



[Assessing the
Performance of
Congressional Web Sites](#)

[Congress Online
Gold Mouse Awards](#)

[Congress Online
Silver Mouse Awards](#)

[Congress Online
Bronze Mouse Awards](#)

[How to Build an Effective
Congressional Web Site](#)

[Mistakes Congressional
Offices are Making](#)

[Looking to the Future of
Congress Online](#)

Congress Online 2003

Turning the Corner on the Information Age

This report was written by the
Congressional Management Foundation,
primary authors Nicole Folk and Kathy Goldschmidt,
with contributions by Rick Shapiro,
Brad Fitch, and Mike Callahan.

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Congress Online Project

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Suite 300

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Summary of Key Findings | vi |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Methodology | 3 |
| Nine Benefits of a Good Web Site | 4 |
| Assessing the Performance of Congressional Web Sites.... | 5 |
| Analyzing Grade Distribution Trends | 5 |
| Analyzing Trends in Award Winners | 14 |
| The Best Web Sites on Capitol Hill | 19 |
| Congress Online Gold Mouse Awards..... | 21 |
| Congress Online Silver Mouse Awards..... | 29 |
| Congress Online Bronze Mouse Awards | 37 |
| The Five Building Blocks of | |
| Effective Congressional Web Sites | 39 |
| 1. Audience | 39 |
| 2. Content | 44 |
| 3. Interactivity | 49 |
| 4. Usability | 52 |
| 5. Innovations | 55 |
| Mistakes Congressional Offices are Making | 61 |
| Conclusion | 65 |
| Looking to the Future of Congress Online | 67 |
| Appendix A: Detailed Methodology | 69 |
| Appendix B: Select Resources..... | 75 |
| Appendix C: Expert Panel Biographies | 79 |
| About the Congress Online Project | Inside Back Cover |

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Nicole Folk and Kathy Goldschmidt
Congressional Management Foundation

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

General

- Congressional offices have significantly improved their sites over the past year. In a comprehensive evaluation of all 610 congressional Member, standing committee, and leadership Web sites, 50% of all congressional Web sites received grades of A or B, five times more than in 2002. (Page 5)
- The best congressional Web sites have both increased in number and significantly improved in quality in *less than a year*. So many offices have improved their Web sites that the number of Congress Online Mouse Awards more than doubled – from 35 last year to 75 this year. The 2003 Mouse Award winners exceeded the standards set by last year’s winners. These sites should serve as models to congressional offices seeking to improve their Web-based communications with their constituents. (Page 19)
- Despite the dramatic increase in A and B sites, the number of D and F sites has decreased only marginally. Approximately 25% of all congressional Web sites received grades of D or F in our evaluation, compared with 32% in 2002. (Page 9)
- The Congress Online Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Award winners view their Web sites as “virtual offices,” providing significant benefits for both the offices and their constituents. They realize that their Web sites are an extension of everything they do and have integrated their sites into the work and goals of the office. (Page 19)
- The *most effective* Web sites are those that: have *clearly defined their Web audiences*, including audiences seeking information from the office and those that the office wants to target; provide *up-to-date information* specifically targeted to meet audience needs; offer visitors *opportunities to interact* with the office; provide visitors *quick and easy access* to information and services; and employ *innovative features* that make the site more interesting or easier to use. (Page 39)
- The *less effective* Web sites are making common mistakes such as: promoting the Member rather than meeting the legislative and information needs of their audiences; failing to keep their sites up-to-date; failing to provide online assistance with constituent services (e.g. help with federal agencies, flag and tour requests); failing to provide the accountability that the public desires (e.g. vote information, Member schedules); focusing too much attention on graphics and design and too little attention on providing useful information; and failing to give constituents opportunities to interact online. (Page 39)
- The large majority of Member offices are now processing e-mail from constituents through Web-based forms while only 37% of Senate and 33% of House offices accept correspondence through public e-mail addresses. In addition, 32% of Senators and 38% of House Members’ Web sites offer subscriptions to e-mail newsletters, but only 14% of Senate and 37% of House Web sites provide access to their voting records. (Page 47)

Chamber and Party Trends in Congressional Web Sites

- In the House, Republicans continued to receive a greater proportion of the best Web site awards. Of the 30 Mouse awards given to House Member offices, 22 (73%) are managed by Republicans and 7 (23%) by Democrats. Last year, Republicans received 19 (79%) of the 24 awards given to House Member offices while Democrats received 5 (21%). (Page 15)
- In the Senate, Democrats continued to receive a greater proportion of the best Web site awards. Of the 24 Mouse awards given to Senate Member offices, 17 (71%) are managed by Democrats and 7 (29%) by Republicans. Last year, Democrats received 8 (73%) of the 11 awards given to Senate Member offices while Republicans received 3 (27%). (Page 15)
- House committee Web sites are dramatically outperforming Senate committee sites. Approximately 43% of House committees received grades of A compared to less than 8% of their Senate counterparts. Furthermore, of the 17 Mouse awards given to committees, 15 (88%) are House sites and 2 (12%) are Senate sites. Of these sites, 12 (71%) are managed by Republicans and 5 (29%) by Democrats. (Page 15)
- Overall, of the 75 Congress Online Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse sites that were selected, 45 (60%) are managed by Republicans, 29 (39%) by Democrats, and 1 (1%) by an Independent. In 2002, 22 of the 35 Mouse Awards (63%) were managed by Republicans and 13 (37%) by Democrats. (Page 14)
- Among congressional leadership, all 4 of the Gold and Silver Mouse sites that were selected are managed by Republicans. Of these sites, 3 (75%) are hosted by the House and 1 (25%) by the Senate. (Page 15)
- Of the 52 award-winning sites that did not win awards last year, 88.2% received grades of C or lower in 2002 while 5.9% actually received grades of F in 2002. This demonstrates that the quality of Congressional Web sites can change rapidly and significantly. (Page 16)
- Using a 4.0 scale, Congress improved its overall GPA from 1.76 last year to 2.30 this year. Over the past year, GPAs improved in every category across the board—by chamber, by party, and by office type (i.e. Member offices vs. committees). (Page 8)
- The highest GPAs were received by House Majority (Republican) committee sites (3.37), followed by Republican leadership sites (3.14) and the sites of Democratic Senators (3.08). (Page 8)
- State demographics that are widely believed to affect the quality of congressional Web sites (e.g. population, percentage of “wired” households) did not seem to influence the delegation rankings. Broken down by state delegation, the 5 highest GPAs were received by Vermont (3.75), New Mexico (3.25), California (3.18), Wisconsin (3.14), and Oregon (3.10). (Page 13)
- In the House, there is a clear decline in the quality of Web sites as the tenure and age of the Member increase. Freshmen and younger Members generally had higher GPAs than did their more senior colleagues. These trends did not hold true for Senate Member Web sites. (Page 12)

INTRODUCTION

One year ago, in our report, *Congress Online: Assessing and Improving Capitol Hill Web Sites*, we described a disconcerting “digital divide” that existed within Congress. We found that, with few exceptions, congressional offices were not yet reaping the benefits of the Internet to inform and communicate with citizens. Our report challenged congressional offices to improve their online communications efforts, and offered assistance with these efforts. A year later we have found that more offices than we ever expected rose to this challenge.

Over the last year, several hundred congressional offices devoted extensive time and resources to making their Web sites valuable and time-saving information services. Nearly 200 offices requested and received personalized assessments and guidance on how to improve their Web sites from the Congress Online Project staff. Scores of congressional staffers at all levels attended our briefings and training sessions to help guide their efforts. And the institutional staff and Web site vendors that assist congressional offices in their Web efforts have been busy with the sheer number of offices working to improve their sites.

As a result of these efforts, so many offices improved their Web sites that we were compelled to more than double the number of offices receiving Congress Online Mouse Awards – from 35 last year to 75 this year. Additionally, last year only 15 of our award-winning sites received a grade of A – compared with 75 sites this year. Indeed, this year half of all congressional Web sites received grades of A or B in our evaluation, a five-fold increase over last year!

The dramatic improvement of congressional Web sites is testament to the concerted efforts of hundreds of people on Capitol Hill who are committed to using the Internet to better serve citizens. It is also testament to the fact that, with the proper guidance, congressional staff can create great sites in short order. In fact, of the 52 offices that received awards for the first time this year, 88% of them received grades of C or lower last year, and 6% actually received grades of F last year!

These new and improved sites are already yielding far-ranging benefits for millions of citizens. Access to legislative information is no longer the exclusive domain of the lobbyists and activists who are physically present on Capitol Hill or can afford to pay for services that monitor the legislative process. Americans now have the tools they need to become better informed than ever before about the policy issues that impact their lives. With easy access to their Members’ views and rationales for key votes, constituents can better track and understand their Members’ actions. And with just a few clicks of a mouse, citizens can become actively engaged in the work of Congress. Through Web forms, e-mail addresses, and other interactive tools, constituents can, more easily than ever before, express their own views to those who represent them.

