the legislative process? When in doubt, put it in multiple places (or in one place and link to it elsewhere). For example, place links to educational information about Congress both in a general section about Congress and in an “Issues” section.

The most important consideration in creating legislative content, of course, is ensuring that all users will understand it, regardless of how frequently they visit the site. For example, instead of a link that just says “THOMAS,” there should be something briefly explaining what THOMAS is, such as “search for legislation.” Instead of a link to “The Legislative Process,” call it “How a Bill Becomes a Law” or explain in one or two sentences that it is a link to information on how laws are made. Constituents are not typically familiar with Hill jargon, so make sure that acronyms and terms like “motion to recommit” and “roll call votes” are explained as well.

FIGURE 37. CATEGORIES OF LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION

How Congress Works

- **What it is:** Most citizens outside the Beltway have forgotten their high school civics classes. Offices can do constituents a great service by making educational information easily accessible throughout the site so visitors can refer to it whenever they have questions.
- **Key Considerations:** Kids or students are not the only ones who need access to this information. Giving users basic and easily-accessible information on the roles and responsibilities of a Member of Congress and how Congress operates can go a long way toward helping constituents understand and use the information on a congressional Web site.
- **Standard tools:** Information about how a bill becomes a law, how Congress operates, and what a Member does.

What Congress is Doing

- **What it is:** Most citizens aren’t familiar with what is going on in Congress or the schedule it keeps. Some think when Congress is in “recess” the Members are all on vacation!
- **Key considerations:** The most current information about Congress needn’t be created and maintained by the office. Linking to, or incorporating information from, the Library of Congress, the Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate, and leadership offices can ensure the timeliness and usefulness of a site without overloading staff. A word of caution: remember to double check and update the links as they change—many links to the House schedule were broken because of a redesign of the Clerk’s page.
- **Standard tools:** The Library of Congress’ THOMAS link or search box, chamber schedule, current floor proceedings, and links to the *Congressional Record*.

What the Member is Doing

- **What it is:** Users ultimately are coming to a Member’s Web site because they are interested in information about the Member.
- **Key considerations:** Let the personality, interests, and priorities of the Member be reflected in his or her online office. Citizens are always going to be interested in the Member’s stance on national issues and key votes. Don’t worry about opposition research; the Member’s record is readily available in any number of places online. If constituents can’t find a Member’s stance or record on their official site, they will find it elsewhere. This not only makes it look like the Member has something to hide, it also allows someone other than the Member to frame and explain the Member’s views.
- **Standard tools:** Voting records and rationales for key votes, links to sponsored and co-sponsored legislation, committee service, information on the Member’s stance on key issues, links to floor statements, and legislative accomplishments. Remember to update these links each Congress.

FIGURE 38. STANDARD LEGISLATIVE CONTENT FOR COMMITTEE AND LEADERSHIP SITES

Committee

- Committee members
- Committee jurisdiction
- Committee rules
- Historical information
- About the Chairman/Ranking Member
- Subcommittee list and information
- List of bills assigned
- How this committee works
- Hearing schedule
- Committee correspondence
- Associated agency links
- Hearing archive
- Hearing transcripts
- Committee reports/publications
- THOMAS link/search box
- Live and archived audio Webcasts
- Live and archived video Webcasts

Leadership

- About the leadership position
- About the leader
- Leadership Issues
- Polls/surveys
- Reports
- Resources
- Agency links
- Calendars

Constituent Services



The next element of a Member Web site to consider is **Constituent Services**. It is, simply put, anything the office can and will do for constituents. For inspiration on how to develop this section of the Web site, and what services to offer, consider the physical office. What questions, problems, and services does the office most commonly handle? Offices should provide access to the full range of information, services, and resources that are requested offline. For many constituents, the primary (and possibly only) channel of interaction with their representatives is going to be through the Web site. Providing constituent services online can extend the services to a wider audience than the physical office normally reaches. When applicable, committee and leadership offices can also provide any services they may provide to citizens online.

The most critical aspect of online constituent services is providing as much substantive guidance and information as possible so constituents can serve themselves through the Web site. Enabling constituents to take control of their problems and work through them with the tools on the site has three benefits. First, it can enable constituents to identify ways their Members can help them, and perhaps even get that help during their online visit. Second, constituents seek help online because that is their preferred medium for information gathering and communication. Serving them online respects their preferences and leaves them with a good impression of their Member. Finally, serving constituents online can lessen the demands on office staff and allow them to focus on the most critical or time-consuming casework, such as resolving a thorny immigration problem or helping a veteran obtain benefits

42% of Member Web sites do not offer guidance on how to initiate casework. 66% do not offer guidance on how to best communicate with the office.

FIGURE 39. COMMON CONSTITUENT SERVICES OFFERED ONLINE

Casework

- **What it is:** Constituents often turn to their Member's office as a last and desperate attempt to resolve problems with federal agencies. The casework process can be both streamlined and clarified on the Web for those overwhelmed by the process of getting the help they need. FAQs about the types of casework provided and specific links to descriptions of the most common problems and solutions can help constituents resolve problems while lightening the load of office staff.
- **Key Considerations:** "Casework" is Hill jargon. Constituents will better understand what the office can do if the Web site employs phrases such as "Help with a problem you are having with a Federal Agency," "What this office can do for you," or "Assistance with a government problem," rather than using the term "casework." Sometimes constituents may not even be aware that congressional offices can help them. Describing what an office can and cannot do to help constituents is as important as explaining how to initiate that assistance.
- **Standard tools:** Answers to casework FAQs, information on state and local resources, guidance on casework initiation, links to specific information on federal agency sites, and a privacy release form.

Other Services

- **What it is:** All of the resources and services offered by the Member's Washington and state/district offices can be streamlined and offered online in order to reach an even wider audience.
- **Key considerations:** Constituents are not always familiar with the things they can ask of their Member. It is just as important to describe how or why a constituent can use a service as it is to supply the service itself. Even if the office doesn't feel comfortable processing every request or interaction with a constituent through a Web form, providing clear guidance on what number to call and other basic information can expedite any process and make the constituent feel like the site and the office have been helpful.
- **Standard tools:** Tour information and request forms, flag ordering information and request forms, internship and Service Academy Nomination applications and instructions, grant information, and guidance on scheduling a meeting.

Press Resources



The next element of a congressional Web site to consider is its **Press Resources**—news and content designed for the media. Member, committee, and leadership sites all need to contain these resources. Not surprisingly, just about every congressional Web site had a section listing press releases by date. Press resources can be much more than that. When utilized and offered correctly, these resources can keep constituents and members of the media up-to-date with the latest and most comprehensive information about the state/district and the Member of Congress. All the necessary content and resources already exist within the office—they just need to be placed online in a usable format. This includes op-eds and articles written by the Member, floor speeches, interviews, and newsletters. If it is produced by the office or is about the Member, it can be helpful to both constituents and the press. High resolution pictures for download, names and contact information for staff who deal with the press, and a brief biography of the Member are often overlooked but extremely useful to the press.

The most important thing to consider is presenting the wealth of information the office produces in the most usable way possible. Virtually all offices already allow the press access to the most recent information by providing press releases arranged by date. But many users are interested in specific topics or issues. It is much more likely that they want to know the latest news or action on their topic of interest—say, the environment or the war in Iraq—than they want to see the last three press releases or floor speeches the Member has released. Organize all of the press resources by topic and type. Users are more likely to read articles and watch or listen to video or audio if they don't have to wade through an endless chronological list of unidentifiable files. While this meets the needs of the press, keep in mind that other key audiences, like lobbyists, academics, and interested constituents will also be served by this information.

FIGURE 40. PRESS RESOURCES

- **What it is:** All of the media that the congressional office produces, from the ubiquitous press release, to op-eds by the Member, to floor speeches, and anything and everything in between.
- **Key considerations:** Though the bulk of an office's media information is of particular interest to reporters, it can also be relevant to other users and can be used to keep constituents up-to-date with the Member's most recent activities, actions, and accomplishments. While they might not peruse the press release section, incorporating press information into other sections of the site, such as the issues section, can enhance the timeliness and value of the entire site.
- **Standard tools:** Press contact information; official biography and high resolution official Member photograph; press releases; floor speeches; op-eds, columns, articles by and about the Member; and audio and video—all searchable not only by date but topic as well.

State/District Information



The next element of a congressional Web site to consider is **State/District Information**. This is all of the information that is specific to the region and constituents that the office represents. After all, constituents are going to be looking for information relevant to the area in which they live, work, and vote. While a Member's Web site should not attempt to be a tour guide or historical document, providing state/district information as it relates to the activities of the Member and of Congress can go a long way toward making the site more useful, interesting, and relevant to the site's visitors. As always, let the demands and activities of the physical office guide the information posted on the Web site. If there is any issue that the Member is active on that is of particular concern to constituents, it can be included in the "Issues" or "About the 3rd District" section. Giving users easy access to regional background information, such as a map and information about the demographic make-up of the region the office represents allows constituents to understand their district or state. The state/district information contained on a Web site can also provide outside audiences with a context within which they can assess a Member's legislative record and actions. For example, knowing that a Member represents a particularly rural district or a district dominated by a certain industry can place his or her actions in a context that makes them easier to understand. It is also this element of the Web site that can do the most to connect Members to their constituents in their states or districts, since it allows the Member to demonstrate a clear understanding of the unique concerns and characteristics of the people he or she represents.

The most important thing to consider about state/district information is its strategic value. It does not just have to give general information to users about the state or district. Offices can be more strategic by tailoring content to particular segments of their constituency or specific areas of the state or district. In practice, for one congressman representing a district with a large number of older Americans this can mean maintaining a senior citizens resource page, while for another congresswoman representing a district with a military base, it can mean a veteran and active military resources page. For other Members, a page with information on the development of a new economic corridor or about the preservation of a natural resource may be more appropriate.

FIGURE 41. STATE/DISTRICT INFORMATION

- **What it is:** Information about, or of concern to, the part of the country the Member of Congress represents as it relates to the activities, actions, and accomplishments of the Member and of Congress.
- **Key considerations:** The information most users are looking for on a congressional site is not local weather or updates about sports teams, but legislative work relevant to the state/district. Also, anticipating the needs and requests of a prominent or unique demographic in the state or district can go a long way toward making the site a useful resource for all key audiences.
- **Standard tools:** State/district map, demographic information, issue information relevant to the state/district, information targeted to specific geographic locations (e.g. major cities, counties) or demographic groups (e.g. a local industry or prominent ethnic groups).

Communication Tools



The next element of a congressional Web site to consider is its **Communications Tools**. These are all the features and applications that foster a relationship between the user and the office, beyond just reading what is posted on the Web site. Internet users are increasingly expecting their online experiences to be interactive. Offices that encourage interactivity are taking advantage of the unique opportunities that the Internet provides: meeting users' needs and expectations, and demonstrating the accessibility and accountability of the office online. All congressional Web sites, be they Member, committee, or leadership, should provide guidance on communicating with the office.

Whether it is simply a Web form to communicate with the office or a variety of tools ranging from RSS feeds to online surveys, it is essential for all congressional Web sites to provide vehicles for active communication. Interactivity—the ability of citizens to hear from and express their views to their elected representatives—is a critical component of our democracy, and congressional Web sites must acknowledge and help facilitate that interactivity. Constituents want to be engaged in the process and they want to stay informed about issues that matter to them. They want to be able to register their opinions and to have their opinions acknowledged and considered. Congressional Web sites can play a particularly important role in fostering interaction with constituents and other audiences by keeping them informed and building strong online relationships with visitors. They can do this by providing clearly thought-out and well-designed Web forms, as well as polls, blogs, and opinion surveys and RSS feeds—anything that fosters an online relationship.

FIGURE 42. TOOLS FOR INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

- **What it is:** Anything and everything that facilitates or encourages sending and receiving information between the user and the Member of Congress and builds and maintains that relationship.
- **Key considerations:** Providing a variety of means to contact the office and utilizing Web forms to allow users to submit requests, comments, and questions can streamline an office's operation and allow staff to spend more time communicating with constituents and less time sorting and forwarding requests to the proper people. Even if an office determines that certain requests or interactions are most effectively handled by phone, mail, or in person, indicating this with explicit guidance and direction on the site can clarify and simplify the process for constituents and staff alike.
- **Standard tools:** Guidance on how to communicate with the office; scheduling request forms; Member, townhall, and mobile office schedules; office hours; office addresses and telephone numbers; Web forms; e-newsletters; online polls or surveys; blogs; podcasts; RSS feeds.

FIGURE 43. STANDARD COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS FOR COMMITTEE AND LEADERSHIP SITES

Committee

- E-mail contact information
- E-mail updates
- Guidance on attending hearings
- Guidance on submitting testimony
- RSS feeds

Leadership

- E-mail contact information
- E-mail updates
- RSS feeds

Web sites can connect a Member to his or her constituents and allow the Member to demonstrate a clear understanding of the unique concerns and characteristics of the people he or she represents.

Putting it all Together

For the sake of clarity, in this chapter we presented each element in the structure of a congressional Web site as a discrete section of the Web site. On the Internet however, they needn't—and indeed shouldn't—be completely separated. On the best sites on Capitol Hill, all of the content is synthesized, overlapped, and cross-referenced. Constituent services sections contain communications tools for users to start the process of casework, or request a tour. The “Issues” section contains legislative content, state/district information, and press resources. Putting time and effort into one feature or element of the Web site and then posting it only in one place increases the likelihood it gets overlooked. For example, a Web form for requesting a meeting will only save time if the Web site's users can find and use it. Putting links to it in multiple places where the users are most likely to need it make it more likely to be utilized. This meets the needs of users on their terms and ensures that both the users and the office are getting the most out of the site.

It is essential in maintaining the quality of a Web site to keep the content updated. Users turn to the Internet for the most current information available. With the considerable time and resource constraints in the typical congressional office, keeping Web site content up-to-date can be an overwhelming task. While it may be hard with limited resources to provide up-to-the-minute, late-breaking news, congressional Web sites can improve the timeliness of their content, and thereby improve the sites' effectiveness, by making the content that the office already produces do most of the work for them. Past letters written to constituents explaining the Member's stance and actions on an issue can populate the issues page and inform an FAQ. Plugging the latest press releases into an issues section can keep a user up-to-date on the most recent action from the office on particular topics. Along the same lines, links to other Web pages or resources that contain specific and up-to-date information (the CRS grants page, the Clerk's roll call votes page, and the Library of Congress' compilation of Members' sponsorships and co-sponsorships, for example) can offer additional timely information without any additional office resources. Just be aware of chamber rules regarding Web sites, and only link to acceptable sites.

While incorporating the elements of a quality congressional Web site, and subsequently maintaining its quality, can seem like a monumental task, it is one that can be done successfully by any congressional office—as our analysis of congressional Web sites revealed. But to complete the transformation into an award-winning Web site, an office must have a support structure in place to allow success to happen. An office can't just build a successful site; it needs to manage it as well. It is to the best practices in managing a successful Web site that we now turn.



CHAPTER 6

Managing a Successful Web Site

In the previous chapter, “Building a Successful Web Site,” we discussed the basic structure of a quality congressional Web site. We focused specifically on the nuts and bolts of what to put on a site and how. But the management of a site, and support structure behind it, is just as important as what is on it—if not more so. Managing a Web site successfully can present some difficult challenges for congressional offices. Their resources are limited, their staff are not usually Web site experts, and their operations are not always designed in ways that easily incorporate Web site management. Nevertheless, the key to an award-winning Web site is effective management.