Committee Web sites have further expanded opportunities for those outside the Beltway to get a first hand look at what occurs in Congress. Through Web broadcasts of committee hearings and other committee meetings, these sites are allowing citizens from Alaska to Florida to view, both in real time and after-the-fact, the

proceedings that were once only accessible to those who could attend them in-person. Additionally, by posting schedules, legislation, and correspondence on their sites, committees enable citizens to better follow and understand their work and their roles in the legislative process.

The Web sites of leadership offices are also playing an important role in educating citizens, particularly about the agendas and perspectives of the key party officials in the House and Senate. These sites provide party supporters on and off Capitol Hill with an in depth understanding of the parties' positions. These sites have also become effective organizing tools for communicating party message and building coalitions. And, through their equally impressive internal Web sites, they are organizing their parties within Congress and providing resources to help Members effectively advance the parties' agendas in their districts and states.

There are, unfortunately, still many congressional offices that are resistant to change. While the number of As and Bs increased 400% over the past year, the number of offices that received Ds and Fs declined only marginally. Last year, 32% of congressional Web sites received grades of D and F, compared to 25% this year. The Member, committee, and leadership offices that support these subpar Web sites do not fit a particular profile. They vary in seniority, age, and party, and they represent districts and states of all demographic categories. What they share is a lack of understanding of the important role the Web can play in informing, communicating with, and connecting to citizens.

The purpose of this report is to help the half of congressional offices who are still struggling to create effective Web sites – and to spur the other half who received As and Bs to continue to improve. To accomplish this, this report:

- Briefly describes the methodology and process we used to evaluate all 610 congressional Member office, standing committee, and leadership Web sites;
- Provides a detailed assessment of the overall performance of these sites;
- Identifies the 75 best Web sites on Capitol Hill – the Congress Online Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Award winners – which can serve as models for offices wishing to improve their own sites;
- Identifies five fundamental building blocks for effective Web sites – and explains how offices can incorporate them into their own sites; and
- Describes the mistakes congressional offices are making with their online practices.

It is our hope that this report provides congressional offices with the tools and information they need to continue their transition to the Information Age.

METHODOLOGY

To assist congressional offices seeking to improve their Web sites, we set out to identify the elements critical to the success of the most effective Web sites on Capitol Hill. To this end, we conducted one year of research, beginning in the Fall of 2000, which included nationwide focus groups with citizens, interviews with scores of congressional staff, research into Web industry standards and best practices, and surveys of political reporters and advocates.

Through our research, we identified *five building blocks* that underlie the success of the most effective Web sites on Capitol Hill. In order of importance, these 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 that 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. This information attracts new visitors and supports the goals of the office.
- 3. Interactivity.** The Web site offers its visitors opportunities to express their views and fosters on and off line communication.
- 4. Usability.** The design and information architecture of the Web site provide quick and easy access to information and services.
- 5. Innovations.** Creative features enhance visitors' experience on the site by making it more interesting or easier to use.

Using these five building blocks as our foundation, we devised *an evaluation methodology* that would be fair and objective, while still taking into account important qualitative factors that affect a visitor's experience on a Web site. These other 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.

Our evaluation process was conducted between August and November 2002 and consisted of three steps. The first step was the most rigorous, and it was the only step that examined all 610 Member, standing committee, and leadership office Web sites. Every congressional Web site was subjected to a *detailed analysis* that identified the top 25% of sites, which were then sent on to the next step.

The second step of our process was designed to more finely differentiate among the best sites by measuring them against criteria that are not critical components for a successful Web site, but which our research showed considerably enhance visitors' experiences. Through this step we identified 62 sites that would vie for Gold Mouse Awards.

The final step was a review of the 62 sites by a nine-member Expert Panel. The Expert Panelists determined which Web sites would receive Congress Online Gold Mouse Awards and which sites should receive Silver and Bronze Mouse Awards. All of their recommendations are reflected in the final results. Additionally, we awarded 13 sites that received As in the first two steps, but were not sent to the Expert Panel, with Bronze Mouse Awards.

NINE BENEFITS OF A GOOD WEB SITE

- 1) **Enhanced service to constituents and the public.** Web sites have opened the halls of Congress to the public around-the-clock, seven days a week. They have given offices the opportunity to create “virtual offices” that provide information and constituent services faster, more comprehensively, and to greater numbers of people than ever before possible.
- 2) **Enhanced visibility and image.** Effective congressional Web sites have become valuable resources that constituents, reporters, and advocates rely upon for timely, reliable legislative and issue information. Not only do these audiences become loyal Web “customers,” they tell others about their positive experiences, thereby increasing the site’s visibility and reach.
- 3) **Targeted communication with key audiences.** Web sites can help build ongoing relationships with key audiences by providing targeted features and information. Timely, informative sections of a Web site devoted to a single issue, for example, can attract people who care about the issue and keep them coming back for more. And issue-based e-mail updates provide the opportunity to regularly communicate with people who subscribe.
- 4) **Unfiltered communications.** There has always been a tension between the press and elected officials over what is newsworthy and how the news should be reported. Web sites give congressional offices an opportunity to communicate directly with the public, rather than through the filter of the media. They allow Members to deliver their views directly to constituents and interested audiences, and thus to control the message.
- 5) **Opportunities to build grassroots support.** Web sites provide Members with new tools for promoting their agendas, coordinating and communicating their message, and fostering grassroots support. Some tools Members are currently using include: e-mail updates designed to be sent along to friends; printable “brochures” for advocates to distribute; and sections devoted to the Member’s key issues.
- 6) **Opportunities to foster public trust in Congress.** A recurring theme of our focus groups can be summed up in one word: accountability. Participants stated that Member Web sites that conveyed a sense of accountability and transparency deserved greater trust than those who seemed to be “hiding something.” Features that were deemed to inspire trust included: voting records, vote rationales, schedules, and unbiased issue information.
- 7) **Increased office productivity.** Web sites can enable staff to spend less time answering basic questions and providing services that do not require human intervention. By providing the most sought after information and answering the most frequently asked questions online, constituents can meet their own needs and staff can focus on providing services and performing tasks that require a human touch.
- 8) **Opportunities to receive greater public feedback.** Web sites offer new and cost-effective ways to solicit feedback from constituents. Effective use of interactive elements such as online polls, message boards, and chats enable Members to receive and better understand public sentiment. These tools can also be used to solicit ongoing and useful insights into what their most engaged constituents care about.
- 9) **Opportunities to encourage citizen engagement.** Web sites offer promising new means for educating citizens about Congress and its work. They provide greater access than ever before possible to congressional documents and proceedings. They also demonstrate greater congressional accountability and transparency and invite citizens to become more engaged, and less cynical, participants in democracy.

ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL WEB SITES

Using the five building blocks as our guide, we evaluated all 610 Member office, standing committee, and leadership office Web sites and assigned grades to each. (At the time of our evaluations, there were two vacant House seats resulting in a total of 438 House Member Web sites.) In this section, we report the general findings of our evaluation in order to provide Congress with an overall assessment of its performance. Following is an analysis of the grade distribution and awards distribution across all congressional offices, broken out in a number of ways – by chamber, party, office types (i.e. Member offices vs. committees), tenure, and age. Through our analysis, we identified 10 key trends in the performance of Congress online:

1. Congressional offices have dramatically improved the quality of their Web sites over the past year.
2. A sizable number of congressional offices continue to perform poorly, maintaining a wide disparity in the quality of congressional Web sites.
3. Senate Member office Web sites are outperforming House Member office sites.
4. In both the Senate and the House, there is a clear divide in the quality of Member office Web sites based on party.
5. House committees are dramatically outperforming their Senate counterparts.
6. House Majority (Republican) committees are outperforming all other committees.
7. In the House, there is a clear decline in the quality of Web sites as tenure and age of the Member increase.
8. There is no correlation between the performance of congressional Web sites and state demographics (i.e. population, percentage of “wired” households).
9. The large majority of first time award winners had subpar or poor Web sites last year.
10. Overall, Republicans manage the majority of the award-winning sites.

[Analyzing Grade Distribution Trends](#)

[Analyzing Trends in Award Winners](#)

Analyzing Grade Distribution Trends

1. Congressional offices have dramatically improved the quality of their Web sites over the past year.

Figure 1 illustrates the overall performance of congressional Web sites, providing a breakdown of grades from our 2002 and 2003 studies. This figure shows that in less than a year, there has been a dramatic improvement in the quality of congressional Web sites. In our 2002 study, fewer than 10% of congressional Web sites received grades of A or B, while approximately 90% of the sites received grades of C or lower. This year, applying the same criteria, 50% of all congressional Web sites received grades of A or B, five times the number in 2002. Additionally, the cumulative grade point average (GPA) of all congressional sites this year was 2.30 vs. 1.76 last year.

CONGRESS ONLINE PROJECT GRADING SCALE

To more easily convey how congressional Web sites performed in our evaluation, we developed a grading scale that reflected our evaluation process and then enabled us to calculate the grade point averages of congressional Web sites. Following is the method and scale we used to assign each grade.