To provide useful advice in this regard, CMF interviewed two unique groups of 2007 Mouse Award winners: offices that have won an award at least three out of four times they have been given out, and the 110th Congress freshman offices that won a Gold Mouse Award this year. The interviews with these winners took place in November and December of 2007 and were conducted with key staffers involved in the planning and maintenance of their Member’s Web site in order to find out how they manage their Web sites and what has allowed them to produce a successful Web site. It is our hope that hearing directly from these offices about what has contributed to their success will give other congressional offices insight into how to set up, manage, and maintain quality sites for years to come.

While all of the individuals interviewed for this chapter hail from the personal offices of Members of Congress, nearly all of their wisdom can be applied to committee and leadership Web sites, as well. In fact, much of their guidance is all the more important in the fast-paced, high-stakes environment of committee and leadership offices.

Before we go directly to the sources for their insights, we will briefly review why they were selected.

Multi-Year Award Winners

There are eleven offices that have consistently delivered superior Web sites over the six years that CMF has been evaluating them. Congressman **Mike Honda (D-CA)** and Senators **Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)** and **Patrick Leahy (D-VT)** have each won a Mouse Award all four years they were given: 2002, 2003, 2006, and 2007. In addition, Congressman **Tom Allen (D-ME)**, Congressman **Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)**, Senator **Larry Craig (R-ID)**, Senator **Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)**, Congressman **John Larson (D-CT)**, Senator **Carl Levin (D-MI)**, Senator **John Thune (R-SD)**, and Congresswoman **Heather Wilson (R-NM)** have each received Mouse Awards three of the four times they were awarded.¹⁰ This group of award-winners is notable because these offices have not only produced award-winning Web sites—they have done so repeatedly. These offices have consistently produced and maintained their Web sites, keeping them content-rich, innovative, and up-to-date over the long haul. We contacted all eleven offices, and many of them were eager to discuss their Web sites and offer other congressional offices insight into how they manage a Web site that continues to perform at the top level year after year.

110th Congress Freshman Award Winners

The second notable group of 2007 Mouse Award winners were those from the 110th Congress freshman class. The 2006 congressional election ushered in a large number of new Members of Congress: 54 in the House and 10 in the Senate. Incredibly, eight of the 54 members of the House freshmen class (15%) and two of the 10 members of the Senate freshman class (20%) won a Gold, Silver, or Bronze Mouse Award in 2007.

While all the freshman award-winners deserve credit, we will focus here on the 110th Congress freshman office Web sites that received Gold Mouse Awards. They are Congressmen **Christopher Carney (D-PA)**, **Brad Ellsworth (D-IN)**, **Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)**, and **Patrick Murphy (D-PA)**. These congressmen had to contend with setting up their offices in Washington and the district, hiring staff, finding their way around the Hill, and everything else that comes with being new to Congress. In spite of the steep learning curve, each was still able to roll out a successful and substantive official Web site in their first months in office. They constitute the best-of-the-best freshman Web sites on Capitol Hill.

Managing a Web site successfully can present some difficult challenges for congressional offices. Their resources are limited, their staff are not usually Web site experts, and their operations are not always designed in ways that easily incorporate Web site management. Nevertheless, the key to an award-winning Web site is effective management.

¹⁰See Figure 11 on page 18 for more information about the Multi-year Award Winners

In Their Own Words

As we discussed in the previous chapter, the vast majority of congressional Web sites can be boiled down to a basic and repeating informational structure. The same can be said of the ways in which successful congressional offices manage and maintain the sites once they have been launched. When asked about their formula for success, our winning offices repeatedly report that there is no silver bullet when it comes to producing a quality Web site. However, there are a few basic management principles offices can follow. Many of this year's winners spoke with CMF about their processes and gave the following advice for other congressional offices.

Get Buy-In From the Top

Without exception, every office we interviewed told us that their Members and/or the senior management understand the value of online communications and directed their staffs to develop quality Web sites. Many predict that without that buy-in from the top, their Web sites would not be nearly as successful.

In the case of Congressman **Tom Allen's** Web site, the push for a quality Web site comes from the very top, according to the Congressman's Communications Director and Senior Policy Advisor, **Mark Sullivan**. "Representative Allen is the site's biggest booster," said Sullivan. He also said that the Congressman often directs the people he meets and audiences he speaks with to go to the site to sign-up for the e-newsletter and receive updates. In addition, Congressman Allen and the Chief of Staff regularly review the site, and the office includes "it as a discussion item in [their] weekly staff meetings and devote a session to [the Web site] and its interface with [their] overall communications and outreach efforts at [their] annual staff retreat."

Freshman Congressman **Brad Ellsworth's** Press Secretary, **Liz Farrar**, said the Web site "is definitely a top-down priority" in their office. She believes part of their success as a new office came from the fact that having a good quality Web site was important to Congressman Ellsworth, as well as to his Chief of Staff. "I think that when you make it a priority from the top, you are able to have the staff time you need to actually develop a good Web site," said Farrar. She believes that having the blessing from above allows the staff to "spend the time that you need to really be picky about what's actually on there and to think through the various elements of your site."

According to Senator **Jeff Bingaman's** Deputy Chief of Staff, **David Pike**, it isn't necessary for the Senator or senior management to know the technical minutiae for the Web site to succeed. They do not have to "understand or know all of the small mechanics of what goes into a Web site... that isn't what is necessary." Pike believes that "those processes and procedures can exist more appropriately elsewhere in the office." It is more important for the office leadership to understand the big picture and "recognize how valuable [the Web site] is among the tools that we have in our office as a way to communicate." Pike stated that the management team in Senator Bingaman's office has made online communications a priority, and therefore has given the staff the resources to produce a quality presence online.

Make the Web Site a Priority

The award-winning offices we interviewed consistently told CMF that having a good Web site was a stated priority in the office and was something that they placed high on their list of daily or weekly tasks.

The Web site is a top priority in the office of Congressman **Earl Blumenauer**, according to the Congressman's Deputy Chief of Staff, **James Koski**. He said that having a district with one of the highest rates of broadband Internet access is what prompted the Congressman to take advantage of opportunities to interact with his constituents online. Koski said that the fact that their district is growing increasingly wired helps them "make sure we keep the constituents interested in what we have to say and what we're presenting on the Web site. The Congressman has clearly driven a lot of what we've done. We have gone through different vendors and different staffers who have been responsible for maintaining the Web site, but if it wasn't for the Congressman's commitment to making sure that we stay on the cutting edge, it wouldn't happen," said Koski. The fact that the Congressman himself monitors the Web site and occasionally asks why something hasn't been posted further motivates the staff to make Web site maintenance a priority and keep it up-to-date. Finally, Koski said that the staff also makes it a point to ask the questions of "what is" and "what should be" on the front page of the Web site at each weekly staff meeting.

When asked how he and the rest of Senator **Larry Craig's** staff make the time to keep the Web site up-to-date, **Mark Shonce**, the Senator's Information Technology Director, confessed that many people view a Web site as only another addition to a staffer's never-ending workload. "Our team takes a different approach because we recognize that the Senator's site is a tool that helps us solve problems and reach constituents in new ways," he said. "It didn't take many Web stats for the Senator, our Chief of Staff, and our legislative staff to realize that the content written for the Web site reaches a great many more than each letter sent to individual constituents." Posting information on the Web site is a priority by virtue of the fact that the Web site is viewed by so many Idahoans. For the same reason, the rest of the staff is responsive to requests from the communications team for updated content.

Though Congressman **Patrick Murphy** is among the freshmen members of the 110th Congress, his office has made the Web site a priority according to the Congressman's Legislative Correspondent, **Marc Boom**. When asked about how he prioritizes the Web site with everything else that he has to do, Boom stated that he doesn't "view the Web site as something that is separate from [his] duties. It really is an integral part of understanding constituent outreach and getting our information out there. If you can answer people's questions before they actually have to take the time to write you about it, that's a good thing. We certainly get plenty of letters, and we're happy to get those, but one of the goals of the Web site was to give people another easy way to contact our office." The office quickly launched a quality congressional Web site within months of Congressman Murphy's swearing in, and everyone on staff clearly understands that, as Boom put it, the Web site is "the front door to [our] office."

All congressional staffers have innumerable priorities vying for their attention. **Mary Sue Englund**, the Office Manager in freshman Congressman **Kevin McCarthy's** office knows this all too well. When asked about how she helps keep the Web site up-to-date, she

confesses that, “If I don’t look at it every day it can fall through the cracks.” To make sure that doesn’t happen she gives herself a visual reminder everyday by setting her browser’s homepage to the Congressman’s Web site. “I open the Internet and that’s what I see, so I think that helps make it a priority.” Englund says that another thing that helps her keep the site current is the fact that the Web site is a priority for Congressman McCarthy. “When it is the priority of your boss, it makes it a priority for you,” she said.

Formulate a Strategic Plan

Great Web sites don’t happen by themselves; they are the result of careful planning and execution by congressional office staffs—often over the course of many months.

Graham Mason, a Staff Assistant in Congressman **Christopher Carney’s** office announced his office was “going for the gold” when they planned and launched a new Web site within three months of the Congressman taking office. He said the office combed through CMF’s *2006 Gold Mouse Report* to identify the best practices the office wanted to employ. “It took a lot of research and leg work beforehand,” said Mason. “I went through the entire [2006] *Gold Mouse Report* to try and figure out what effective Web sites had.” He then led the effort in the office and looked to what other offices were doing for inspiration and guidance. “I must have looked at more congressional Web sites and would take notes about what they had or that I thought was particularly useful or effective,” he said. The office compiled a master list—a wish list—of all the things that they wanted to include and delegated them to individual team members. “We gave them timelines, and kept on them about it, and they got it done very effectively,” said Mason.

When asked what the secret is to being a four-time Mouse Award winner, **David Pike**, Senator **Jeff Bingaman’s** Deputy Chief of Staff, confesses that, “the ‘secret’ is that the Web site is family—it’s part of our office and we include it as often as we can in whatever we’re doing.” He went on to say the Web site “is an integral part of our thinking and our strategy and all of the processes we have in the office.” Despite already having an award-winning Web site, the office underwent six months of strategy talks before they built and launched the current site, which shows that great thought and care was given to every aspect of the site and how to strategically present the information. Pike said that careful planning went into “what information are we presenting in [each] part of the site, who’s coming to see it, and how can we organize it in such a way that is useful and meaningful to that audience.”

Congressman **Kevin McCarthy’s** Press Secretary, **Nick Bouknight**, said that their office started planning for a new site within a month of taking office. “We got to work in January and met with a vendor,” he said. “The Congressman pushed to get something up quickly.” It wasn’t done on an ad hoc basis, however. There was a strategic vision they were using to guide their activities. Bouknight said that the office was striving “to be transparent with what we were doing in Washington and in the district.” While some offices worry about their Web sites being used for opposition research purposes, Bouknight advised, “Don’t be afraid to put what you are doing on the Web site.” When asked what advice he would give to other congressional offices wanting to improve their Web sites, he suggested they post more than just press releases, such as the Member’s voting record and links to sponsored legislation. “Our bosses do a lot of great work and we should show that off,” he said.

Senator **John Thune's** multiple Mouse Awards are no accident, but rather the result of careful planning, reported **Nic Budde**, the office's Systems Administrator. "The Web site is an extension of our office. Creating and maintaining content for it is just as important... as anything else [we] do." To assure that constituents "receive the same service from our Web site as they would receive if they came into or called our office," the office has a plan in place to keep the Web site accurate and fresh. "Each month and after major actions in the Senate, we revisit key areas of the Web site to ensure that the information posted is still relevant," said Budde.

Allocate the Necessary Resources

Prioritizing and planning for a quality online presence will not get the job done unless the necessary resources—both fiscal and human—are dedicated to the Web site.

James Koski, Congressman **Earl Blumenauer's** Deputy Chief of Staff believes that it is important to designate the necessary resources to developing and maintaining a congressional Web site, but warns, "it's an effort, but I think it pays off." When asked if there was a secret to Rep. Blumenauer's three-time award-winning Web site, Koski responded, "I don't think it is as much a secret, as it is a commitment and allocating the resources to do it." Koski offered one additional warning to other senior staffers: "Be realistic about the time and effort it does take. You do have to create the time for the staff to stay on top of it if that is really what you want out of the Web site."

"We wanted everything we did to be very focused on the district," reported **Rebecca Gale**, freshman Congressman **Christopher Carney's** Communications Director, "and the Web site was part of that." When asked what the role of the Congressman and his Chief of Staff were in the early success of their Web site, she said "most of their role has been to empower the staff" to launch a site that meets the needs of the district. The Carney office reported that they had the blessing of the Congressman "to move forward and create a great product." Gale went on to say that the staff was given the time and the room to create the best Web site that they could. She also credited several stellar interns who dedicated a good portion of their time to updating and improving the content necessary for the launch as an additional factor in their success.

Putting financial resources into the Web site takes an initial investment that many offices balk at, but the fruits of that investment translate into saved time and resources. "Making the decision to completely redesign our site was a major hurdle," said **Scott Gerber**, Senator **Dianne Feinstein's** Director of Communications, "but given new technology and tools, it became evident that it was important." The investment in a redesign resulted in a Web site "that is easy to maintain and update" and makes the resources needed to keep it current "relatively small," said Gerber.

Create a Team-Oriented Approach

All of this year's three- and four-time award winners and freshman winners highlighted in this chapter revealed that it doesn't quite take a village to launch and maintain a successful Web site, but it certainly isn't a one-person show either. It takes a concerted team effort to achieve success on the Web.

It can take time for any office to develop a well-oiled team, but **Adam Abrams**, freshman Congressman **Patrick Murphy's** Communications Director, reported that teamwork contributed significantly to their success. "Everyone in our office—from our district offices to the D.C. office—plays a role in making sure we flag the important photos of the day, the videos, press releases, and statements by the Congressman to make sure that the material is always fresh," said Abrams. According to him, their early success is due to the team effort with regard to identifying the material that needs to be posted to the Web site. Abrams also said that the team approach extends all the way up to the Congressman himself, saying, "Congressman Murphy plays a large role in making sure the issues important to our district are always front and center on our Web site."

Kathleen Long, Senator **Carl Levin's** Deputy Press Secretary, revealed that everyone in the office contributes to the success of their multi-year award-winning site. While "the press office is responsible for day-to-day maintenance of the Web site," she said everyone plays a role. "Legislative assistants regularly review the issue pages..., the state staff reviews the Constituent Services section," and the Senator himself "often reviews the site" and the Chief of Staff "approves all major changes."

When asked what the key to success was for Senator **Patrick Leahy's** long string of Mouse Awards, the Senator's Systems Administrator, **Matt Payne-Funk**, replied, "the first thing that comes to mind for me is teamwork and diffused responsibility for content management." He also reported that Senator Leahy puts a lot of power in the hands of his staff, and "that trust and a collaborative spirit make it much easier to keep the content fresh." When asked if there was a formalized structure for keeping the Web site up-to-date, Payne-Funk replied, "No, it's more that it is ingrained and part of the office's culture and we think of the Web site as our window to the world and a window back to us from the world." Furthermore, he believes that it is also an important part of the office culture to delegate responsibility throughout the office for keeping the Web site content fresh and germane to what's going on in Vermont and in the U.S. Senate.

Meet the Needs of Constituents on Their Terms

Congressional Web sites aren't just for Hill staff and reporters. Good congressional Web sites will make resources available to these groups, but the primary audience for all Member Web sites is the constituents who sent the Member to Washington in the first place. The best Web sites on Capitol Hill know this and make an effort to serve their constituents online.

Rob Pierson is Congressman **Mike Honda's** Director of Online Communications, as well as the President of the House Systems Administrators Association. When asked why he thought the Congressman's Web site has been a four-time award winner, Pierson said that his boss represents a good portion of California's Silicon Valley and that his constituents assume that their Member of Congress is going to have a comprehensive and

navigable Web site. He said Congressman Honda tries to “meet and exceed constituent expectations” when it comes to his Web offerings. When asked about the Congressman’s vision for the Web site, Pierson said one of the things that his office is trying to do is to make it easy for constituents to visit the Congressman’s Web site. “The constituent is not going to want to go to the video section and look through the whole list of videos to see everything about healthcare, and then go to the photos page to get all the photos about healthcare,” said Pierson. “What we’re looking for is to create issue-centered pages where you go to the healthcare page and it shows you the Congressman’s perspective on healthcare, it shows all of the recent photos that he’s posted that have been tagged with a ‘healthcare’ tag, all of the videos of him speaking on the floor of the House of Representatives about healthcare issues, or blog posts that relate to healthcare, and have that all in one central place. It’s that kind of organization that makes it easy for the constituent to find exactly what they need without having to search through the whole site.”

Even though Congressman **Brad Ellsworth** is in his first term, his office clearly understands why it’s important for a Member to have a quality online presence. “We really view our Web site as our fourth office,” reveals the Congressman’s Press Secretary, **Liz Farrar**. “When we launched it we introduced it as our online office,” she continued. “We were looking for a site that would provide the content and information that constituents often call our other offices for in one place that they can access 24 hours a day.” This focus on the needs of constituents is laudable from a freshman office, and reveals that what the office is doing online seeks to meet the needs of his district visitors. “We were looking for something that was very user friendly, visually appealing, and easy to navigate,” said Farrar.

When it comes to providing tools that constituents can understand and use, Senator **Patrick Leahy’s** Web site has made a real effort to translate Hill jargon into language that is accessible to the average Vermonter. The Senator’s Systems Administrator, **Matt Payne-Funk**, said that the idea for their ‘More from the Floor’ section stemmed from the realization that, “Even for the most seasoned staffer, the [Senate] floor can be a confusing place.” So, they thought that it would be a valuable resource for constituents if they were to translate into plain English the happenings of the U.S. Senate. Payne-Funk said that, “it turned out to be a very popular part of Senator Leahy’s Web site.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the offices that have shown an ability to consistently produce quality Web sites, and the 110th Congress freshman Gold Mouse winners who expeditiously created better Web sites than many of their veteran counterparts, are great places to look for guidance about managing the creation and maintenance of good Web sites.

While they each do it in a different way, every one of the offices that we queried about their online communications efforts repeated themes of making the Web site a priority, allocating the necessary resources, and the need to keep their audience in mind. They will all tell you that, even if you have lots of great content, your Web efforts will flounder if you aren’t also keeping the principles for managing a successful Web site in mind. Each of the offices represented above has shown an aptitude for success in online communications and should be seen as a resource for their fellow congressional offices.

2007 CMF MOUSE AWARDS

THE BEST WEB SITES ON CAPITOL HILL

Gold Winners

HOUSE MEMBERS

Rep. Tom Allen (D-ME)
Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)
Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-CA)
Rep. John Boozman (R-AR)
Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL)
Rep. Dan Burton (R-IN)
Rep. Christopher P. Carney (D-PA)
Rep. Bud Cramer (D-AL)
Rep. Brad Ellsworth (D-IN)
Rep. Anna G. Eshoo (D-CA)
Rep. Mike Ferguson (R-NJ)
Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-VA)
Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC)
Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA)
Rep. John Linder (R-GA)
Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY)
Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA)
Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)
Rep. Jerry Moran (R-KS)
Rep. Patrick J. Murphy (D-PA)
Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ)
Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI)
Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA)
Rep. Hilda L. Solis (D-CA)
Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-FL)
Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA)

SENATE MEMBERS

Senator John Cornyn (R-TX)
Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT)
Senator Orrin G. Hatch (R-UT)
Senator John Thune (R-SD)

COMMITTEES

House Committee on the Judiciary
Chairman John Conyers, Jr.

House Committee on Science and Technology
Chairman Bart Gordon

House Committee on Ways and Means
Chairman Charles B. Rangel

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Chairman Jeff Bingaman

Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (Minority)
Ranking Member James M. Inhofe

LEADERSHIP

House Republican Conference
Chairman Adam Putnam

Silver Winners

HOUSE MEMBERS

Rep. Neil Abercrombie (D-HI)
Rep. Robert B. Aderholt (R-AL)
Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)
Rep. Bruce Braley (D-IA)
Rep. Chris Cannon (R-UT)
Rep. John Culberson (R-TX)
Rep. Eliot L. Engel (D-NY)
Rep. Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)
Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI)
Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD)
Rep. Bob Inglis (R-SC)
Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI)
Rep. Randy Kuhl (R-NY)
Rep. Nick Lampson (D-TX)
Rep. Jim Langevin (D-RI)
Rep. John B. Larson (D-CT)
Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-CO)
Rep. David Scott (D-GA)
Rep. Dave Weldon (R-FL)
Rep. Heather Wilson (R-NM)

SENATE MEMBERS

Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)
Senator Larry Craig (R-ID)
Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID)
Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC)
Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL)
Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)
Senator Joe Lieberman (ID-CT)
Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)
Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE)
Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

COMMITTEES

House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Chairman John D. Dingell

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Chairman Henry A. Waxman

House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming
Chairman Edward J. Markey

LEADERSHIP

Office of the Speaker of the House
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Bronze Winners

HOUSE MEMBERS

Rep. Brian Bilbray (R-CA)
Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)
Rep. Mary Bono (R-CA)
Rep. Michael C. Burgess (R-TX)
Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI)
Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ)
Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE)
Rep. Scott Garrett (R-NJ)
Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-GA)
Rep. Darlene Hooley (D-OR)
Rep. Joe Knollenberg (R-MI)
Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (D-OH)
Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD)
Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN)
Rep. Mark Udall (D-CO)
Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT)
Rep. Jerry Weller (R-IL)
Rep. Lynn A. Westmoreland (R-GA)
Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-VA)

SENATE MEMBERS

Senator Norm Coleman (R-MN)
Senator Byron L. Dorgan (D-ND)
Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY)
Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)
Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ)
Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)
Senator Carl Levin (D-MI)
Senator Trent Lott (R-MS)
Senator Jack Reed (D-RI)
Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR)

COMMITTEES

House Committee on Education and Labor
Chairman George Miller

House Committee on Financial Services
Chairman Barney Frank

House Committee on Homeland Security
Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joe Lieberman

LEADERSHIP

Office of the House Majority Leader
The Honorable Steny Hoyer

CHAPTER 7

The 2007 Mouse Award Winners

While Congress' overall progress on the Internet may be stagnant, the 2007 Mouse Award Winners are sterling exceptions to the general trend on Capitol Hill. Each of the 104 award-winning Web sites exemplify the sort of effective and successful Internet presence that is possible for any congressional Member, committee, and leadership office to attain. Every site that earned an "A" and thus received a Mouse Award excelled in most if not all of the established criteria. In this section we highlight the exceptional features of our 2007 Mouse award winners. For each of the 36 Gold Mouse Award winners we highlight two areas in which the sites especially shine, and we highlight one exceptional element of each of the 34 Silver Mouse winners. Finally, each of the 34 Bronze winners is listed by an element of its Web site that is particularly notable.



Gold Mouse Award Winners

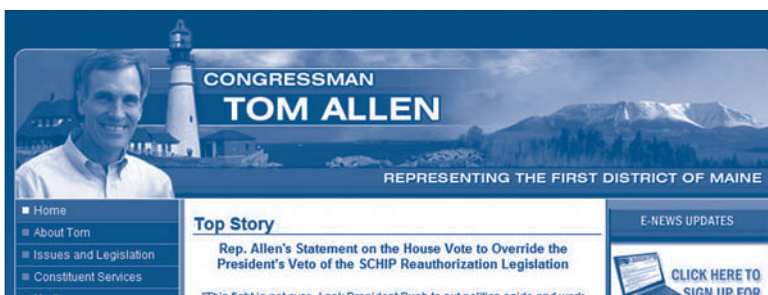
The following Gold Mouse Award winners lead the congressional field with a superb presence on the Web. They use their Web sites to provide their audiences with user-friendly content in interactive and innovative ways. All of the Gold Mouse Award winners are magnificent examples of what every congressional office should strive to be—useful, informative, empowering, and substantive. What follows is a general description of every Gold Mouse winning site, with an emphasis on two of the elements that particularly stand out, and a brief discussion about what makes their sites so successful.



House

Representative Tom Allen (D-ME) <http://tomallen.house.gov>

Congressman Tom Allen's Web site illustrates how the Web can be utilized to foster meaningful interaction between constituents and their Members of Congress. Clear and consistent navigation and up-to-date information ensure that users can easily access accurate information. This marks the third time that Congressman Allen's Web site has received a CMF Mouse Award.



The site meets all the various needs constituents have on their terms. Its **communication tools** provide driving directions and links to maps of the offices in the district and in Washington.

A survey solicits the views and opinions of

constituents and allows them to quickly transmit their concerns to the office. Local, district, and state-specific resources are included in the answers to common casework problems. An e-newsletter sign-up with 16 areas of interest also allows constituents to be updated on the topics that interest them. The **district information** makes the site a valuable resource for issues of concern to constituents. State topics are highlighted in the "Maine issues" section, and an interactive map shows the Congressman's activities and accomplishments by county.



Representative Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) <http://tammybaldwin.house.gov>

In addition to looking professional and hi-tech, the design and layout of Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin's site simplifies things for users looking to get to more substantive

information—which is something the site also excels at providing. This is the second year in a row that the site has won an award.



The site's content is fully integrated into the site's design. Its **legislative content** contains a great deal of information—from press releases to legislation and links to related federal and state information—on a wide variety of topics. Descriptions of the issues are combined with links to further information in the form of

related press releases, legislation, and links to relevant outside agencies and information. The **constituent services** section explains what her office can and cannot do for a constituent, in addition to FAQs and links to federal agencies. In these ways, the Web site anticipates the needs of constituents and lets them know what to expect from interactions with the office.





Representative Xavier Becerra (D-CA) <http://becerra.house.gov>

Congressman Xavier Becerra’s Web site is an example of how new technology and Internet best practices can complement the services provided by a congressional office. Combining extensive content with many different ways to absorb it, the site allows users to access the information and content on their own terms. With the site’s “Legislation in Focus” and “Hot Topics in Focus” sections, users can see the latest action on the Congressman’s priorities and on the issues of the day. This is the site’s second Gold Mouse Award in as many years.

The Congressman’s site is at the forefront of Web-specific offerings. The **communication tools** are as comprehensive and varied as they are relevant and substantive. Podcasts, videocasts, four different ways of receiving RSS feeds of his most recent votes, and the “Becerra Bulletin” e-newsletter all offer ways for users to interact with the office and receive updates on developments as they happen. Clear guidance in the Web form on the best ways to contact the Congressman—depending on the type of issue—enhances the interactivity of the site. Its **constituent services** section furthers that interactivity with a step-by-step guide to determining if a problem can be addressed by the office and, if it can, provides answers to FAQs and online assistance for initiating casework.



Representative John Boozman (R-AR) <http://www.boozman.house.gov>

Congressman John Boozman’s Web site brings the full range of information and services offered by a congressional office onto the Web. The depth of the content made available on the Web site is matched by a structure which allows users to find and browse the information painlessly. The structure of the Web site follows its function—as an excellent resource for information of the Congressman’s office. This is the second Gold Mouse Award for Congressman Boozman’s site—the first was in 2003.

The site presents all of the different services and information in a way that assists users looking for information on specific topics. The **legislative content** on the site offers an exhaustive list of issues with links to related CRS reports, press releases, video, and other relevant documents. National, local, and Member issues are all given equally extensive treatment. The **press resources** section offers a range of documents by date, document type, and topic. Not only does each press release have a press contact name and telephone number, but the name is embedded with a link to allow e-mail contact with the press secretary with the click of a button.





Representative Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL) <http://brown-waite.house.gov>

Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite's Web site is an example of an online office developed for its diverse users. The key to its success is the depth of the site's information and services, which both meets the needs of key audiences and highlights the goals and priorities of the office. The content and menu options are described and presented in clear and concise language. The site's design ensures that important information doesn't get lost, so that all users regardless of their background knowledge or interests can find what they are looking for.



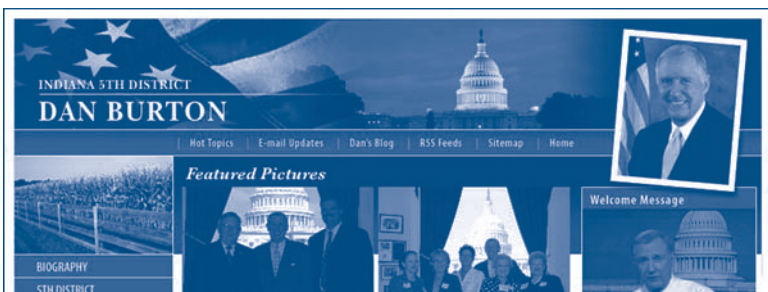
The **constituent services** provided on the site include an issues section tailored to the needs



and concerns of the Congresswoman's constituents. In addition, information about the many services the office can provide is offered on the site as well. From help with a federal agency and federal job listings, to the Congressional Art Competition and congratulatory letters for Eagle Scouts, everything the office does for its constituents is described online. The **legislative content** is synthesized in the issues section, with up-to-date write-ups and related documents and press releases for each issue.

Representative Dan Burton (R-IN) <http://www.house.gov/burton>

Congressman Dan Burton's Web site uses the opportunities that the Internet provides to inform and foster interaction with his constituents. It successfully integrates offline activities with online resources to make its full array of information and services readily available to constituents and other key audiences.



The Web site's **communication tools** enable users to interact with the office online. A staff directory and Web form for scheduling requests emphasizes the openness and accessibility of the office. The mobile office schedule and the current town hall and community forum schedules also contribute to the feeling that the



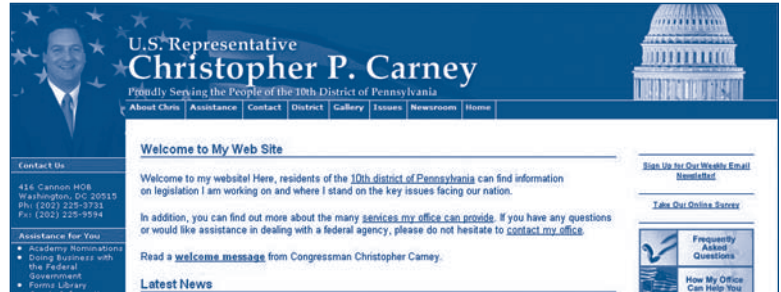
office is open and approachable for all constituents. The **design and layout** of the site facilitates the collection of users' opinions on hot topics like immigration, and offers an RSS feed, site map, and the most recent and relevant information. The result is an interactive and easily navigable site that serves users on their terms.