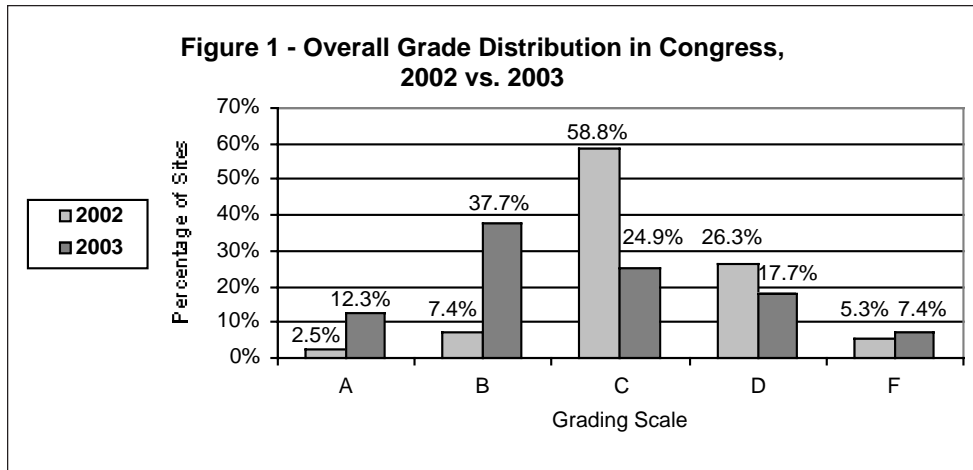
A (4.0) = Excellent Sites. These sites outperformed all other sites in our evaluation process because they not only excelled by incorporating every one of the five building blocks, they also all exceeded the benchmarks we set for congressional Web sites, based on last year's evaluation process. All A sites received Congress Online Mouse Awards this year, and the Expert Panel process determined which would receive Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Awards. These sites are exceeding the standards for excellence set last year.

B (3.0) = Good Sites. These sites met most of the benchmarks we set for them, based on last year's evaluation process, but they did not exceed them. They performed exceptionally well with regard to the building blocks of Audience and Content, and admirably with regard to the other building blocks. However, each had weaknesses – usually in the area of interactivity and/or usability – that prevented it from being an A site. These sites display commendable practices for congressional Web sites, and they are providing useful and timely information and services to their audiences, but each can be improved in one or more areas to be considered an A site.

C (2.0) = Fair Sites. These Web sites met a fair number of the benchmarks we set for them, and most performed solidly with regard to most of the building blocks – some even showed exceptional performance with regard to interactivity, usability, or innovations. However, these sites were significantly weaker in the areas of audience and content than the B sites, which prevented their scores from being higher. For example, Member Web sites that lacked constituent service information beyond a message to “contact my office” or that had out of date press releases or legislative information would have received grades of C.

D (1.0) = Poor Sites. These were the Web sites that performed below average with regard to audience and content, usually by providing generic information and severely limited content. Most also performed subpar when evaluated according to the other building blocks, as well. Like the C sites, good performance under one or two of the building blocks could not make up for what they lacked under audience and content.

F (0) = Failing Sites. These sites performed well below average with regard to audience and content. They also usually had glaring usability problems – such as being severely out-of-date, having confusing navigation or no navigation at all, or having “under construction” notices, rather than content, in key areas of the site – which made the site virtually impossible for the average Web visitor to access and use.



A breakdown of House and Senate grades further illustrates the improvement in congressional Web sites. As Figure 2 shows, approximately 46% of House Member offices received grades of A or B this year. This is more than seven times the number of As and Bs in our previous study, when 6.4% of House sites received an A or B. Additionally, the number of House Member offices receiving C grades decreased by more than half, from just over 59% to approximately 25%.

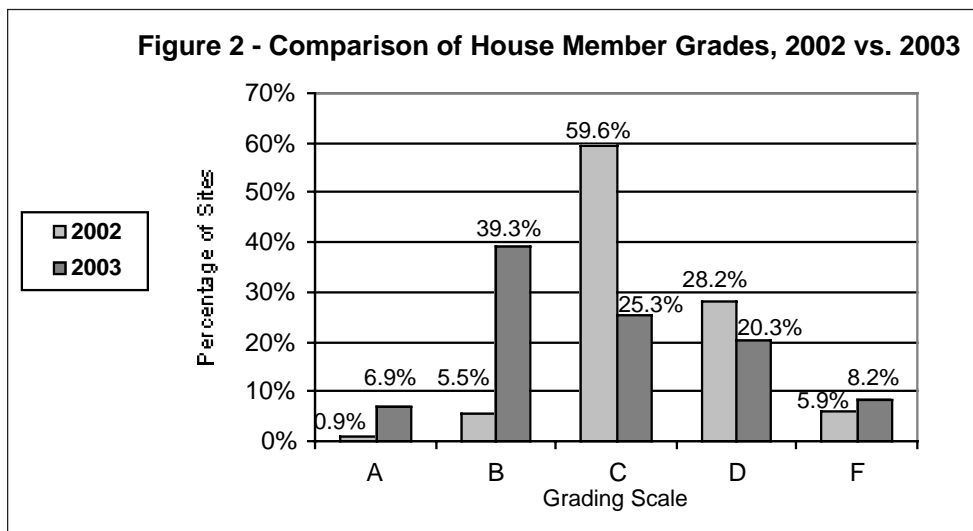
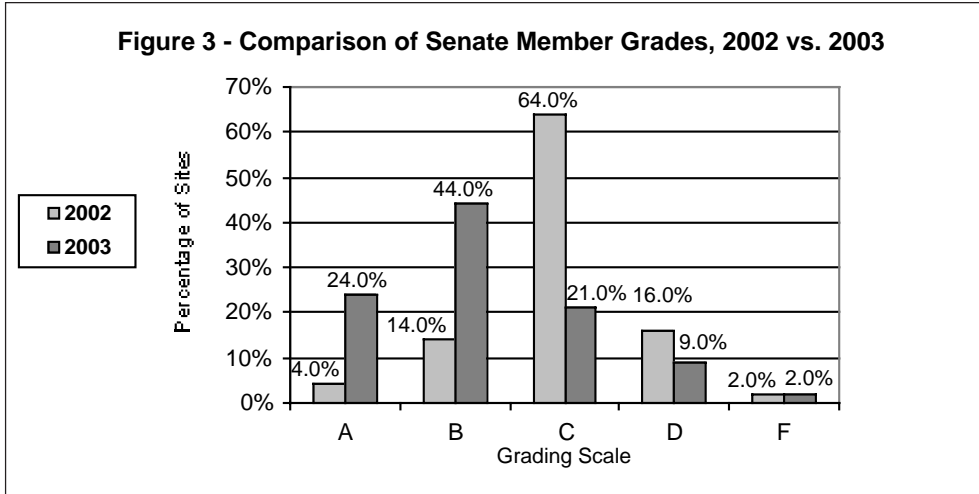


Figure 3 displays a similar comparison and outcome for the Senate. Last year, 18.0% of Senate sites received grades of B or higher. That number increased more than threefold to 68.0% in 2003. The decline of C grades in the Senate is even larger than in the House. In our 2002 study, 64.0% of Senate Member office Web sites received C grades. Only 21.0% scored C this year. Clearly, greater numbers of Member offices are investing resources in improving their Web sites.



As Table 1 shows, all categories of congressional Web sites improved over the past year. House Republican committees made the biggest advances, raising their GPA from 2.20 to 3.37, while Senate Democratic committees made the least improvement (1.71 GPA in 2002 to 1.88 in 2003). House Republican committees also had the highest GPA (3.37), followed by Republican leadership (3.14) and Senate Democratic Members (3.08).

| | 2002 GPA | 2003 GPA | Point Increase |
|---|----------|----------|----------------|
| House Overall (all offices combined) | 1.76 | 2.22 | 0.52 |
| House Members | 1.67 | 2.16 | 0.49 |
| House Democrats | 1.58 | 2.08 | 0.50 |
| House Republicans | 1.76 | 2.23 | 0.47 |
| House Committees | 2.06 | 2.83 | 0.77 |
| Republican (Majority) | 2.20 | 3.37 | 1.17 |
| Democratic (Minority) | 1.77 | 2.38 | 0.61 |
| Senate Overall (all offices combined) | 2.06 | 2.57 | 0.51 |
| Senate Members | 2.12 | 2.79 | 0.67 |
| Senate Democrats | 2.61 | 3.08 | 0.47 |
| Senate Republicans | 2.10 | 2.49 | 0.39 |
| Senate Committees | 1.62 | 1.81 | 0.19 |
| Democratic (Majority) | 1.71 | 1.88 | 0.17 |
| Republican (Minority) | 0.75 | 1.25 | 0.50 |
| Leadership Overall (all offices combined) | 2.09 | 2.73 | 0.64 |
| Democratic Leadership | 1.75 | 2.00 | 0.25 |
| Republican Leadership | 2.43 | 3.14 | 0.71 |
| Congress Overall (all offices and chambers combined) | 1.76 | 2.30 | 0.54 |

Assessing the Performance of Congressional Web Sites

The increase of above average sites this year suggests that more congressional offices are viewing their Web sites as a priority and are devoting the necessary resources to improving them.