Representative Christopher P. Carney (D-PA) <http://carney.house.gov>

Freshman Congressman Christopher Carney’s Web site makes the services of his physical office easily available for constituents on the Internet. His site shows how effective an online presence can be when content is tailored to meet constituents’ needs. Everything from the menu options to the issue descriptions is presented in a way that visitors from both inside and outside the beltway can understand.

The **constituent services** section brings the personal touch of the physical office to online visitors. For those who wish to initiate casework requests, clear guidance concerning each type of casework is offered. The names and e-mail addresses of the caseworkers are provided so users know the real people behind the support they are getting. A “forms library” allows users to quickly identify and easily fill out the relevant forms. FAQs on other constituent services and legislative issues are offered for those who may not be sure of what they need. The Congressman’s site offers an array of services from requesting a meeting, to information on how to register to vote. The **press resources** section contains releases by date and by topic, video and transcripts of floor statements, and the name, number and e-mail of the communications director.



Representative Bud Cramer (D-AL) <http://cramer.house.gov>

Congressman Bud Cramer’s Web site anticipates the needs of its audience and fulfills them clearly and concisely. It provides extensive content, including educational information about Congress using real life examples to illustrate how Congress functions. A section describing a typical week for the Congressman, a letter of the month section featuring a constituent’s letter and the Congressman’s response, and a walkthrough of the legislative process with a bill he introduced, are all innovative ways of showing constituents what goes on in Congress and how the institution works. This is the second time the site has received a Mouse Award.



The site’s **constituent services** section offers assistance, FAQs, and information on everything from casework and resources for those looking to do business with the federal government, to presidential greetings and letters from the Congressman. The **design and layout** include featured issues, links to “Today’s Schedule” for the House of Representatives, and a quick link to FAQs which all help orient the user to the site’s offerings.



Representative Brad Ellsworth (D-IN) <http://www.ellsworth.house.gov>

First-term Congressman Brad Ellsworth's Web site illustrates how to make offline content available online. An accessible and clear layout, with interactive breadcrumbs and consistent navigation, makes the site easy to use. With content that encompasses the work of the office, the site is a necessary resource for any user looking for help or information from the Congressman.



The site's **communication tools** are as clear and helpful as possible to users. The site explains that there are delays in the delivery of postal mail to Congressional offices, and provides links to Web forms that the user can utilize instead. The site has different Web forms, each specifically designed to facilitate different



types of contact with the office. There are, for example, forms that solicit constituent opinions on pending legislation and forms for scheduling a meeting with the Member. The **district information** includes the location, telephone and fax numbers, and the office hours for all district and DC offices. In addition, all of the topics in each issues section contain specific information on how they relate to constituents and the Member's priorities.

Representative Anna G. Eshoo (D-CA) <http://eshoo.house.gov>

Congresswoman Anna Eshoo's Web site demonstrates how the layout and design of a site can enhance its content. The synthesis of a sleek, professional design and relevant content makes for an award-winning site. This marks the second year in a row the site has won a Mouse Award.



The site's **legislative content** is top notch. Each issue statement is accompanied by descriptions of recent action on related bills and laws. The "Legislative Resources" section has descriptive links to information about what is going on in Congress and tells users where the Congresswoman is devoting her time. Of



particular note is the innovative "glossary," which provides definitions of words and jargon that those unfamiliar with the legislative process might not know. The **communication tools** provide users with guidance on the best methods of contacting the office. Office hours and driving directions to her offices in Washington, DC and in the district are also provided. With these features, the site is especially helpful for all constituents regardless of their method of interaction with the office.



Representative Mike Ferguson (R-NJ) <http://ferguson.house.gov>

Congressman Mike Ferguson’s Web site provides a variety of tools and information for its online audience. With a modern, appealing layout; Web-specific offerings; and comprehensive content, the site supports its users and illustrates an effective online presence.

The site takes advantage of the interactive nature of the Web to serve users in the way that is most convenient for them. The **communication tools** include an online poll on the homepage, podcasts, and an e-newsletter sign up. Requests for flags, tours, “comments and concerns,” and meetings with the Congressman can all be submitted online through Web forms. The **press resources** section includes a press kit and releases sorted not only by date and by topic, but by region of the district as well. News stories about the Congressman and video of his floor speeches are also available in an easily accessible format.



Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA) <http://forbes.house.gov>

Congressman J. Randy Forbes’ Web site meets the needs of his constituents while giving them a clear understanding of his work in Congress. The issues section describes the Congressman’s most recent actions and accomplishments on each of his priority issues. Pertinent links to sources like THOMAS, which audiences off the Hill may not be familiar with, are briefly explained so that visitors can effectively use the site.

The site is designed for ease of use. The **design and layout** offer users easy access to up-to-date information. The homepage has links to issues that are currently in the news, an interactive poll, and a “latest news” section. This section, like the rest of the Web site, uses a consistent layout and structure, ensuring that users will not be confused by changing options and menu locations as they move through the site. An option to change the font size is a feature that makes the site more usable. The **press resources** include press releases that can be sorted by both date and topic. Video clips of floor statements, an e-newsletter archive, and audio columns about important national issues give interested users access to the range of media the Congressman uses. The audio column “A Day in the Life of Congressman Randy Forbes” provides a glimpse of what a Member’s job entails.





Representative Virginia Foxx (R-NC) <http://foxx.house.gov>

Congresswoman Virginia Foxx's Web site illustrates how a Member's work and priorities can translate into an effective and useful presence on the Internet. The consistent and professional layout and integrated content provide easy to access services for diverse

users with differing needs. The site has received a Mouse Award for the second time in two years.

The **constituent services** section supplies valuable content to many different audiences. A section for students provides them with substantive information on how to apply for internships or for the congressional page program, and describes other leadership opportunities in DC and in the district. Resources are also available



for senior citizens and teachers, and for those needing assistance with a federal agency.

Communication tools include office hours, maps, and guidance about how best to contact the office depending on the issue. The Congresswoman posts notices of upcoming tele-townhall meetings and links to e-mail updates, both of which encourage the kind of interactivity that the Web allows.



Representative Mike Honda (D-CA) <http://honda.house.gov>

Congressman Mike Honda's site explores the limits of what a congressional office can do on the Web. It includes all the content expected of a top quality site and includes innovations that few other offices have utilized. Beyond RSS feeds, podcasts, e-mail updates, and information in Spanish, the site incorporates access to Facebook, YouTube,

and Flickr. All of these features are successful because they complement and expand upon the goals and functions of the office, and are not there simply to be cutting edge. This marks the fourth Mouse Award for the Congressman's site, and the third time in four years that the site received a Gold Mouse Award.

The site provides guidance on all of the services that the office offers constituents. The **constituent services** section explains the ins



and outs of casework. Clear and extensive FAQs with district-specific information for the most common constituent problems allow visitors to get the help they need directly from the Web site. Extensive links and clear information about federal agencies, state and local government, and community service providers is offered for problems that fall outside the office's jurisdiction. The site's **legislative content** contains national and local issue information updated for the current Congress, with links to legislation, chamber schedules, and other educational tools. The site is a resource that combines press releases, CRS reports, bill information, and related federal agency action all in one place.

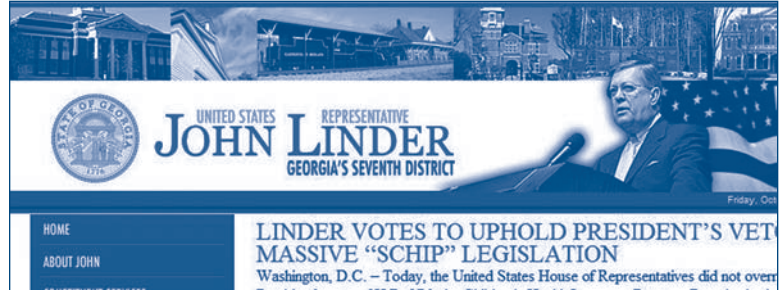




Representative John Linder (R-GA) <http://linder.house.gov>

Congressman John Linder’s Web site serves as an example of how a professional layout and design can complement the effectiveness of the content. The site is highly usable, with an innovative format and features that enhance the office’s online services and information. The site is receiving its second Gold Mouse Award in two years.

The **constituent services** section provides detailed direction on how to initiate and even self-diagnose casework problems, and it offers detailed guidance on where to get help with a state issue. A detailed constituent survey, e-newsletter sign up, and Web form for contacting the office solicits personalized interaction with the office. An “important dates” section lists upcoming town hall meetings and other pertinent deadlines. The **design and layout** of the Congressman’s site, present a large volume of information without also overwhelming the user. Helpful tools, including an RSS feed, a text only option, and a “Most Viewed Page” feature, are also especially valuable.



Representative Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY) <http://maloney.house.gov>

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney’s Web site is a great example of how to provide extensive information in a way that enhances a user’s visit. From the war in Iraq to the Second Avenue Tunnel and everything in between, the site contains substantive information on as many issues as users could expect of any congressional office. Information about Congress and the Congresswoman’s work in the House is exhaustive and provides an extensive educational resource for her constituents. Because the office has clearly identified its audiences and presented the content in user-friendly ways, the site does not overwhelm the user. The site has been a Gold Mouse winner for two straight years.

The site’s design and structure provide a thoroughly usable format for navigation. The **design and layout**, with “quick links” and “related information” sections, direct users to additional content that might be of interest to them. All the information on the site is cross-referenced and integrated into multiple sections. The **press resources** are also customized so that interested users can see releases by issue and by date, and RSS feed and news search options increase the site’s usability and relevance to members of the press. Regardless of a user’s interests, they will be able to find detailed information quickly and easily.





Representative Ed Markey (D-MA) <http://markey.house.gov>

Congressman Ed Markey's Web site utilizes the Web to create and maintain an effective and useful presence on the Internet. The content is clear, easy to use, and—just as importantly—up-to-date. RSS feeds for news releases and podcasts, and a THOMAS

search box that links to the current Congress contribute to the timeliness of the information and make the site that much more useful. This is the second consecutive year that Congressman Markey's site has received a Mouse Award.

The site offers a variety of content to match the varied users the site attracts. The **press resources** section includes video of floor speeches, audio clips, and an extensive list of

topics with links to related press releases. In order to better meet the needs of visiting members of the media, the names and numbers of the office's press contacts are provided in each press release. The **constituent services** section offers a range of information and resources for constituents. A "life events" section contains links to related government agencies which provide services such as issuing birth certificates and driver's licenses. In addition, a great deal of care is given to showing the impact of national events on the state of Massachusetts. Finally, a casework-specific Web form allows constituents to start the process and interact with the office to address issues they have with federal agencies.



Representative Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) <http://kevinmccarthy.house.gov>

Congressman Kevin McCarthy's Web site offers constituents everything they typically seek from a quality veteran Member's site, no small feat for a freshman office. From guidance on internship opportunities to FAQs about the Congressman's positions on certain hot topics, the site is a helpful online resource for all its audiences.

The site puts the Congressman's office at his constituents' fingertips. The **legislative content** includes information about what's going on in Congress as well as the aforementioned FAQ which allows users to stay up-to-date on the most recent developments on each topic.

The issues section includes the latest press releases relating to each issue, which allows users to find the most recent information quickly and easily. The **design and layout** of the site includes an RSS feed, interactive breadcrumbs, and a "Favorite readings" section. All are examples of innovations that add value to the Web site.





Representative Jerry Moran (R-KS) <http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov>

Congressman Jerry Moran’s Web site illustrates how a site built with a specific audience in mind can deliver resources and information that are clear, consistent, and accessible. Constituents are provided with valuable information and services relating to his district and Congress. The clear professional format and content provided for its key audiences make this site a success.

The site’s **press resources** illustrate the thought that went into the needs and interests of each audience. The press section contains information tailored to the press and to any other interested users, including a press kit, video clips, speeches, editorials, an e-newsletter archive, and press releases. Beyond the typical latest news, the **design and layout** prominently display “hot topics” of particular interest to constituents and even solicit user opinions on legislative matters. An online poll and navigable breadcrumbs make the site easy to use, while it also serves the needs of its diverse audiences with sections and information tailor-made for each one.



Representative Patrick J. Murphy (D-PA) <http://www.patrickmurphy.house.gov>

First-term Congressman Patrick Murphy’s Web site demonstrates just how accessible and easy to use an effective online presence can be. Everything from the menu options to the grants information page is presented in terms and language that experts and newcomers alike can understand. The site allows users to spend less time trying to figure out which section they are interested in and more time focusing on the substance of the site.

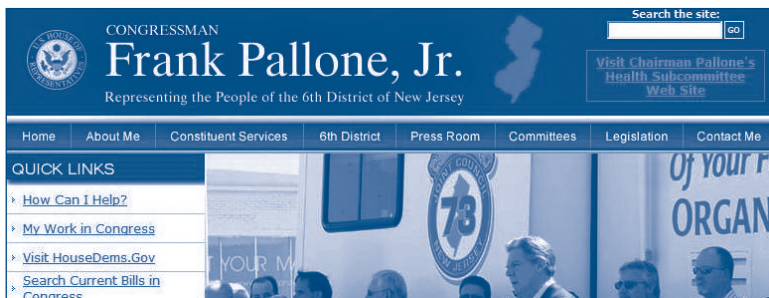
The site employs navigation and site design practices that anticipate the needs of its users. The **design and layout** provide clickable breadcrumbs that allow users to figure out where they are in the site and move around quickly. A “Related Items” box delivers other resources that might be of interest to users, while a site map, privacy policy, and consistent and clear menu choices on each page also contribute to the site’s overall usability. The “Front and Center” section of the homepage is laudable for informing users about the most recent or pressing issues the Congressman is active on. The **constituent services** section is extensive, with all the guidance and information users would want, as well as one page of the issues section devoted to “local issues” specifically for constituents. A thorough FAQ which answers questions about the site, casework, and finding legislative information further enhances the site’s usefulness for constituents and other key audiences.





Representative Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) <http://www.house.gov/pallone>

Congressman Frank Pallone's Web site is a source of relevant and timely information from the office for all of its diverse audiences, from constituents to members of the press, to users on and off the Hill. It takes the physical office onto the Internet without sacrificing the quality of the office's information or services.



The **legislative content** allows users to access all the information about what the Congressman is doing in Congress, from bills he has sponsored and co-sponsored in this and past sessions of Congress, to the House calendar and Floor schedule, to information on the legislative process. The "My Work in Congress" section has issues which show users the Congressman's most recent action on each topic. Finally,



the **design and layout** of the site offer the most recent video and links to the complete transcript—an important feature that makes the content accessible for all constituents.

Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI) <http://www.house.gov/ryan>

Congressman Paul Ryan's Web site provides as much up-to-date content as one would expect from a quality congressional office, and it does so in a straightforward and readable manner. Congressional Web sites are also a Member's online office, and this site clearly reflects that with its inclusion and integration of the Congressman's various priorities and activities.