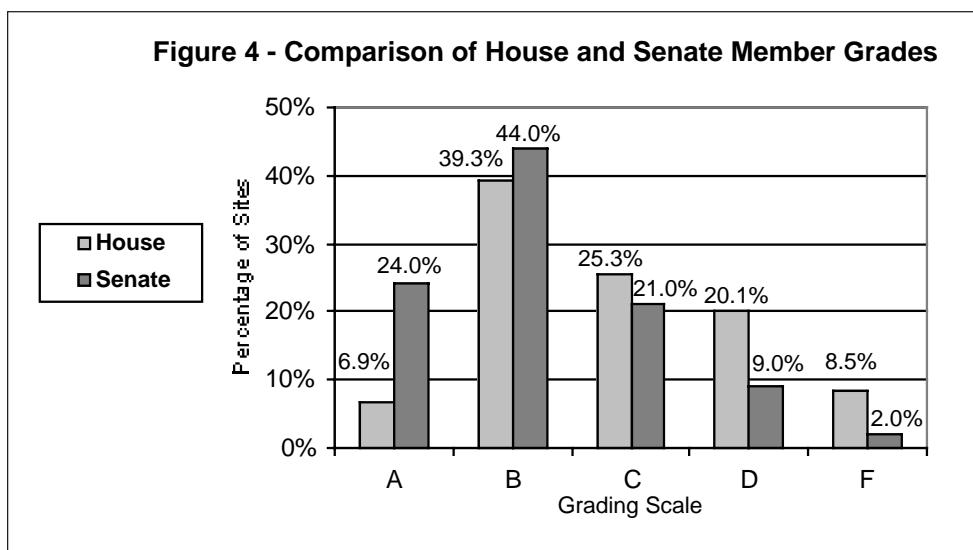
2. A sizable number of congressional offices continue to perform poorly, maintaining a wide disparity in the quality of congressional Web sites.

While there has been a dramatic increase in the number of above average sites, there has been only a marginal decrease in the number of congressional sites performing poorly. As shown previously in Figure 1, approximately 25% of congressional Web sites received grades of D or F this year. In comparison, almost 32% received Ds or Fs in 2002 – a decrease of only 7%. The poor performance of one-fourth of the Congress suggests that these offices have not accepted the benefits of effective Web sites and have not realized the implications for not creating them.

Comparing data from our 2002 and 2003 studies, we see that a significant number of C sites improved their grades to As and Bs. Unfortunately, a sizable number of sites remain at the bottom of the grade distribution. In addition, the number of *House Member* offices receiving failing grades actually *increased* this year, from 5.9% to 8.2%. Thus, despite the significant number of offices improving their Web sites, there remains a wide distribution in the quality of congressional Web sites overall.

3. Senate Member office Web sites are outperforming House Member office sites.

Senate Member office Web sites are slightly outperforming House Member office sites (2.79 GPA versus 2.16, respectively). As shown in Figure 4, 68.0% of Senate Member offices sites received grades of either an A or a B, compared to 46.2% of all House Member office sites. This disparity in the quality of Web sites is likely explained by the significant disparity in budgets between House and Senate Member offices. Senate offices have larger budgets and larger staff and, therefore, tend to devote greater resources to their Web sites.



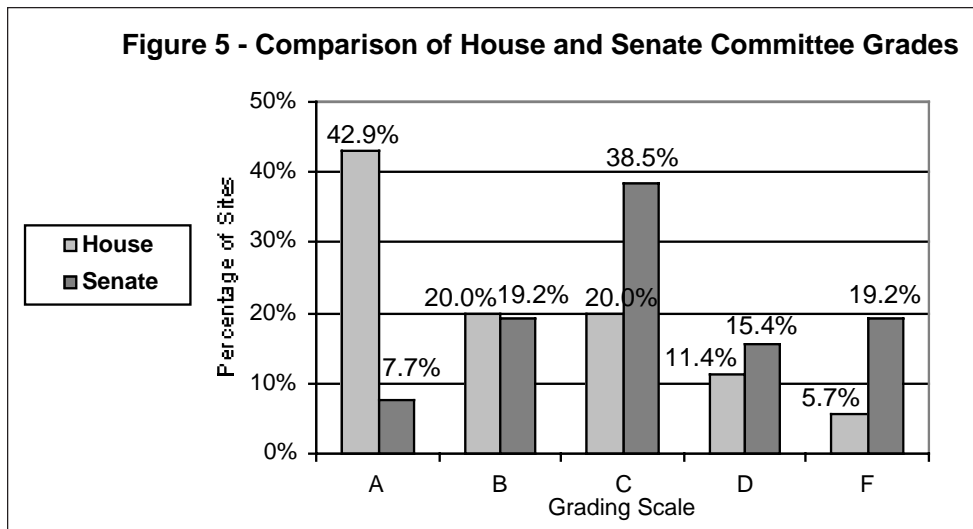
4. In both the Senate and the House, there is a clear divide in the quality of Member office Web sites based on party.

Table 2 reveals that, with regard to *Member offices*, Senate Democrats are performing better than their Republican counterparts. Senate Democratic offices collectively had a GPA of 3.08 compared to 2.49 among Republicans. In addition, 34.0% of Senate Democrats received A grades, which is more than double the percentage of Senate Republicans (14.3%). Furthermore, only 4.0% of Senate Democratic offices received grades of D or F compared to 18.3% of Senate Republican offices. Conversely, on the House side, Republican Member offices are performing better than their Democratic counterparts (2.23 vs. 2.08 GPA). As shown in the table, 22 House Republicans received A grades, which is more than three times the number of House Democrats receiving A grades (7).

| Table 2 – Member Offices by Party* and Chamber | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| (Percentages) | | | | | | |
| | A | B | C | D | F | GPA |
| Senate Democrats | 34.0% | 46.0% | 16.0% | 2.0% | 2.0% | 3.08 |
| Senate Republicans | 14.3% | 40.8% | 26.5% | 16.3% | 2.0% | 2.49 |
| House Democrats | 3.3% | 40.2% | 25.2% | 24.3% | 7.0% | 2.08 |
| House Republicans | 9.9% | 38.7% | 25.7% | 16.2% | 9.5% | 2.23 |
| (Raw Numbers) | | | | | | |
| | A | B | C | D | F | GPA |
| Senate Democrats | 17 | 23 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 50 |
| Senate Republicans | 7 | 20 | 13 | 8 | 1 | 49 |
| House Democrats | 7 | 86 | 54 | 52 | 15 | 214 |
| House Republicans | 22 | 86 | 57 | 36 | 21 | 222 |
| <i>*Members of the Independent Party were not included in this analysis.</i> | | | | | | |

5. House committees are dramatically outperforming their Senate counterparts.

As Figure 5 shows, 42.9% of House committee sites received grades of A, yet only 7.7% of Senate committees received comparable grades. Thus the GPA of House committees is 2.83, compared to a GPA of 1.81 among Senate committees. In addition, 34.6% of Senate committees received grades of D or F, which is more than double the percentage of House committees receiving poor grades (17.1%). This suggests that House committees are doing a far better job of effectively using their Web sites to communicate valuable information to online visitors from both inside and outside Congress. The outstanding performance of House committees is likely explained by factors such as commitment to Web site development by the chairmen and staff directors, the competitiveness of committee IT staff to produce the best sites, and a significant investment of resources.



6. House Majority (Republican) committees are outperforming all other committees.

As can be seen in Table 3, House Republican committee Web sites were judged to be superior to all other committee Web sites. More specifically, 15 of 19 House Republican committee sites (79.0%) received grades of A or B compared to 7 of 13 House Democratic committee sites (53.9%), 5 of 17 Senate Democratic committee sites (29.4%) and one of four Senate Republican committee sites (25.0%). The collective grade point averages of these committee sites (broken out by chamber and party) further document this disparity.