The site's **legislative content** provides issue information and recent press releases, CRS reports, statements, and speeches on each topic. Clearly labeled links to the floor schedule, House legislative calendar, information on how a bill becomes a law, and what Congress does, all give audiences outside the beltway



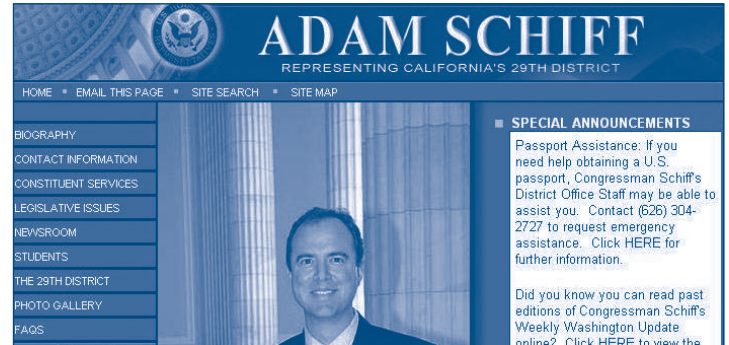
the resources to better understand how Congress works. The **design and layout** of the Congressman's site include a homepage which contains the top five issues of the week and information on passport assistance—a frustrating and pressing concern to constituents at the time of our evaluations—as well as the usual "Latest News."



Representative Adam Schiff (D-CA) <http://schiff.house.gov>

Congressman Adam Schiff’s Web site is an invaluable resource for his constituents. It is a rich source of information on the Member’s goals, activities, and priorities, and explains those resources in simple terms that those off the Hill will understand. For the second consecutive year, the site has received a CMF Mouse Award.

The site puts as much care into explaining the content as it does in hosting it, and the result is an informative and usable resource. The **legislative content** is accessible for all visitors to the site. The link to roll call votes is preceded with a step by step guide to deciphering the Clerk’s roll call page, as well as answers to frequently asked questions. The link to video floor statements is coupled with transcripts, so those unable to access the video are able to read the same valuable information. The **design and layout** of the site, with interactive breadcrumb navigation, links to a site map, the privacy policy, and consistent menu design and placement, ensure that users spend more time with the content than trying to find it in the first place. A “Web Support” section is an innovation which assists users in traversing the site and allows them to contact the Webmaster to report broken links.



Representative Hilda L. Solis (D-CA) <http://solis.house.gov>

Congresswoman Hilda Solis’ Web site provides dynamic content in an understandable and navigable format. With easily accessible information that is kept up-to-date, the Web site is an invaluable resource for its users.

The **press resources** are presented so members of the media and other interested users can find the information that most interests them. Press releases, op-eds, and letters to federal officials and agencies are offered, sorted by date and by issue. Audio and video are available, and the Congresswoman even has her own YouTube channel. An electronic press kit and press contact information on each press release give critical information to reporters where they need it. RSS feeds and newsletter archives help keep her constituents up-to-date on the Congresswoman’s actions in Congress. Through the **design and layout**, clear and consistent navigation is paired with easy to read text and embedded, identifiable links. The content throughout the site is written for the Web with short paragraphs and numerous links to more information for those who are interested. A site map and language—staying away from congressional jargon—further contribute to the site’s ease of use.





Representative Cliff Stearns (R-FL) <http://www.house.gov/stearns>

Congressman Cliff Stearns' Web site is designed to provide content that serves the needs of its visitors. Whether users need help with a federal agency, want to know more about the Congressman and his accomplishments, or are looking for the latest news from his office, they can find what they need on the site.



The **legislative content** offers novel services and information that enhance the value of the Web site to users. The committees on which he serves are listed, with links to the committee homepages. In addition, the site offers a description of what each committee does and describes the Congressman's priorities and goals on the committee. A listing of recent votes, including a description of the



bill, the Congressman's stance, and the final result, allow users to see what is happening in Congress. The **constituent services** section eases users through the process of getting the assistance they need. Mobile office hours, a complete staff listing, and a real life example of casework all offer constituents a clear sense of an open and approachable office.

Representative Mike Thompson (D-CA) <http://mikethompson.house.gov>

Congressman Mike Thompson's Web site offers constituents information and online support that make the resources of the office available on the Internet. The breadth of the



information offered on the site is augmented by embedded, easily identifiable links, and a design scheme that allows users to scan and quickly find the content that most interests them. The site's crisp look and clear and easy navigation assist users and make finding important information a relatively painless experience.

The **constituent services** section includes guidance on casework initiation and takes users



step-by-step through diagnosing their problems to determine if the office can be helpful. Users can review all the services provided on the Web site, all the services that the physical office can assist them with, as well as how to contact the office. The constituent services section even includes guidance on scheduling a meeting with the Congressman. The **design and layout** incorporate an "In This Section" toolbar which complements the easy-to-read layout and professional design. The result is a useful and informative site that is easily navigated.



Senate

Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) <http://cornyn.senate.gov>

Senator John Cornyn’s Web site tailors its content to an online audience, and as a result every section efficiently and effectively serves their needs. With a search box, site map, text only option, and “en Español” section prominently displayed on every page as part of the navigation, the Web site is eminently user-friendly. The professional look and feel of the site and the obvious effort to keep it up-to-date also add value to the content. This Mouse Award is Senator Cornyn’s second in as many years.



The site enables its users to easily find the content of most interest to them. The Senator’s **press resources** section contains press releases, committee and floor statements, video and audio clips, and newsletter archives and sign-ups. All are searchable by date and by topic. His site also offers four separate RSS feeds, for “News & Releases,” “Official Podcasts,” “Recent Votes,” and “Newsletters & Issue Updates,” with six different ways to subscribe to them. His **legislative content** has all of the related press information for each issue topic as well as a list of accomplishments and an updated description of his work on each issue in the current Congress.



Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) <http://dodd.senate.gov>

Senator Chris Dodd’s Web site clearly and concisely serves his constituents, and takes full advantage of the unique opportunities for interactivity which the Internet provides. The design and layout of the site complements and encourages this interactivity. By cross-referencing press releases, op-eds, blog posts, and other related documents, the site ensures that its users will find relevant content regardless of where they look for it. Senator Dodd previously won a Mouse Award in 2003.

The site offers a full range of content specifically adapted for the Web. Its **communication tools** include a page offering clear guidance on the best ways to contact the Senator. The site offers RSS feeds for the office’s latest news and podcasts in English and Spanish, as well as blog posts which are categorized and searchable by topic. Podcasts and their accompanying transcripts are also readily accessible. The site’s **state information** is top-notch. The site offers an interactive map of Connecticut, with information specific to each county, including relevant press releases, appropriations, and recent action by the Senator in the region.





Senator Orrin G. Hatch (R-UT) <http://hatch.senate.gov>

Senator Orrin Hatch's Web site is an informative and timely resource which extends his office on to the Internet. All of the resources and information one would expect to receive from a congressional office are conveniently offered online. This is the second consecutive year Senator Hatch's site has won a CMF Mouse Award.



The site is built for constituents, and it shows. The **design and layout** facilitate the users' experience in finding the most recent and notable information. The homepage has the latest votes in the Senate. The sections providing assistance have titles ("Services for Utahns," "Teachers & Students") that are easy for constituents to understand, especially for those users who may not be familiar with the term "casework." The site also has a text size



option and embedded links, which both contribute to the site's overall usability. The **press resources** include the press contact listed in each press release as well as a "Press Contact Info" section with the names and numbers of the press secretary and press assistant. The issues section contains relevant press releases, and users can access them by topic. Finally, video and audio clips are also incorporated seamlessly into the press and issues section, and are paired with descriptions of the recorded events.

Senator John Thune (R-SD) <http://thune.senate.gov>

Senator John Thune's Web site demonstrates how Members of Congress can use the Internet to expand the reach of their offices and successfully serve multiple and disparate audiences simultaneously. The site is an interactive resource, tailoring content and



innovations to serve its audiences in a variety of ways. This year, Senator Thune's site takes home its third Mouse Award.

The site's hi-tech look and feel and clear navigation tools deliver content to its audiences in both a useful and usable format. The **constituent services** section meets the needs of constituents on their terms. The site clearly explains what casework is and how the office can help, while step-by-step instructions guide



the constituent through the process. A detailed FAQ complements this section and allows constituents to get answers 24 hours a day. The site's **legislative content** contains key information in a way that can be easily understood by all audiences, whether or not they are familiar with the Hill. The Senator's voting record is posted on the site in an easily readable format, with the name and brief description of each bill, his position, and the outcome provided. The "Hot Topics" section highlights issues receiving a high volume of interest from his constituents in South Dakota.



Committee

House Committee on the Judiciary Chairman John Conyers, Jr.

<http://judiciary.house.gov>

The House Committee on the Judiciary’s Majority Web site puts the vast work of the committee online. The latest committee news is always available on the homepage, while the latest subcommittee news is offered in each subcommittee section. Those features and an up-to-date interactive calendar of events give users access to important and timely information.



The **legislative content** provided on the site is extensive. The “Markup & Business Meetings” section contains archived Webcasts, as do the “Legislative” and “Oversight” hearings sections. The “Documents in Demand” section of the homepage is a notable feature that provides quick access to the most popular items that the committee produces—an invaluable resource for Hill staff and members of the press. Information on the committee’s rules, jurisdiction, history, and brief biographies of each committee member is also provided. Its **communications tools** include contact information for the committee, including a Web form for citizen comment, something which few other committee Web sites offer.



House Committee on Science and Technology Chairman Bart Gordon

<http://science.house.gov>

The House Committee on Science and Technology’s Majority Web site exemplifies the amount of useful, important information a congressional committee Web site can contain. Up-to-date hearing schedules and timely witness statements are particularly important, and the Web site covers those things and more. The depth of information alone is exemplary. With its clear and consistent look and feel, and features such as a site map and sorting capabilities for most of its documents, the site goes above and beyond what is standard practice on Capitol Hill.



The site’s **legislative content** is as detailed and extensive as can be expected from a committee. Everything from committee reports and budget information to an archive of hearing Webcasts and letters to and from the administration are available on the site. Its **communications tools** are also particularly notable. A “For Members & Citizens” section targets these groups directly, with descriptions of bills, educational information, and a “Tell Your Member” option. “Comment Online” facilitates interactivity with the committee itself, something not every committee welcomes.





House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Charles B. Rangel

<http://waysandmeans.house.gov>



The House Committee on Ways and Means' Majority Web site provides its key audiences with information and resources in a valuable, easy-to-use format. An interactive calendar of the committee schedule demonstrates that an innovative feature can add value to standard information and make it easier to understand and use.

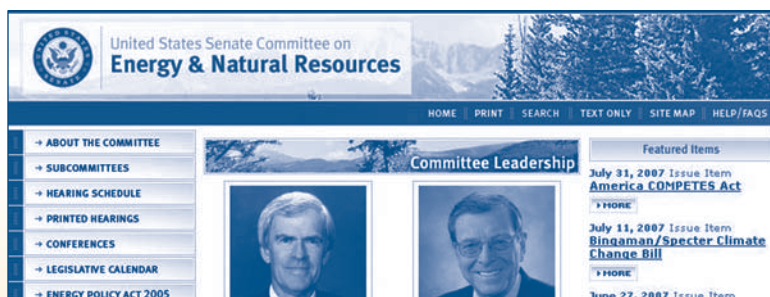
The site's **legislative content** includes the most up-to-date actions on bills as well as



information on hearings with testimony and transcripts posted as they become available. Each subcommittee provides information about its membership, jurisdiction, past hearings, and legislation that has been referred for their consideration. In short, if the committee produces it, it is offered online. Its **design and layout**, with clear, short, and descriptive menu options, assist all users from experts to newcomers in easily using the site. A special feature allows users to immediately start to view live committee proceedings. The professional and consistent navigation and the posting of up-to-date information also contribute to the success of the Web site.

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Jeff Bingaman

<http://energy.senate.gov>



The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Majority Web site demonstrates how effective a committee Web site can be when tailored content is paired with a hi-tech design. The design of the site ensures easy access to comprehensive information for citizens, the press, congressional staff, as well as its various professional audiences.

The **design and layout** contain the most up-to-date information and an interactive calendar of events. The **legislative content** includes a "Live Webcast" button that allows users to start watching committee proceedings whenever they occur. The site contains links to related federal agencies and an "Energy Policy Act of 2005" section with information on the first comprehensive energy bill passed by Congress in 13 years. One particularly laudable practice on the Web site is the inclusion of a detailed description of each hearing in clear and understandable language so any users, regardless of their expertise, can understand the committee and its work.

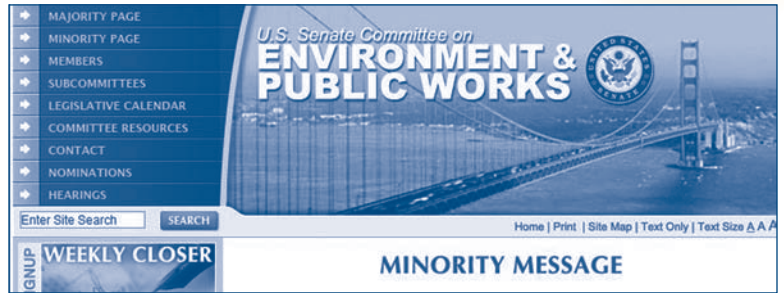




Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (Minority) Ranking Member James M. Inhofe

<http://epw.senate.gov/minority>

The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works' Minority Web site illustrates how committee sites can successfully provide timely and targeted information to its various audiences. The site is designed for ease of use. Press contact names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses included in each press release make information readily available to one of the site's key audiences: the press.



Its **design and layout** facilitate the delivery of thorough and targeted information to citizens. A "Fact of the Day" section and blog posts give them updated content and help ensure repeat visits to the site. The content is also fully integrated and cross-referenced throughout the site. For instance, the issues section contains a brief statement by the Ranking Member, related press releases and speeches, as well as related facts of the day and blog posts. Providing a variety of content in a number of different ways ensures that users will find the information that interests them, regardless of where they look for it. The site's **legislative content** has information specific to the committee's work and jurisdiction, including information about its rules, history, hearing schedules, and nominations.



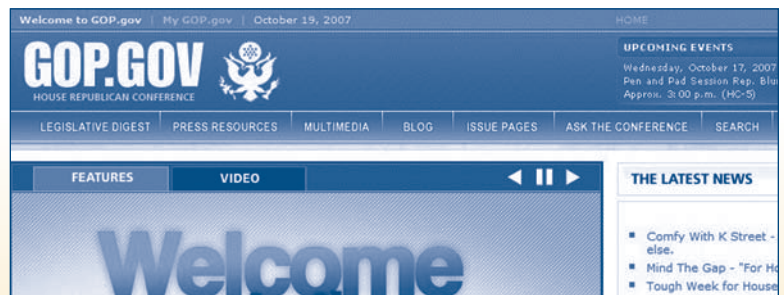
Leadership

House Republican Conference Chairman Adam Putnam

<http://www.gop.gov>

The House Republican Conference's Web site utilizes the latest technology to provide content to the variety of users that visit it. The look and feel of the site is hi-tech and professional, and both make the site easy to use.

The site's **legislative content** is extensive and easily digested. Video and audio podcasts, floor speeches, legislative digests, an active issues section, an extensive press section, and a calendar of events, all make the site a valuable resource. Other notable **design and layout** features include a link to the site map and a feature that provides dynamic, related information specific to the page being visited. Both features make the content usable and navigable. RSS feed hot buttons and a search box containing popular searches (such as "Earmarks") are examples of innovative features that add value without being overwhelming.





Silver Mouse Award Winners

The 2007 Silver Mouse Award winners pushed the envelope and illustrate how Congress can catch up to commercial and other federal government offerings on the Web. What follows is a presentation of the Silver Mouse winners highlighting one element of each site which is particularly innovative and noteworthy.



The **design and layout** of a Web site can enhance the entire site, as the following Silver Mouse Award winners demonstrate.