Note: When discussing the grades of committee Web sites, we describe them by the party that managed their site at the time of our evaluations, rather than by "majority" or "minority."

| (Raw Numbers) | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| | A | B | C | D | F | Totals |
| House Republicans | 12 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 19 |
| House Democrats | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 13 |
| Senate Republicans | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Senate Democrats | 2 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 17 |
| (Percentage) | | | | | | |
| | A | B | C | D | F | GPA |
| House Republicans | 63.2% | 15.8% | 15.8% | 5.3% | 0% | 3.37 |
| House Democrats | 23.1% | 30.8% | 15.4% | 23.1% | 7.7% | 2.38 |
| Senate Republicans | 0% | 25.0% | 0% | 25.0% | 50.0% | 1.25 |
| Senate Democrats | 11.8% | 17.6% | 35.3% | 17.6% | 17.6% | 1.88 |

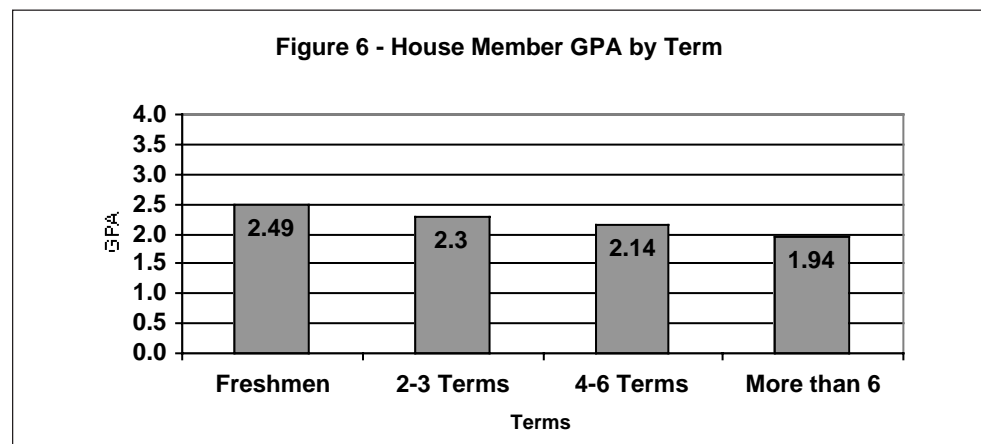
**Eight Special, Select, and Joint Committees were not included in this analysis.*

Table 3 also reveals an interesting trend in the Senate that affects the overall performance of Senate committee Web sites. There are only 4 Senate minority committee sites, which is in stark contrast to their 17 Senate majority counterparts. (In comparison, there are 19 majority committee sites and 13 minority committee sites in the House.) Many Ranking Members in the Senate have not created minority Web sites due to the lack of interest in and understanding of the Web by some Senators. Other committees choose to include majority *and* minority information on the majority committee’s Web site.

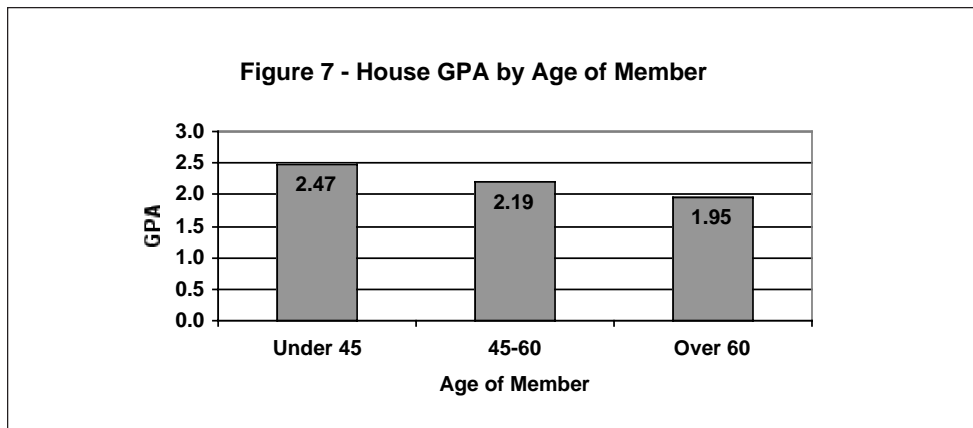
Additionally, there has been a vast improvement in House committee sites overall over the past year. In 2002, only 8 House Republican sites and one House Democratic site received grades of A or B, compared with 15 Republican sites and 7 Democratic sites in 2003. This progress is reflected in their higher GPAs for 2003. The GPA of House Republican committee Web sites went from 2.20 last year to 3.37 this year, while House Democratic committees improved their GPA from 1.77 to 2.38.

7. In the House, there is a clear decline in the quality of Web sites as tenure and age of the Member increase.

Figure 6 shows the disparity between the GPA of freshmen compared to veterans in House offices. Freshmen House Members in the 107th Congress had a higher GPA than that of more senior Members. There is a clear decline in GPA as tenure in the House increases. This can possibly be explained by the fact that Members who were more recently in other sectors became accustomed to using technology in their daily lives outside Congress. When they came to Congress, an environment that has generally been slow to adopt and integrate new technologies, they brought their more technologically savvy mindsets with them. As a result, they are more likely than more senior Members to have integrated their Web sites and other technologies into their congressional business. Based on our research, it seems that newer Members in the House are making their Web sites more of an office priority than are most veteran Members.



Additionally, House Members under age 45 had a higher grade point average than did older Members (2.47 vs. 2.12). As shown in Figure 7, there is a clear decline in GPA as the age of House Members increases. This trend in Congress also tends to mirror trends outside Congress. Younger people are generally more likely to have integrated technology into their personal and professional lives.



However, while there are clear trend lines in House GPAs by the term and age of the Member, the same trends do not hold true in the Senate. We found no correlation between GPAs and years of service in the Senate, or between GPAs and age of the Senator. The Senator's tenure and age do not seem to be factors in the quality of the site. This suggests that in House offices, Member interest in the Web site is an important variable in the success of the site. When the Member makes the Web site a priority, the office makes the Web site a priority and commits the necessary resources to making it a success. Senate offices have greater resources to devote to their sites than do House offices. Consequently, a Web site may not need to be a high priority of the Senator to be allocated the resources necessary for it to be successful.

8. There is no correlation between the performance of congressional Web sites and state demographics.

Table 4 lists the 20 state delegations with the highest GPAs. Vermont scored the highest in our evaluations with a 3.75 GPA, followed by New Mexico (3.25), California (3.18), Wisconsin (3.14), and Oregon (3.10). This table reveals an important finding about the performance of congressional Web sites. The demographics of a state do not predict the quality of its congressional Web sites. This list includes both sparsely populated rural states, such as North Dakota and Vermont, and large, populous states, such as California and Pennsylvania. It also includes states not typically considered "wired," such as New Mexico and Arkansas, as well as highly wired states, such as Oregon and Maryland. The delegations with the best congressional Web sites come from all over the country.

Table 4 – Top 20 Grade Point Averages by State Delegation*

| State | GPA |
|------------------|------|
| 1. Vermont | 3.75 |
| 2. New Mexico | 3.25 |
| 3. California | 3.18 |
| 4. Wisconsin | 3.14 |
| 5. Oregon | 3.10 |
| 6. Minnesota | 3.07 |
| 7. Tennessee | 3.06 |
| 8. Delaware | 3.00 |
| (tie) Idaho | 3.00 |
| Kansas | 3.00 |
| Nevada | 3.00 |
| North Dakota | 3.00 |
| South Dakota | 3.00 |
| Connecticut | 3.00 |
| 15. Nebraska | 2.92 |
| 16. Michigan | 2.91 |
| 17. Arkansas | 2.88 |
| (tie) Maryland | 2.88 |
| 19. Pennsylvania | 2.85 |
| 20. Rhode Island | 2.75 |

**State delegation averages were calculated using the GPA for each chamber.*

Analyzing Trends in Award Winners

In addition to analyzing the overall grades of congressional Web sites, we also analyzed the award-winning Web sites – the 75 Congress Online Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Award winners. This allows us to report on 8 trends we observed among the best congressional Web sites.

- 1. Overall, Republicans manage the majority of the award-winning sites.** As shown in Table 5, 45 (or 60.0%) of the 75 award-winning Web sites are managed by Republicans and 29 (or 38.7%) by Democrats. Similar findings were reported in our 2002 study, when 22 (or 62.9%) of the 35 award-winning sites were managed by Republicans and 13 (or 37.1%) by Democrats.
- 2. In both the House and Senate, there is a clear divide in the number of award-winning Web sites based on party.** Not surprisingly, this mirrors the trend we

Assessing the Performance of Congressional Web Sites

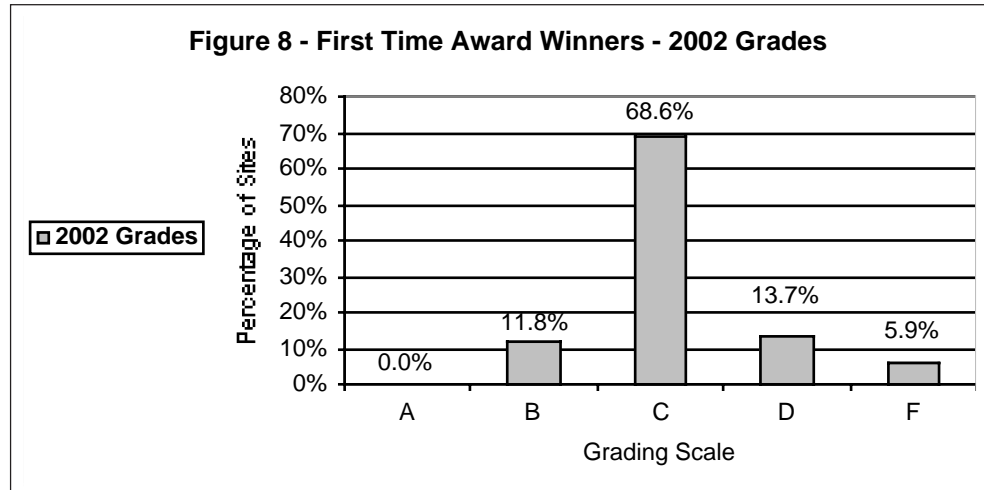
saw in Congress overall. Among *Member offices*, 17 of the 24 Congress Online Awards given on the Senate side (or 70.8%) were awarded to Democratic sites. Conversely, 22 of the 30 awards given on the House side (or 73.3%) were won by Republican sites. In 2002, Democrats received 8 (or 72.7%) of the 11 awards given to Senate Member offices while Republicans received 19 (or 79.2%) of the 24 awards given to House Member offices.