- **Rep. Earl Blumenauer's (D-OR)** site is thoroughly adapted for the Web. For each issue in the issues section, a few brief paragraphs provide the latest information and a link to more information about the issue, along with clear, embedded links to related information which makes it very easy for visitors to find what they are looking for.
- **Rep. Ron Kind's (D-WI)** "Getting Help with a Federal Agency" section presents the explanation of what casework is and instructions on how to start the process in a clear series of interactive steps.
- **Senator Patty Murray's (D-WA)** new site was created with input from users. The "About the Site" section contains a list of changes and improvements the site has undergone, and explains that they took comments from users into account during its redesign process. It offers prime examples of how to write and present content on the Web.



Legislative content should represent the bulk of the content on most congressional Web sites, and the Silver Mouse Award winners show the variety of innovative and useful ways that valuable legislative information can be provided online.

- **Rep. Robert B. Aderholt's (R-AL)** "Congressional Record" section gives users easy access to all the Congressman's official remarks.
- **Rep. Chris Cannon's (R-UT)** "Chris Cares" section includes information on specific bills or initiatives on which the Congressman is active.
- **Rep. Eliot L. Engel's (D-NY)** "A-Z Issues in Brief" offers an exhaustive list of issues and a brief statement of the Congressman's stance on each.
- **Rep. Steny Hoyer's (D-MD)** "Legislative FAQ" answers the questions users may have about Congress and what Rep. Hoyer can do to assist them..
- **Rep. John B. Larson's (D-CT)** issues section contains updated and thorough information on national and local issues, as well as on issues that are a priority for him.
- **Senator Dianne Feinstein's (D-CA)** "Priorities" section has a list of the Senator's priorities for the current session of Congress, and each one provides a wealth of information on the given topic.

Rep. Blumenauer

Position Statements

- Blumenauer Responds to Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Proposal
- Alternative Minimum Tax
- Budget and Taxes

Related Information

- Floor Releases
- Floor Speeches

Budget and Taxes

This week is an important one in Congress. On Tuesday the House voted on a bill that will provide more Oregon Veterans with access to low-interest home loans. With so many returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, our veterans need the Oregon Veterans Home Loan Program now more than ever. Learn more about the 60-year-old Oregon Veterans Home Loan Program [here](#).

Today we will vote on a trade agreement that for the first time contains fully enforceable labor and environmental standards. The U.S.-Peru FTA marks a new threshold for international labor and environmental standards, setting the standard for all future trade deals. [Learn more about the agreement](#) and how the prospect of this FTA has already prevented the Peruvian government from oil drilling in a [Peruvian rainforest](#).

On Friday the House will vote to protect 23 million families from a massive tax increase under the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT). Without this legislation, the number of Oregonians subject to the AMT next year would jump from 6,800 to 44,000.



Read full issue

Rep. Kind

Getting help with a federal agency

What is casework?

One of the most important services that I provide to the people of western Wisconsin is assisting them when they have a problem with a federal agency. Working with federal agencies can be difficult and confusing. My staff and I are more than willing to help you navigate the process.

Step One: Determine if I can help you.

What I can do to help:

I can assist you if you are having problems with a federal agency and live in [Wisconsin's Third Congressional District](#). For example, I can help with the Social Security Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, to name a few.

What I cannot do to help:

Unfortunately, I cannot help you if your problem involves a state or local agency. In addition, I am forbidden by law from providing legal advice and intervening in a legal dispute.

If you are having a problem with a state agency, please contact your state legislators. If you do not know who your representatives are, [click here](#) or call 808-266-0341.

Step Two: Gather all relevant materials.

- Fill out the casework authorization form by [clicking here](#).

Sen. Murray

About this Site

Welcome! to Senator Murray's improved website, which was launched in April 2005. This updated version makes major improvements in content, accessibility, navigation and usability.

We've tried to build this site around your needs. We reviewed the comments from more than 2100 visitors who filled out our [web survey](#) over the past two years, and we drew on the best practices recommended by various studies including the [Congress Online Project](#).

We welcome your comments on the site at: webmaster@murray.senate.gov

Highlights

Compared with the websites of all 100 United States Senators, Senator Murray's new site:

- Offers the **most legislative content**
- Is **"Section 508" compliant** - making it accessible for handicap visitors
- Offers the most useful section on **applying for Federal grants** (Murray's Grants Gateway)

Rep. Aderholt

Congressional Record Statements

The Congressional Record is the official record of the proceedings and debates of the United States Congress. It's published daily when Congress is in session.

In this section you'll find records of actions I've taken during debate or remarks I've made and entered into the Congressional Record since I first joined Congress in January 1997.

The information is arranged by the Congress in which it occurred.

- 110th Congress** January 2007 to Present
- 109th Congress** January 2005 to December 2006
- 108th Congress** January 2003 to December 2004

Rep. Cannon

Chris Cares

I will use this section of the website to share with you details of initiatives, legislation, or ideas I will be bringing forward in the Congress and elsewhere. This section will be updated as well each individual initiative with any news items. I encourage you to comment and contribute to my blog and email me with any comments or ideas you have about these initiatives.

Passing the Internet Tax Moratorium and Reducing Taxes on Satellite TV

Congressman Cannon has continued to lead the fight to make the Internet Tax Moratorium permanent. As Ronald Reagan said of government's view of the economy, "If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it." The CANNOT allow that to happen to the Internet. Similarly, we must stop taxing Satellite TV and other services at higher rates than Cable TV. Allow the marketplace to choose which service provides better service, higher quality, and lowest prices. [Click here for more](#)

Congressional Pardon for Agents Ramos & Compean

The arrest and conviction of Agents Ramos and Compean for defending our borders is a travesty. I was an original co-sponsor of HR 563 The "Congressional Pardon for Border Patrol Agents Ramos and Compean Act" and will continue the work needed to get these men released from prison. [Click here for more](#)

Operation Iraqi Freedom

As America's brave men and women continue to fight in the global war on terror, the inquiry has sought to do everything they can to stifle their efforts. Unable to garner enough votes to cut and run, unable to garner enough votes to defend the war, and unable to garner enough votes to just freeze it, they have now begun to find ways to derail the mission using regulations and attacking private companies working in Iraq. These attacks have also fallen on us in Congress who have steadfastly defended our men and women in uniform and those who risk their lives in Iraq outside of the Government. [Click here to read more](#)

Rep. Engel

On the Issues | A-Z Issues in Brief | Committee & Caucus Assignments

Congressman Engel's Stance on the Issues

Click on an issue to read the Congressman's brief statement on each

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

- A**
 - Abortion
 - Animal Welfare
- B**
 - Border Security
 - Budget
- C**
 - Caller ID Fraud
 - Campaign Finance reform
 - Choice
- D**
 - Darfur
- E**
 - Education

Rep. Hoyer

Legislative FAQ

The Founding Fathers wanted to be sure that passing legislation was neither a quick nor easy process; this page is to help constituents understand the processes of Washington DC so they can have a more active role in governing themselves.

- How a bill becomes a law?
- What does a member of Congress do?
- What is the difference between the House of Representatives and the United States Senate?
- What is happening on the house floor right now?
- Where can I access the congressional record of what has been said on the floor of the House of Representatives?
- When is congress in session?
- What is the district work period?
- What if I need help with a federal agency?
- What services can Congressman Hoyer provide for a constituent?

How a bill becomes a law?

In the simplest terms, a bill becomes a law after it passes the Senate and the House and the President signs it. For more information about how a bill becomes a law, visit the Library of Congress' guide on how a bill becomes a law. The Clerks office also provides a guide to the legislative processes as it specifically relates to the House of Representatives. The Congressional Research Service has an even more detailed explanation here.

What does a member of Congress do?

Rep. Larson

Home » Issues

District Office

- Citizens' Services
- Grants

DC Office

- Legislation
- Issues
- Committees & Caucuses

Press Office

Photo Album

Contact Me

Learn About Job

- Congress
- First District
- Privacy Policy

Updated: 08/28/2007 12:22:29

- A New Direction for America
- Aeronautics R&D
- America's Energy Security Trust Fund
- Aspirin for Iraq Insurgents
- Animal Rights
- Breast Cancer
- Children's Safety
- Coltville
- Darfur
- Education
- Energy Prices
- Environment and Parklands
- Fuel Cells
- History, Culture, and the Arts
- HIV/AIDS
- Homeland Security
- Housing & Community Development
- Innovation Agenda
- Iraq
- Manufacturing
- Nursing Facility Safety
- Prescription Drugs
- Public Safety
- Repealing the Doctrine of Preemption & Unilateralism
- Reserve Pay & Benefits
- Retirement Savings

Sen. Feinstein

America continues to face serious challenges. So I continue to fight for the values we hold dear. In the 110th Congress, it is my top priority to seek solutions for the most critical issues facing our nation. Please click on the links below to find out more about some of my top priorities:

Priorities:

- Addressing the Rising Costs of a College Education
- California Wildfires
- Combating Criminal Street Gangs
- Encouraging Stem Cell Research
- Global Warming: A Time to Act



- **Senator Ben Nelson's (D-NE)** issues section clearly emphasizes his priorities and explains them to his constituents.
- **The House Committee on Energy and Commerce's (Chairman John D. Dingell)** "Public Record" section has all the public information created by the committee, and it is easily organized by both date and subject.
- Each investigation done by the **House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (Chairman Henry Waxman)** has its own page with an RSS feed, related hearings, legislation, correspondence, and news in a user friendly format.
- **Speaker Nancy Pelosi's (D-CA)** leadership site contains a section titled, "About Nancy Pelosi," which contains biographical information about the Speaker, describes the role of the House Speaker, and outlines her vision for the House of Representatives.



The **constituent services** offered on a congressional Web site can provide constituents with exemplary service, even if the office never physically interacts with the constituent, as these Silver Mouse Award winners demonstrate.

- **Rep. Neil Abercrombie's (D-HI)** site has targeted information for members of the military, including information on the Veterans' Administration data breach and links to information and services for each branch of the military.
- **Rep. Pete Hoekstra's (R-MI)** "Constituent Services" section provides detailed and clear guidance on what casework is and how he can help.
- **Rep. Jim Langevin's (D-RI)** "U.S. Service Academy Nominations" page is particularly laudable for its in-depth information and detailed guidance for young people seeking Service Academy nominations.
- **Rep. Dave Weldon's (R-FL)** constituent services information regarding tours of the White House is clear and thorough, and includes a Web form for submitting tour requests.
- **Rep. Heather Wilson's (R-NM)** "Help with Federal Agencies" section highlights real casework problems and solutions, and gives users a sense of the work the Congresswoman's office can do for constituents.

The most critical aspect of online constituent services is providing as much substantive guidance and information as possible so constituents can serve themselves through the Web site.

Sen. Nelson

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Speaker Nancy Pelosi

Rep. Abercrombie

Rep. Hoekstra

Rep. Langevin

Rep. Weldon

Rep. Wilson



- **Senator Joe Lieberman’s (ID-CT)** “Constituent Services Center” offers FAQs and guidance on a wide variety of different services the office can provide.



Press resources are a standard feature on congressional Web sites, but as these Silver Mouse award winners demonstrate, a “Press Room” or “News” section can be more than just a list of press releases. These sites show that, for most other congressional Web sites, there is always room for innovation and improvement.

- **Rep. Bruce Braley’s (D-IA)** “News” section contains press releases with their titles, first few sentences, and links to the full releases.
- **Rep. John Culberson’s (R-TX)** “In The News” section contains “This Week’s Votes,” which is updated weekly and offers users a look at key votes and how the Congressman voted.
- **Senator Dick Durbin’s (D-IL)** “A/V” section offers a wealth of streaming video, including video of press conferences, floor statements, local news clips, and committee meetings.



An effective **state/district information** section can provide constituents with targeted information that addresses legislative issues relevant to their local concerns and needs. It can also demonstrate that the Member is in touch with constituents, as these Silver Mouse Award winners exemplify.


- **Rep. Nick Lampson’s (D-TX)** “22nd District of Texas” section includes a map of the district, census information for the district in general as well as each county in the district, and “Local Updates” on the most recent happenings of concern to the district.
- **Senator Larry Craig’s (R-ID)** “About Idaho” section offers general information about the state and describes his initiatives for the state. In addition, there is an archive of video of events the Senator has hosted or attended in Idaho.
- **Senator Jim DeMint’s (R-SC)** Web site offers an interactive map of South Carolina. When users click on a region of the map they are taken to a page with the local office location, a list of counties in the region, and the latest news, events, and grant awards for the region.



The following Silver Mouse Award winners highlight how **communication tools** can establish an office’s presence online with important, instructive, and interactive information and features that facilitate the connection between Member and constituent.

- **Rep. Alcee L. Hastings’ (D-FL)** “Calendar” section is unique in that it contains a list of organizations with which the Congressman has met during the week.
- **Rep. Bob Inglis’ (R-SC)** “Issues” section is extensive and informative, and allows users to give him feedback on each issue.

Sen. Lieberman



SERVICES
 Senator Lieberman's Constituent Service Center offers help in the following areas:

- Child Support
- Consumer Protection
- Deportation
- Emergency Preparedness
- Environment
- Federal Jobs
- Federal Publications
- Heating Costs

Rep. Braley

News Previous Item

Braley Votes to Provide Billions for Mississippi Lock and Dam Construction
 Aug 2, 2007 - Today, Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Waterloo) voted for a bill that authorizes billions of dollars for Mississippi River lock and dam construction. The House-Senate conference report agreement on H.R. 1495, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), passed the House late last night by a vote of 381-45. - [Story](#)

Braley Supports CHAMP Act to Provide Health Insurance to Thousands of Iowa Kids
 Aug 1, 2007 - Today, Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) voted for the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act of 2007 (H.R. 2162), a bill that would renew the widely successful State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP)—a program that currently covers more than 6 million American children. The bill... - [Story](#)

House passes resolution honoring 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry
 Jul 31, 2007 - The U.S. House passed a resolution Monday honoring the 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry, which just completed the longest combat posting any Iowa unit has had since World War II. The Iowa National Guard unit, based in Waterloo, was mobilized in October 2005 and arrived in Iraq the following April. The... - [Story](#)

Braley Joins Former Prosecutors to File Gonzales Impeachment Investigation Resolution
 Jul 27, 2007 - Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) joined Rep. Tom Lantos (D-California) and Rep....

Rep. Culberson

Last Week in Congress

11/05/07 - Votes for the Week of October 29, 2007
MONDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2007

1) H.R. 1475 - Anthony Quinn Starlight Act - **PASSED BY VOICE VOTE**

2) H.R. 58 - Expressing support for designation of the month of October 2007 as "Country Music Month" and to honor country music for its long history of supporting America's armed forces and its tremendous impact on national patriotism. - **YES**

10/29/07 - Votes for the Week of October 22, 2007
MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2007

1) H.R. 189 - To establish the Peterson Great Falls National Park in the State of New Jersey. - **NO**

2) H.R. 830 - To authorize the exchange of certain lands in Denali National Park in the State of Alaska. - **PASSED BY VOICE VOTE**

10/22/07 - Votes for the Week of October 15, 2007
MONDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2007

1) H.R. 624 - Congratulating the State of Israel on sharing a United Nations committee for the first time in history. - **PASSED BY VOICE VOTE**

2) H.R. 738 - Condemning the campaign of murder, terror and intimidation aimed at overthrowing the democratically elected government of Lebanon and condemning efforts by some Lebanese political figures to obstruct, delay and impede the legal and established process of their country for the selection of a new president according to the rule of law. - **YES**

10/12/07 - Votes for the Week of October 9, 2007
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2007

1) H.R. 1124 - To extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999. - **PASSED BY VOICE VOTE**

2) H.R. 3308 - To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 215 East Main Street in Atwood, Indiana, as the "Lance Corporal David K. Frisley Post Office". - **PASSED BY VOICE VOTE**

Sen. Durbin

RECENT A/V CLIPS



Consumer Product Safety Commission

LISTEN WATCH



Antibiotic-Resistant Infections

LISTEN WATCH



VA Hiring Practices

LISTEN WATCH

[MORE >>>](#)

NEWS RELEASES **STATEMENTS & COMMENTARY**

Durbin Welcomes Oak Park Officials As Special Guests To The Joint Session Of Congress - 11/8/2007

Durbin & Cochran Introduce Legislation To Help Organ Transplant Patients - 11/8/2007

Durbin Statement On Import Safety Report - 11/6/2007

[MORE >>>](#)

LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE

Rep. Lammson

The 22nd District of Texas

Congressional District 22



The 22nd Congressional District of Texas is located in Southeast Texas and is comprised of parts of four different counties: Fort Bend, Brazoria, Galveston, and Harris. Neighboring and containing parts of Houston, the nation's 4th largest city and energy capital, it is home to NASA's Johnson Space Center, the San Jacinto Monument, Ellington Air Force Base, and the original Imperial Sugar Mill.

An estimated 790,000 people live in the 22nd District and includes a unique mix of large cities, smaller developing cities and towns. Since the 2003 mid-census redistricting, the 22nd District now includes part or all of the following cities within its borders: Houston, Stafford, Missouri City, Meadows Place, Needville, Richmond, Rosenberg, Friendswood, Pearland, Santa Fe, La Marque, League City, Nassau Bay, Pleak, Shoreacres, Arcola, Deasley, Brookside Village, El Lago, Taylor Lake Village, Texas City, Hitchcock, Deer Park, Pasadena, Seabrook, LaPorte, Sugar Land, Webster and others.

With the 22nd District's significant rural areas in Fort Bend County, farming and ranching play a vital role in its economy. Transportation is also a top issue in the 22nd District, with major highways such as IH 59 and IH 45, Texas' Highway 8 and Houston's Beltway 8 expanding.

SEARCH

Keyword: _____

Entire Site
 This Section

NATIONAL PARTISANISM & EMPLOYED CHILDREN

Sen. Craig

Get to know Idaho



- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [History](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Legislation](#)
- [News](#)
- [Publications](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Services](#)
- [Statistics](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Voting](#)
- [Work](#)


My Idaho Planner shows selected highlights from my schedule which can be shared in Idaho. Events and meetings which are open to the public are also presented here in my Planner, and I hope you will share in your local area to your planner as well.

Working to make sure that Idaho's critical needs are met is a big part of my job as Idaho's senator. My Idaho Relations page lists every project I have secured through the Appropriations process since I began serving on the Appropriations Committee in 1997. Below I am the only Senator to provide a comprehensive list like this.

My Idaho Newsroom features audio and video clips of events I have hosted or attended in Idaho. Now you can attend one of my town hall meetings without leaving the comfort of your desk chair.

[CONTACT SENATOR CRAIG](#)

Sen. DeMint



Information by Region
 Click on a region for additional information.

Rep. Hastings

Calendar

Many people are curious who their Member of Congress and his or her staff meet with in the course of representing them. To further my commitment to increasing transparency in our government, below you will find a list of organizations and individuals who my staff and I have met with recently.

Please note, this page will not allow you to request a meeting with me or my staff. To request a meeting, please contact the appropriate office (contact information is located at the bottom of this page).

October 15, 2007 - October 19, 2007

October 8, 2007 - October 12, 2007

October 1, 2007 - October 5, 2007

September 24, 2007 - September 28, 2007

September 17, 2007 - September 21, 2007

September 10, 2007 - September 14, 2007

September 3, 2007 - September 7, 2007

Rep. Inglis

Comments

Post A Comment (we will use your first 150 words):

* Name: _____

* Email: _____

* Zip Code: _____

* Required Field



- **Rep. Randy Kuhl's (R-NY)** "Town Hall Meeting" section has the schedule of town hall meetings organized by county.
- **Rep. Ed Perlmutter's (D-CO)** "Staff Biographies" section provides constituents with a look at who works for the Congressman, as well as background information about them.
- **Rep. David Scott's (D-GA)** "From Your Neighbors" section provides letters written by constituents and the Congressman's response to them, with links to the contact form and an invitation to users to contact him.
- **Senator Jeff Bingaman's (D-NM)** "Contact me" section continues to offer some of the most usable, extensive, and varied guidance on interacting with an office that we have seen.
- **Senator Mike Crapo's (R-ID)** "How to Contact Me" section provides information and guidance on the best ways for constituents to reach the Senator.
- **Senator Bernie Sanders' (I-VT)** site encourages interactivity through a poll that solicits users' opinions on important issues facing the United States.
- **The House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming (Chairman Ed Markey)** has an interactive globe which provides targeted content in a unique way that facilitates interaction and information-gathering for its public audience.

While 58% of Member Web sites provided video clips and 30% provided audio clips, only 8% and 2%, respectively, also provided transcripts.

Rep. Kuhl

2007 Town Meeting Schedule
Click on your County to see Randy's town meeting schedule for your area.

- [Allegheny County](#)
- [Cattaraugus County](#)
- [Chemung County](#)
- [Monroe County](#)
- [Ontario County](#)
- [Schuylker County](#)
- [Steuben County](#)
- [Yates County](#)

2006 Town Hall Meeting Photo Gallery
Click here to see photos from Randy's 2006 Town Hall Meetings

2005 Town Hall Meeting Photo Gallery
Click here to see photos from Randy's 2005 Town Hall Meetings

Rep. Perlmutter

ABOUT PERLMUTTER

Staff Biographies

Danielle Bedovich Plog serves as Congressman Ed Perlmutter's Chief of Staff. Danielle is based in the Colorado District Office, and travels to DC frequently. Danielle graduated from Colorado State University with a major in Political Science and a minor in Spanish. Danielle worked a number of years in the Colorado State Legislature and was formerly the Chief of Staff for the State Senate Majority Office, after which Danielle was a Senior Associate for a public affairs firm.

Mike Spira is the Legislative Director for Congressman Ed Perlmutter. Mike received his undergraduate degree in Political Science at American University in Washington DC and his graduate degree in Applied Politics also at American University. Mike has worked on Capitol Hill for 6 years.

Leslie Oliver is the Communications and Policy Director for Congressman Ed Perlmutter. Leslie is a graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder and the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law. Leslie's professional background includes work in Colorado and Washington, D.C. in the fields of government and media relations, and most recently practicing law in Denver.

Aaron Greco serves as Congressman Perlmutter's Director of Constituent Services and Outreach. He is responsible for outreach to local governments and organizations and addressing constituent concerns within the region. Aaron received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Humanities from Fort Lewis College in Durango, CO.

Matt Neenan is Legislative Assistant to Congressman Ed Perlmutter in the areas of homeland

Rep. Scott

Services

Home / From Your Neighbors / From Your Neighbors

What we are hearing from people around the District:

Each week, my office receives hundreds of letters, calls, faxes, and e-mail from residents across the Thirteenth District.

In this section, I will post a sampling of the current feedback from constituents across the 11 different counties of the Thirteenth District on the latest topics in the news. You will also find my responses to these comments and see where I stand on the issues at the forefront of people's minds around the district.

Please follow the link below to send me an e-mail and indicate in your message if it is permissible to repost your message, and whether we may use your name.

[Email Congressman Scott](#)

State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)

Jonesboro writes:

I ask you to please vote to override President Bush's veto of the above plan. I have nieces who have PeachCare and they would not have had insurance otherwise. Please don't stop their insurance. If we can spend another 150 billion dollars on the war in Iraq, a great deal of which goes to Blackwater and other contractors, we can spend a few billion dollars to insure our children

Sen. Bingaman

Listed here are the most common topics of communications I receive, along with the methods by which you can get your message to me. While you should choose the method that is most convenient for you, I've placed an asterisk (*) beside those that are usually the most efficient for that topic. [\[MORE\]](#)

Legislative & Policy Issues	Send me your thoughts, comments, or questions about a legislative or policy matter. [MORE]
	Call* Letter* E-Mail* E-Form* Visit*
Federal Agency Assistance	Request help from my New Mexico constituent services representatives in working with a federal government agency. [MORE]
	Call* Letter* E-Mail* E-Form* Visit*

Sen. Crapo

How To Contact Me

If you have questions, need assistance, want to make a schedule request, or need to find out more information, please use the links below. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page may already have the answer for you, so checking there would be a good first step.

Offices - Addresses, phone numbers, and office hours for my Idaho and Washington, DC offices.

E-mail - Send me an e-mail via on-line form.

Tours - If you plan to travel to Washington, DC and would like assistance with tours and visitor information, please complete this form.

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) - Your question may already have an answer, so check here first.

Privacy Policy - Information you are asked to provide through this site will not be disclosed to any entity outside of my congressional office.

Sen. Sanders

What are the two most important issues facing the United States?

<input type="checkbox"/> The war in Iraq	<input type="checkbox"/> Creating good jobs in the USA
<input type="checkbox"/> Global warming	<input type="checkbox"/> International terrorism
<input type="checkbox"/> The AIDS epidemic	<input type="checkbox"/> Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Providing health care to all Americans	<input type="checkbox"/> A woman's right to choose
<input type="checkbox"/> Gay Rights	

* E-mail Address (required):

First Name:

Last Name:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

Home Phone:

House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming



Bronze Mouse Award Winners

The Bronze Mouse award winners exemplified what it means to turn a Web site into an online office. While they were scored and rated highly for the quality of their entire site, what follows is a list of the Bronze winners grouped according to an element in which they particularly excel.

Design and Layout



Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ)
 Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN)
 Sen. Norm Coleman (R-MN)
 House Committee on Financial Services
Chairman Barney Frank
 Senate Committee on Homeland Security
 and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joe Lieberman

Legislative Content



Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI)
 Rep. Darlene Hooley (D-OR)
 Rep. C. A. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD)
 Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)
 Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI)
 House Committee on Education and Labor
Chairman George Miller
 House Committee on Homeland Security
Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

Constituent Services



Rep. Brian Bilbray (R-CA)
 Rep. Michael C. Burgess (R-TX)
 Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (D-OH)
 Rep. Mark Udall (D-CO)
 Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)
 Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR)

Press Resources

Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)
 Rep. Joe Knollenberg (R-MI)
 Rep. Lynn A. Westmoreland (R-GA)
 Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY)
 Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS)
 Office of the House Majority Leader
The Honorable Steny Hoyer



State/District Information

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE)
 Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT)
 Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-ND)
 Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT)
 Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI)



Communication Tools

Rep. Mary Bono (R-CA)
 Rep. Scott Garrett (R-NJ)
 Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-GA)
 Rep. Jerry Weller (R-IL)
 Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-VA)





Conclusion

Congressional offices' progress toward offering comprehensive Web sites is disappointing for the second straight year. Web sites that had not met a minimum standard of service in CMF's 2006 report remain sluggish in their response to the increasing importance and prominence of the Internet. Individual features—such as video, links to the *Congressional Record*, and floor speeches—are increasingly being incorporated into congressional sites. However, the majority of congressional Web sites have yet to make the leap from a meager outpost on the Internet to a substantial and valuable online office that fosters communication and information-sharing with Americans. In spite of this grim reality, there are sterling exceptions to the overall trend. Many offices with effective and successful Web sites are not content to rest on the laurels of past awards and are not satisfied with an above-average site. They push themselves and their sites, making them more useful, more usable, more interactive, and more innovative. The Congressional Management Foundation hopes that congressional offices will use this report and the example set by all of this year's Mouse Award winning offices as tools to assist them in turning their Web sites from a bothersome chore into a time-saving resource for achieving their own goals.

As congressional offices continue into the second session of the 110th Congress and beyond, they must recognize the important role the Internet will continue to play in the lives of their constituents and in the business of the U.S. Congress. The Congressional Management Foundation produced this report in alignment with our mission to support the institution of Congress because we believe that good government is achieved through good management. With the best practices and guidelines for success we laid out in this and previous reports, the means and prospects for becoming an award winner—or at least improving to a minimum standard—are at Congress' fingertips.



APPENDIX

Detailed Methodology

The Evaluation Process

Our evaluation methodology was designed to be as fair and objective as possible without being based solely on objectively-measured factors. A visitor's experience on a Web site is largely based on qualitative factors such as the quality and tone of the information, the usability, navigability, look and feel of the site, and the degree to which the information meets the user's needs. As a result, a purely objective measurement-based evaluation does not begin to assess actual user experience. To comprehensively evaluate the user experience we utilized a methodology we first developed in 1998, and have fine-tuned since then, which combines quantitative and qualitative measurements of the sites.

Over the years, we have developed a set of criteria that can be used to assess the quality of congressional Web sites. We identified these criteria using a variety of sources, including citizen focus groups, interviews with Members and press secretaries, surveys of reporters and advocates, internal discussions, as well as literature reviews on industry best practices and usability. In broad terms, these criteria are represented by the five building blocks: audience, content, usability, interactivity, and innovation. More specifically, we identified specific features or qualities that, taken together, comprise the five building blocks and characterize high-quality Web sites in the normative sense; that is, Web sites that are helpful and informative from both the Member's and citizens' perspectives. Each question, called a "code," tapped into one of the attributes identified as important for a Web site. A form used by all evaluators provided a detailed description of the attribute that the code was intended to measure and guidance on how to respond to the question. Some of the codes are qualitative—asking how well the site did something— such as the *National Issues* code: "To what extent does the site provide information about major national issues..." and the evaluator is to respond on a 0 (low) to 5 (high) scales. Other codes are quantitative—asking whether or not a site had something—such as the presence or absence of a THOMAS search box, which is measured as either present (one) or absent (zero).

We used most of these attributes in evaluating the quality of congressional Web sites for our first two reports, *Congress Online: Assessing and Improving Capitol Hill Web Sites* (published January 2002) and *Congress Online 2003: Turning the Corner on the Information*

Age (published March 2003). Over the summer of 2006, we updated the list of attributes to reflect the evolving technology and practice standards for Web design that have occurred in recent years. We used the updated criteria in our 2006 evaluations of all House and Senate Web sites and published our findings in our *2006 Gold Mouse Report: Recognizing the Best Web Sites on Capitol Hill*. The current study uses methods and procedures nearly identical to those we used in the 2006 report.

Each of the three categories of sites—Member, committee, and leadership—has a different evaluation form based on the different roles, goals, and audiences of each category of office. Every site within the three categories was evaluated extensively. We evaluated each Member, committee, and leadership site with 94, 43, and 40 codes, respectively. Because of the unique and divergent nature of each committee and leadership site, the evaluation of these sites necessarily relied less on a large number of quantitative codes and more on qualitative codes specific to each site’s purpose and goals. For Member Web site evaluations, every evaluator went through several rounds of training to ensure that each criterion—especially the qualitative ones—was applied the same way regardless of the evaluator, within a reasonable margin of error. For committee and leadership sites, consistent grading was maintained through a single evaluator for all sites.