- 3. House committee Web sites won far more awards than did the Senate committee sites.** Again, this reflects the general trend that we reported of House committee Web sites outperforming their Senate counterparts overall. More specifically, of the 17 awards issued to committees, House committees won 15; only 2 Senate committees won an award. Furthermore, of the award-winning House committee sites, the majority party (the Republicans) hosted 12 of the 15. In 2002, 8 of the 10 awards given to committee sites were managed by the House while 1 Senate committee site and 1 Joint committee site received awards. Republicans also managed 7 of the 8 House committee sites in 2002.
- 4. All four of the award-winning leadership sites are hosted by Republicans.** No Democratic leadership Web site in either chamber won a Congress Online Gold, Silver or Bronze Mouse Award.
- 5. Overall, Senate Web sites won more than their proportionate share of awards.** House sites won 48 of the 75 Mouse awards while Senate sites won 27. Thus, in absolute numbers Senate sites won far fewer awards than did House sites. However, since Senate sites made up only 21.1% of the 610 Web sites we evaluated but received 36.0% of the awards, they actually won more than their proportionate share. Conversely, House sites, while making up 78.9% of our evaluation sample, only won 64.0% of the awards.

| | Member Offices | | Committees | | Leadership | | Total |
|--------------|----------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|--------|-------|
| | House | Senate | House | Senate | House | Senate | |
| Democrats | 7 | 17 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 29 |
| Republicans | 22 | 7 | 12 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 45 |
| Independents | 1 | 0 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 1 |

- 6. The dramatic improvement in the quality of congressional Web sites over the last year has more than doubled the number of award winners.** In our 2002 study, 35 congressional Web sites were given awards for their online practices. Of these sites, only 15 received grades of A while 20 received grades of B+. This year, however, 75 congressional Web sites earned A grades and received awards for their efforts. This is 5 times the number of sites receiving A grades, and more than 2 times the number of sites receiving awards compared to last year.

7. The large majority of first time award winners had subpar or poor Web sites last year. Of the 75 award-winning sites, 52 (or 69%) did not win awards last year. Remarkably, as Figure 8 shows, 88.2% of these 52 sites – all of which earned As this year – received grades of C or lower in 2002 while 5.9% actually received grades of F last year. Additionally, these 52 sites had a cumulative GPA of 1.86 last year. The improvement in their GPA from 1.86 to 4.0 in less than a year demonstrates that with the proper dedication, resources, and guidance, congressional offices can quickly and significantly improve the quality of their Web sites.



8. New Members comprise a significant share of the award-winning sites. There were 60 *new Members* in our evaluation process – 11 Senators and 49 Representatives. Four of the 24 awards given to Senate Member sites and 6 of the 30 awards given to House Member sites were awarded to the sites of new Members. This means that while new Members made up only 11% of the Senate, they won 16.7% of our Senate Member awards. Similarly, new Members made up 11.1% of the House, but won 20.0% of the awards given to House sites. Thus, new Members won more than their proportionate share of Mouse Awards.

THE BEST WEB SITES ON CAPITOL HILL

Congress Online Gold Mouse Award

| | |
|---|--|
| Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) | Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) |
| Representative John Boozman (R-AR) | Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) |
| Representative Chaka Fattah (D-PA) | Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) |
| Representative Kay Granger (R-TX) | |
| Representative Melissa Hart (R-PA) | House Energy and Commerce Comm. – majority |
| Representative John Larson (D-CT) | House Government Reform Comm. – minority |
| Representative Richard Pombo (R-CA) | |
| Representative George Radanovich (R-CA) | House Republican Conference |
| Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT) | |
| Representative Nick Smith (R-MI) | |

Congress Online Silver Mouse Award

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Representative Judy Biggert (R-IL) | Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) |
| Representative Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) | Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) |
| Representative Mike Honda (D-CA) | Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) |
| Representative Mike Pence (R-IN) | Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) |
| Representative Steve Rothman (D-NJ) | Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) |
| | Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) |
| Senate Energy and Natural Resources Comm. – majority (Democrats) | Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) |
| Senate Budget Comm. – majority (Democrats) | Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA) |
| House Agriculture Comm. – majority | Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) |
| House Armed Services Comm. – majority | Senator Fred Thompson (R-TN) |
| House Education and the Workforce Comm. – majority | Senate Republican Conference |
| House Energy and Commerce Comm. – minority | House Majority Whip Tom DeLay |
| House Rules Comm. – majority | House Republican Policy Committee |
| House Veterans' Affairs Comm. – majority | |

Congress Online Bronze Mouse Award

| | |
|---|---|
| Representative Cass Ballenger (R-NC) | Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) |
| Representative Eric Cantor (R-VA) | Senator Jean Carnahan (D-MO) |
| Representative John Doolittle (R-CA) | Senator Mark Dayton (D-MN) |
| Representative Porter Goss (R-FL) | Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) |
| Representative Gil Gutknecht (R-MN) | Senator Bill Frist (R-TN) |
| Representative Amo Houghton (R-NY) | Senator Ernest Hollings (D-SC) |
| Representative Walter Jones (R-NC) | Senator Herb Kohl (D-WI) |
| Representative Jim Matheson (D-UT) | Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) |
| Representative John Mica (R-FL) | Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) |
| Representative George Nethercutt (R-WA) | Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) |
| Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) | Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) |
| Representative Bernard Sanders (I-VT) | |
| Representative Thomas Tancredo (R-CO) | House Budget Comm. – majority |
| Representative Lee Terry (R-NE) | House Budget Comm. – minority |
| Representative Heather Wilson (R-NM) | House Financial Services Comm. – majority |
| | House Government Reform Comm. – majority |
| | House Judiciary Comm. – majority |
| | House Resources Comm. – majority |
| | House Science Comm. – majority |

THE BEST WEB SITES ON CAPITOL HILL

Each congressional office is responsible for devising its own Web strategies and content, and for determining how to create and manage its own Web site. Each office must determine for itself the time, staff, and financial resources it will allocate to its Web site; decide whether to hire a consultant or vendor for assistance; and devise the management policies and practices that will apply to its site. Each office must confront a range of important decisions associated with developing and managing a Web site.

To acknowledge the offices that have most effectively undertaken these tasks, the Congress Online Project is recognizing the 75 best Web sites on Capitol Hill for 2003. We are presenting 16 offices with Congress Online Gold Mouse Awards, 26 offices with Silver Mouse Awards, and 33 with our first ever Bronze Mouse Awards. A computer mouse is the key to most constituents' interaction with a congressional Web site, so we chose the mouse to represent the pinnacle of congressional achievement on the Web.

The 75 offices that received Congress Online Awards this year reflect the improvement we've seen in the quality of congressional Web sites. Last year, Gold Mouse Awards were given to the 15 sites that received grades of A and Silver Mouse Awards to the 20 sites that received grades of B+. This year, however, so many Hill offices produced outstanding sites that the number of offices receiving grades of A increased from 15 to 75. These sites exceeded the benchmarks set in last year's evaluation process and raised the bar for congressional best practices. We felt it was necessary to recognize this change in Congress online through our awards. This year, all—and only—sites with A grades received Congress Online Mouse Awards. Additionally, we created a new category to accurately reflect the grades—the Bronze Mouse. The breakdown of award levels is as follows:

Gold Mouse Award = A+
Silver Mouse Award = A
Bronze Mouse Award = A-

The 2003 Congress Online Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Award winners view their Web sites as “virtual offices.” They realize that the Web site is an extension of everything they do and have integrated the site into the work and strategic goals of the office. These 75 award-winning sites should serve as models of the current best practices for congressional Web sites. To demonstrate why they are leading the way for effective Web use on Capitol Hill, the following section describes one of the outstanding aspects of the Gold Mouse Award winners, summarizes an interesting feature for each of the Silver Mouse Award winners, and lists the Bronze Mouse Award winners.

*Note: In the following pages, award winners that are marked with an (*) indicate that the site is no longer available for viewing online or that the site may have been modified since our evaluation process due to the changes from the 107th to the 108th Congress.*

CONGRESS ONLINE GOLD MOUSE AWARDS

The Congress Online Gold Mouse Award winners are the best of the best. While 75 congressional Web sites received grades of A in our evaluation process, our Expert Panel felt that 16 of these sites performed better than the others and deserved recognition as A+ sites. For their best practices for congressional Web sites, we recognize 3 Senate Member Web sites, 10 House Member Web sites, 2 committee Web sites, and 1 leadership Web site with 2003 Congress Online Gold Mouse Awards.