We conducted the evaluations of the Web sites of all Members of the House and Senate between July 13 and August 24, 2007. The evaluations of the Web sites of all committee and leadership sites of the House and Senate took place between August and September.

The Analysis

After all 618 congressional Web sites were evaluated, the resulting data was analyzed with the assistance of our research partners from Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, the University of California-Riverside, and Ohio State University.¹¹

Member Sites

While it is relatively straightforward to identify and code for the attributes that make for a good quality Web site, determining how to aggregate these data to measure the overall quality of a Web site is more difficult. One possible and relatively easy way would be to add all of the coded variables together and create a simple percentage of the number of codes on which a Web site received a high score. This “additive index” approach is not desirable, though, since it gives equal weight to each code. For example, in this approach, whether or not the site had information on receiving federal grants—which is somewhat peripheral to the intrinsic quality of a legislative Web site—would be given equal weight to whether or not the Member offered rationales for key votes or extensively discussed national issues.

Instead, we used statistical factor analysis to assign weights to the codes and then constructed the numeric overall quality score by taking the weighted sum of the coded variables.

Factor analysis is one method social scientists use when there are many measured indicators of a trait that itself cannot be measured directly, such as a Web site’s intrinsic

¹¹For more information about our partnership, see “About the Project” on page iii

“quality.” A trait such as “Web site quality” that cannot be measured directly is called a “latent” trait. Factor analysis is a statistical method that takes many coded variables, called “indicators” or “indicator variables,” and finds the latent trait that is common to all of the indicators.¹² Here, the measured quality indicators are the coded variables, and the latent trait of the Web site is its underlying quality. Factor analysis is especially appropriate in this context, since it accommodates the fact—indeed assumes—that many of the indicators are measured subjectively or with error. With the presence of a vast quantity of indicators, subjectivity and errors tend to cancel out.¹³

We carried out the statistical analysis in several steps. In the first step, we used factor analysis and the coded data to construct a series of 13 attribute scales, where each attribute scale measured the extent to which the Web site possessed desirable attributes such as the amount of issue content, the Web site’s usability, the quality of the information to constituents, and the quality of the Web site’s technology. For this analysis, we used 67 of the 94 codes, and between three and six coded indicator variables to measure each attribute scale. In the second step, we combined these attribute scales using a separate factor analysis model to form two quality scales, one measuring the quality of the information on the site, and the other measuring the degree to which the site communicates to constituents. In the third step, we took the average of the two quality scales to construct an overall quality score.

Figure 44 lists all of the coded variables we used in the analysis, and the composition of each of the attribute and quality scales. The original coded variables are indicated with a light blue bullet point (•) (for example, the code for “Readability”). The attribute scales are indicated with a dark blue bullet point (●) (for example, “The quality of issue content on the site”). The two quality scales are labeled as such (for example, “Information Quality Scale”).

Each code and each scale has an associated weight listed in parentheses, where the weight is estimated in a factor analysis model, and then rescaled so that the weights add up to 1. With this rescaling, the weights indicate the proportions each item contributes to the associated scale.

¹⁸ Factor analysis uses the empirical correlations among indicator variables to estimate the degree to which the original data can be described by one or more underlying dimensions. These underlying dimensions to the data are the latent trait or traits of interest, and the observed, coded data are used to measure the unobserved latent traits. Since the variables in this study are either dichotomous (0,1) or ordered categorical (0 to 5), we use a polychoric correlation matrix in the factor analysis. We use the principle factors method, and for each attribute scale we select variables that load well onto only a single dimension for that scale. We retrieve factor score coefficients using the regression method, which post-multiplies the vector of factor loadings by the inverse of the estimated correlation matrix. These scoring coefficients are the weights we use to construct each attribute scale. For ease of presentation, we standardize the scoring coefficients as proportions within each scale so they add up to one.

¹⁹ While factor analysis statistically accommodates data that are measured with error, it is best for the data to have as little error as possible, or in other words, high “reliability.” We conducted a reliability study across the coders by asking each coder to evaluate 10 common Web sites. There were a total of eight coders involved in the study. Coders evaluated all Web sites in a randomized order, and so did not know which 10 Web sites were the common Web sites. To assess reliability across these common evaluations, we quantified a coding “error” as choosing a value that differed from the modal response from all coders. So for example, if coder B coded a Web site as having an attribute, and so entered a one, while the remaining eight coders entered a zero, coder B in this instance would be identified as having made a coding error. We then simply took the percentage of errors across all codes that each coder recorded for all common Web sites. The error rates overall were very low, ranging from as low as 9.0% to as high as 13.8%. This indicates overall a very high level of inter-coder agreement.

FIGURE 44. FACTOR WEIGHTS FOR THE CODED INDICATORS¹⁴

INFORMATION QUALITY SCALE

- **The quality of all issue content on the site (0.23)**
 - The quality of information regarding national issues†
 - The quality of the Member's priority issues
 - The quality of state and local issues
 - The extent of the Member's rationales given for votes cast†
- **The amount of content on current issues (0.31)**
 - Discussion of current events
 - The quality of information on national issues from the 110th Congress†
 - The quality of Member's priority issues from the 110th Congress
 - The quality of state and local issues from the 110th Congress
 - The extent of rationales for votes from the 110th Congress
 - The Member's specific accomplishments from the 110th Congress
- **The ambiguity of the issue content (-0.08)**
 - The discussion of national issues is too generic to tell if current
 - The discussion of the Member's priority issues is too generic to tell if current
 - The discussion of state and local issues is too generic to tell if current
- **The Web site's usability (0.24)**
 - The overall look and feel of the Web site is good†
 - Ease of navigation†
 - Readability†
 - Organization†
 - Timeliness of information and updates†
- **The timeliness of the information (0.31)**
 - National issues are from the 110th Congress
 - Member's priority issues are from the 110th Congress
 - State and local issues are from the 110th Congress
 - Rationales for votes are from the 110th Congress
 - The Member's specific accomplishments are from the 110th Congress
 - Video from the 110th Congress
 - Audio from the 110th Congress
 - Timeliness of information and updates†

COMMUNICATION QUALITY SCALE

- **The extent to which the Web site promotes accountability to constituents (0.12)**
 - Provides the Member's voting record
 - Explains how to read and use roll call votes
 - Lists the Member's sponsored and co-sponsored legislation
 - Includes a THOMAS search box or link

¹⁴Variables marked with a † are measured on a 0 to 5 scale; all others are measured on a 0 to 1 scale.

• **Information on the legislative process (0.13)**

- Explains how a bill becomes a law
- Includes a FAQ section about Congress
- Provides information about what a Member does
- Includes a student or kid's page

• **Information on floor proceedings (0.10)**

- Lists the chamber schedule
- Provides information about the current floor proceedings
- Links directly to the *Congressional Record*

• **Resources for constituent casework (0.13)**

- Answers FAQ regarding constituent casework†
- Provides guidance on how constituents can initiate casework
- Includes a casework privacy release form
- Links to relevant government agencies
- Links to FirstGov

• **Information of interest specifically to constituents (0.14)**

- Congressional internships
- Admission to the military academies
- Capitol tour information
- Flag requests
- Information about federal grants
- Information about local or district resources

• **Information about the district or state (0.11)**

- Lists interesting and important features of the district/state
- District/state demographic statistics
- Includes map of the district/state

• **Media communication (0.12)**

- Press releases are organized by date
- Video
- Audio
- Archives of the Member's columns or op-ed pieces

• **Communication technology (0.15)**

- Privacy statement
- Text only option
- Blog
- RSS feed
- Podcast
- Sitemap
- Breadcrumbs
- Online townhall or survey
- Tour request form
- Flag request form
- Search feature

To construct the attribute factor scores, we multiplied the value for each coded variable by its associated weight, and then added these numbers together. Most of the codes are measured on a (0/1) scale, meaning that the variable is a one if the Web site has the feature and a zero if the Web site does not have the feature. Because of this, the attribute scales for the most part are simply the sum of the weights corresponding to the items found on the Web site.

To create the quality scales for “information” and “communication,” we multiplied the Web site’s factor score for each of the relevant attribute scales (that is, the attribute scales that fall under each of the two headings) by its associated weight and added these together. Finally, to create a total score, we took the average of the Web site’s score on the two quality scales.

Both of the quality scales measure the quality of a Web site but each in different ways: one measures issue content and the other measures the clarity of communication to constituents. While our analysis showed that these are distinct dimensions of quality, they are not unrelated. The two quality scales were highly correlated (with a Pearson correlation of 0.54, $p < 0.001$).

Through our research and experience we identified four key dimensions most essential to a successful Web site which we believe should be given priority beyond the results generated in the factor models. These four dimensions are issue content, constituent casework, timeliness, and usability. Web sites that scored above average on all four of these dimensions were given extra credit in the form of a 10% increase above the overall score generated by the factor analysis.

The final step was to convert the numeric scores to letter grades. To do this, we first sorted all scores within each chamber, so that the scores were arranged from the highest House score to the lowest House score, and then the highest Senate score to the lowest Senate score. To make the scores comparable with those from 2006, we standardized the score. The best site in each chamber from 2006 were set as 100% in 2007 (just as they were in 2006), which we will call the “baseline” scores for each chamber.¹⁵ We then computed a within-chamber ranking by dividing each Web site’s score by the baseline score for its chamber. In this final ranking, sites that did better than the best site in their chamber last year received a score above 100%. All of the other scores ranked below that as the percent of the baseline score. We then maintained the 2006 cutoffs between scores to assign letter grades as shown in Figure 1 (on page 9).

¹⁵We conducted an overtime reliability analysis to ensure comparability of the scores between the 2006 and the 2007 data. There were two coders who participated in both years’ coding, and these two coders recoded archived versions of the 2006 websites for ten Members. We found that the mean error rate between the two years was not greater than 20% on all dichotomous items, and less than one point on the items rates on a 0 to 5 scales. There were only two items where both coders showed a consistent drift between one year and the next, that is, where the errors do not cancel out but instead tend to be of the same time between the years. Both coders tended to rate vote rationales slightly higher for 2006 than in 2007. There were also a few more items where one or the other coder had an inter-temporal drift, but these tended to be idiosyncratic across the coders. Overall, the overtime reliability of these data appears to be quite high.

Committee and Leadership Sites

Committee and leadership sites, like Member sites, were judged according to how well they utilized the five building blocks, and evaluated using the qualitative and quantitative measures described above. To judge all sites with the most accurate and fair evaluation possible, we divided committee and leadership offices into “classes.” These classes were designed to take into account the differing needs of the audiences that the committees each serve: some committees primarily serve more technical and professional audiences, while others serve the general public. Thus one class of committees must be held to higher standards for providing information geared toward a Hill audience and lower standards for providing information accessible to the general public, while a second class of committees should be held to higher standards for information geared to the general public and lower standards for the information useful for a Hill audience. The use of these classes enabled us to use the same criteria in the evaluation of all of the sites while still ensuring a robust and accurate evaluation of each individual site.

Committees

The classes of committees were based on the primary audience/s they serve. All committees serve the same basic audiences—the general public, the press, experts on the issues in their jurisdiction, and congressional staffs. Committees differ, however, in the degree to which particular audiences demand access to their work. As a result, we separated committees into the following five classes:

1. **Standing committees with significant professional audiences.** These are the committees whose jurisdictions are fairly specialized and/or technical and whose audiences will include a significant percentage of people who have some knowledge of, and expertise in, the subject matter. *These committees were held to lower standards for providing educational and other information geared toward the general public, but higher standards for providing technical documents and publications geared toward an expert audience.* Examples of committees in this class include the House Committee on Appropriations and the Joint Economic Committee.
2. **Standing committees with significant non-professional audiences.** These are the committees whose jurisdictions impact a fairly sizeable population of citizens with a personal, rather than an academic or professional, interest in the subject matter. *These committees were held to higher standards for providing information and services accessible to the general public, but lower standards for providing technical information for an expert audience.* Examples of committees in this class include the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and the House Small Business Committee.
3. **Standing committees with significant professional and non-professional audiences.** These committees have jurisdictions that make their work of interest to a range of expert and non-expert audiences. Most of them have high media profiles, which keeps their work in the public eye. *These committees were held to high standards for having information and services accessible both to the public and experts.* Examples of committees in this class include the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

4. **Standing committees with primarily congressional audiences.** These are the committees with jurisdictions that are largely internal to Congress. *These committees were held to high standards for providing information and services for congressional staffs and lower standards for providing information and services for external audiences.* It is important to note, however, that some of the functions of these committees are best served by internal congressional intranets, which were not included as part of our evaluation. Committees in this class include the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct.
5. **Standing committee minority offices with primarily partisan audiences.** Minority offices of committees do not control the bulk of the information that most visitors will be seeking on committee Web sites and provide a counterpoint to the majority office. *These committees were held to high standards for providing information and services for their Republican staff, supporters, and the press.* Examples of committees in this class include the Senate Committee on the Budget (Minority) and House Committee on Foreign Affairs (Minority).

Leadership Offices

The classes for leadership offices were based on their leadership roles. Their different roles dictate the audiences they are trying to reach and the content and services they should be providing. All leadership offices have to provide basic educational information about what they do; information about the Leader's and the party's message; key issues, information and services for same-party congressional staff and Members; and information in support of their leadership roles. The degree of attention they should devote to each of these areas should vary, however, based on their particular responsibilities. To allow for this in our evaluations, we divided leadership into the following three classes:

1. **Leadership offices with both congressional and public audiences.** These are the leadership offices that hold the highest leadership positions of each party in each chamber. Their roles are to represent the party, as a whole, and to provide general party leadership on and off Capitol Hill. They are the spokespersons for their parties, and their Web sites will be of interest to citizens as well as to party activists and congressional staffs. *As a result, they were held to high standards for providing authoritative party information for both citizens and congressional staff.* Note that the Majority and Minority Leaders in the Senate do not have separate leadership Web sites. Examples of leadership sites in this class include the Office of the House Republican Leader and the Office of the House Majority Leader.
2. **Leadership offices with primarily congressional audiences.** These are the leadership offices that conduct the organizational business of the parties. Though their content and services – and their Web sites – are of interest to select citizens and activists off Capitol Hill, their primary role is to organize the party on Capitol Hill. *As a result, they were held to high standards for providing content for congressional staffs and lower standards for providing information and services that are accessible to citizens.* An example of leadership sites in this class is the House Republican Policy Committee.

3. Leadership offices with primarily public audiences. These are the leadership offices that serve as the communicators for each party in each chamber. *They were held to high standards for providing information and services for both the public and for congressional staffs, as well as for communicating the parties' messages and accomplishments in ways that were accessible and informative to audiences on and off Capitol Hill.* Examples of leadership sites in this class include the House Democratic Caucus and the House Republican Conference.

The evaluation criteria were weighted based on their overall importance, and the scores for the audiences were given extra weight based on the class of the site. As was done with the Member grades, the scoring between 2006 and 2007 was standardized. We computed a ranking by dividing each Web site's score by the highest 2006 score within the respective category (committee or leadership). In this final ranking, the highest scoring Web site in 2006 for each category was given a 100% (just as it was in 2006), and all of the other scores were ranked as the percent of that score. The cutoffs between scores for committee sites, established in the 2006 Gold Mouse Report, were used to assign letter grades as shown in Figure 2 (on page 9). Because of the small number of leadership sites, grades were curved based on the 2007 scores. A score breakdown is not available in order to maintain the privacy of individual office scores. The letter grades breakdowns are shown in Figure 3 (on page 10).



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