Each of the 16 Gold Mouse Award winners excelled at incorporating every one of the five building blocks—audience, content, interactivity, usability, and innovations—into their Web sites. They also exceeded the benchmarks we set for congressional Web sites based on last year’s evaluation process. These sites should serve as models for congressional offices seeking to improve their Web-based communications with constituents and other audiences. In order to truly understand and appreciate how amazing these Web sites are, they must be viewed in the medium in which they were created: *online*. These sites are so comprehensive that we felt detailed descriptions of their attributes could not replicate the experience of using them online. In the following summaries we instead chose to describe just one outstanding aspect of each site. These summaries provide a brief glimpse at what sets these sites apart from the rest of Congress online. For a full appreciation of all they have to offer, visit them online.



[Senate Member Offices](#)

[House Member Offices](#)

[Standing Committees](#)

[Leadership Offices](#)

Senate Member Offices

Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) carper.senate.gov

Senator Tom Carper has created a Web site geared more towards constituents than were most congressional sites we evaluated. Almost all of the information on the site, even the press releases, is thoughtfully written for the citizens of Delaware. The site’s emphasis on constituents makes Senator Carper seem like an active, dynamic, and accessible Senator who not only cares about his work in Congress, but about the people he represents. How did he do it? Senator Carper’s site is a one-stop virtual congressional office that targets the following features to constituents:

- A map of Delaware breaks down *local news* and *resources by county*, which gives constituents easy access to information relevant to where they live;
- The site *highlights Delawareans* by posting constituent photo galleries and congratulating constituents on their accomplishments;
- A *monthly spotlight* on Delaware focuses on local issues;
- Headlines of press releases have a *Delaware angle*;
- *Thorough constituent services and issue* information allow citizens to self-serve their needs.

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) leahy.senate.gov

Senator Pat Leahy knows what online audiences want and how to provide it: targeted information adapted for the Web. The information on his Web site is so extensive that it surpasses congressional standards, yet it does not overwhelm its visitors. As one of our evaluators stated, the “deep information [on Senator Leahy’s site] pulls you in, since each page seems more interesting and more informative than the last.” Additionally, the site is understandable to all users. On his site, Senator Leahy provides:

- *Summaries* of his key legislative priorities, as well as *links to additional information* and *related Web sites* for people who want to learn more;
- Extremely detailed information about getting assistance and doing business in Vermont, broken down into *easy to read pieces using headings, short paragraphs, and bullets*;
- News releases and statements that use *descriptive links* to enable visitors to quickly browse the headlines for topics that interest them. *Press releases organized by date* and *topic* are also provided.

Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) reid.senate.gov

If you want to learn how to create an exciting two-way dialogue between citizens and your Member, look no further than Senator Harry Reid’s Web site. Senator Reid has created a very clearly written, interactive Web site that builds strong online relationships with his constituents. To accomplish this, the Web site includes:

- A section titled “*Get Involved,*” in which Senator Reid encourages constituents to tell him their personal stories, addresses frequently asked questions, and provides assistance for their problems with federal agencies;
- *20 different e-mail newsletters*, providing targeted information by issue and by audience group, that keeps subscribers informed on a regular basis;
- an *online poll* that allows citizens to voice their opinions on current topics; and
- a customized Web-based form that *solicits user feedback about the Web site.*

House Member Offices

Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) www.house.gov/blumenauer

Few congressional offices have recognized the power of the Internet in energizing and engaging citizens online. Rep. Earl Blumenauer has. His Web site was repeatedly praised throughout our evaluation process for its clear efforts to encourage citizen interaction with government. Civic participation is a key component of Rep. Blumenauer’s “Livable Communities” initiative, and his site employs a number of features designed to foster public involvement online:

Congress Online Gold Mouse Awards

- A section titled “*Effective Advocacy*” teaches citizens how to communicate effectively with their elected officials;
- Rep. Blumenauer’s *weekly schedule, upcoming events, and voting record* are posted to provide greater accountability;
- *Links to voter registration information and local advocacy groups* are included on the site to get more citizens involved in their communities and active on issues that matter to them;
- The *language and look and feel* of the site make Rep. Blumenauer appear more approachable and eager to interact with constituents.

Representative John Boozman (R-AR)

www.house.gov/boozman

Rep. John Boozman’s Web site gives constituents what they want: a well-organized, user-friendly Web site that puts their needs first. The design is simple, not flashy; understated but *effective*. This makes Rep. Boozman seem very open and accessible to his constituents. Plus, there’s no need to dig for information since the site provides access to the most requested information on the home page, including:

- Current *press releases*;
- Notice of *upcoming events* in Washington, DC, and the district;
- Special Web site “*features*” on issues of importance to constituents;
- Listings of *recent votes*;
- *Constituent services information*;
- The opportunity to signup for his *e-mail newsletter*;
- Quick access to *legislative and educational resources*; and
- *E-mail, postal mail, and telephone contact information*.

Representative Chaka Fattah (D-PA)

www.house.gov/fattah

Rep. Chaka Fattah’s Web site is a terrific example of a site that effectively advances the Member’s strategic goals without being self-promoting. This site is principally devoted to informing its audiences about Rep. Fattah’s top legislative priority—education. At the same time, it educates its audiences about how government works. Some of the outstanding features on Rep. Fattah’s site include:

- an “*Education Resource Center*,” conveniently organized by audience, making it easy for students, families, and teachers to find the information targeted to their needs;
- a description of how his “*Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)*” initiative became public law – a slightly different approach towards informing constituents about the legislative process;
- a section called “*How Government Works*” that explores the impact of the federal government in his district, explains how citizens’ tax dollars are spent, and answers general questions about Congress;
- explanations of how he feels on different topics, including *why he’s for or against key pieces of legislation*; and
- the ability to *e-mail pages to a friend*, which allows you to share the extensive information on this site with others.

Representative Kay Granger (R-TX) kaygranger.house.gov

Too many congressional Web sites are generic — they fail to reflect the personality of the Member and the distinctiveness of the district or state. Rep. Kay Granger’s site is not one of them! Evaluators throughout our process commented on the straightforward, direct style of Rep. Granger’s Web site. She was praised for her efforts to address constituent concerns and problems online rather than pushing them off to another Web site or directing them off line. Rep. Granger accomplishes this by:

- Providing a *listing of staff names and job responsibilities*;
- Answering *frequently asked questions* throughout the casework section;
- Offering a *Spanish language version* of the Web site that serves her constituency;
- Presenting her constituent services information in *language that users will understand*; and
- Using *colors, graphics, and photos* that give a professional feel yet a district-centered focus to the site.

Representative Melissa Hart (R-PA) hart.house.gov

Constituents want to hear from your boss more frequently than only around election time and Rep. Melissa Hart knows this! Rep. Hart’s Web site fosters a sense of public trust by keeping constituents constantly informed of her work in Congress. Her online “Eye on Washington” newsletter provides more information on a weekly basis (when the House is in session) than a lot of congressional Web sites do during an entire session. Typically the newsletter describes the past week’s legislative activity, including information on recent votes, while offering a preview of the upcoming House schedule and her events calendar. Users can subscribe to receive this newsletter by e-mail or can opt to view it online. Her site also provides other information that demonstrates her desire to be accountable to her constituents. These include:

- *a listing of office hours and staff contact information*; and
- an *outreach calendar* that shows where she’s going and who she’s meeting with.

Representative John Larson (D-CT) www.house.gov/larson

One of the most beneficial things a congressional office can do for its constituents is explain what the Member and the office do and help constituents understand the work of Congress. Rep. John Larson does a great job of providing a context for the extensive information included on his site. For example:

- His *issue pages* go beyond the usual rhetoric sometimes found on congressional sites and address questions such as, “What is the problem?” and “How can we fix it?” *Related documents and press releases* are also found throughout the issue and legislative pages. This context and additional information helps constituents better understand the issues and their impacts;

Congress Online Gold Mouse Awards

- Rather than just linking to the committees on which he serves, Rep. Larson's site *explains the role and responsibilities of each committee*;
- *Assistance with federal agencies is broken down by issue area* and includes the contact information for the staff person responsible for that issue;
- *Numerous links to educational resources* inform visitors about the daily lives and responsibilities of Members, and congressional procedures and history.

Representative Richard Pombo (R-CA)

www.house.gov/pombo

Rep. Richard Pombo does an outstanding job of building relationships with his audiences online. Rich content and interactive features bring visitors back again and again. These include:

- *Up-to-date information on the home page* to keep it fresh and continually changing for repeat visitors;
- *A bulletin board of posted constituent comments* that allows visitors to read what their neighbors are saying;
- *Information on a range of topics*, including high-tech and agricultural issues—issues of particular concern to two key constituencies in his district;
- An extensive gallery of *constituent photos*; and
- The "*Pombo Report*," a weekly e-mail newsletter that includes information ranging from a discussion of current events to recent legislative activity.

Representative George Radanovich (R-CA)

www.radanovich.house.gov

The extensive information on Rep. George Radanovich's Web site goes above and beyond what we looked for on a congressional site. It's obvious that an effort has been made to think creatively about what information will be helpful to his audiences. Some of the noteworthy information on his site includes:

- A "*Life Events*" section that provides online government services for every stage of a constituent's life: from birth to school, taxes, retirement and more;
- In-depth issue pages that cover a *wide range of topics*, from California wine-making to the war on terrorism;
- *Descriptions of legislative accomplishments* and easy to read summaries of what Rep. Radanovich has been working on in Congress that provide a sense of accountability;
- Links to *regular video messages* on selected topics and *live audio broadcasts of committee hearings* in which he participates; and
- *Congressional Research Service reports and briefs* that allow people to learn more about the issues from a reliable, nonpartisan source.

Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT)

www.house.gov/shays

If you are an expert on an issue or have sponsored a key piece of legislation, the Web is a great place to promote your cause. Check out the Web site of Rep. Chris Shays, whose section on campaign finance reform is a terrific example of showcas-

ing your priorities online. His in-depth information seeks to educate, inform, and mobilize citizens on the issue. The section also includes materials for congressional staff and the press. Specifically, his site includes:

- *Briefing materials, talking points, and overviews* of the Shays-Meehan (and McCain-Feingold) campaign finance law;
- *Press releases and statements* from each of the four key sponsors;
- Related *news articles* and *links to additional resources* and third party groups;
- A section titled “*make a difference,*” designed to encourage visitors to contact their own Representative or Senator about campaign finance reform.

Representative Nick Smith (R-MI)

www.house.gov/nicksmith

One of the most dynamic and constituent-driven Web sites that we saw in our evaluation process was that of Rep. Nick Smith. Rep. Smith and his staff encourage and receive a lot of feedback from constituents about the Web site and they incorporate what they learn into their Web strategy. As a result, the following features keep his site engaging and up-to-date:

- The top center of the home page focuses on providing the *latest news and headlines*, while special Web site features are included to draw people in to the site;
- An *extensive district survey* asks constituents for their views and opinions on a range of topics *and then* provides survey results;
- Quick and easy answers to frequently asked questions provided in his “*Information Center*” that are updated on a regular basis to respond to the ever-changing concerns of constituents.

Standing Committees

House Committee on Energy and Commerce (majority)

energycommerce.house.gov

The House Committee on Energy and Commerce states that it has “arguably the broadest (non-tax-oriented) jurisdiction of any congressional committee.” This large oversight gives the Energy and Commerce committee a high profile that causes numerous audiences to seek information from it. By committee standards, this Web site provides the most extensive information of any committee on the Hill. One of our Expert Panelists referred to the Energy and Commerce site as “the Rolls Royce of committee Web sites!” The Committee has included the following information and features specifically targeted to meet the needs of congressional staff, reporters, lobbyists, and citizens:

- *Committee business*, such as hearing information, press releases, and official correspondence, is provided by topic;
- Pages on *committee hearings* include witness lists, prepared testimony, Member statements, and related documents;
- *Live Webcasts* of hearings are archived on the site;
- *Subscriptions to e-mail updates on the committee schedule*; and
- An “*anonymous tip line*” is provided through which citizens can report waste, fraud, or abuse.

House Committee on Government Reform (minority) reform.house.gov/min

The Web site of the minority office of the House Committee on Government Reform makes it easy to understand the committee's role in Congress. This is not an easy task for a minority committee, especially on the Web. The goal of most minority offices is to use the Web to "get their message out" to the public, press, and other congressional staff. The Government Reform Democrats do an excellent job of communicating their positions without letting their partisan nature overwhelm the Web site. The matter-of-fact language, straightforward style, and sheer amount of information on the site strike a balanced tone for all its audiences. Some of the features employed by the minority office include:

- Information on their "*special investigations*" that showcase their efforts to have their voice heard on the diverse issues that fall within their jurisdiction;
- *Interactive calculators*, designed to differentiate between the majority and the minority party's plans for Social Security and Prescription Drugs, make the site more interesting to visitors; and
- An Enron "*tip line*" allows citizens to submit information online and feel that they can contribute to the work of the minority office.

Leadership Offices

House Republican Conference www.GOP.gov*

The Web site of the House Republican Conference — GOP.gov — exemplifies the use of innovations on Capitol Hill. Through its innovative use of technology, GOP.gov has set standards so high that it is clearly unmatched in Congress. To coordinate and communicate the party message to Republican staff, reporters, and the public at large, the Conference has created a dynamic, influential, and groundbreaking Web site that features the following:

- "*Committee Central*," a clearinghouse of information on every bill that will be considered on the House floor, including information about each bill's status, background, cost estimates, related press releases, and more;
- *News releases* from most Republican Members and Committees;
- The opportunity for visitors to *register with the site and receive personalized content* every time they visit the site, based on the topics and Members of Congress that interest them;
- The opportunity to subscribe to *targeted e-mail newsletters* that reach over 75,000 subscribers a year;
- *Specialized content for Republican staff*; and
- *An online discussion board.*

CONGRESS ONLINE SILVER MOUSE AWARDS

The 2003 Congress Online Silver Mouse Award winners have changed the definition of the Silver Mouse Award. Last year, offices that received grades of B+ were given Silver Mouse Awards for their efforts. This year, however, the 26 sites that earned grades of A in our evaluation process received Silver Mouse Awards. This change was made to reflect the improved quality of congressional Web sites and the resulting increase in the number of A sites. As A sites, this year's Silver Mouse Award winners exceeded our standards and excelled in their use of each of the five building blocks for effective congressional Web sites. For various reasons, however, our Expert Panel felt that these sites did not perform at the same level as our Gold Mouse Award winners. Still, all of the A sites should serve as models for congressional offices wishing to improve their sites. In the following pages, we briefly summarize one of the interesting features of each of the Silver Mouse Award winning sites. However, to fully experience and appreciate the outstanding qualities of these award winners, they should be viewed online. For their online practices, we recognize 10 Senate Member Web sites, 5 House Member Web sites, 8 committee Web sites, and 3 leadership Web sites with 2003 Congress Online Silver Mouse Awards.



[Senate Member Offices](#)

[House Member Offices](#)

[Standing Committees](#)

[Leadership Offices](#)

Senate Member Offices

Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) bingaman.senate.gov

If you're wondering how important information architecture can be for a site, check out the Web site of Senator Jeff Bingaman. This site is a model for other congressional offices seeking to present their information in a way that's easy for visitors to find and use. Senator Bingaman's site: answers frequently asked questions in the margins of many pages; highlights the most sought after information on the home page; offers information specifically relevant to New Mexicans; and provides different sections targeted to the needs of specific audience groups. All of these features enable visitors to quickly access the information that meets their needs.

Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) brownback.senate.gov

Only a few congressional Web sites offer the ability to request meetings with the Senator online. Senator Sam Brownback's site is one of them. His site uses customized Web-based forms to help both constituents and staff with these requests by requiring all the necessary information up front. There is no need for further phone calls or e-mails! While this feature helps his office, it's also a simple way to provide constituents with a greater level of accessibility.

Senator Larry Craig (R-ID)
craig.senate.gov

Senator Larry Craig's Web site takes a slightly different—and more interactive—approach towards encouraging young kids' interest in government than do most congressional sites. By joining Senator Craig's "Kid's Club" (with parental permission, of course), members receive a packet of educational material from his office. They can also sign up for a special e-mail newsletter notifying them of Web site updates to the Club. The Kid's Club is a great way to tap into a younger, more "wired" generation, and their parents probably like it too!

Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)
feinstein.senate.gov

One of the most outstanding aspects of Senator Dianne Feinstein's Web site is that it acts like an encyclopedia. Senator Feinstein's site: offers 17 pages on clearly defined issue areas, ranging from agriculture to working families; includes a page outlining her legislative priorities and specific bills she has sponsored in Congress; contains legislative brochures that constituents can print and distribute for themselves; and presents her voting record, broken down by topic and by session of Congress.

Senator Bob Graham (D-FL)
graham.senate.gov

The "workdays" feature on Senator Bob Graham's Web site is a great example of a way to build relationships with constituents both on and off line. Senator Graham's "workdays" are days in which he works side-by-side with constituents in their daily jobs. But Senator Graham brings this off line activity online by providing accounts of his days and notices of where he'll be and what he'll be doing next. This feature also showcases the Senator's personality and gives visitors the sense that he truly enjoys the interaction with, and contributions of, citizens in his work in the Senate.

Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA)
harkin.senate.gov

Senator Tom Harkin's Web site takes the task of identifying audiences and providing targeted content for them to a new level. The site anticipates the needs of its audiences, and then presents information for them in an innovative, user-friendly way. Each of its four key audiences—constituents, students, teachers, and the press—has its own section filled with frequently requested information and other material likely to be of interest to them.

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)
hutchison.senate.gov

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison's Web site is one of the few congressional sites set

up as a portal, where all of the information is available from the home page. This simple, yet effective, style allows users to quickly scan and access the extensive information and services provided on the site. With one click of the mouse, visitors can learn about 16 different issues that Senator Hutchison is active on, receive assistance with constituent services, or view the upcoming Senate schedule.

Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA)
landrieu.senate.gov

Senator Mary Landrieu has one of the more sophisticated Web sites on Capitol Hill and she's using it to create a two-way dialogue with her audiences. Her site offers three different e-mail newsletters that keep constituents and the press informed on a regular basis. Additionally, the site uses a Web-based feedback form to solicit constituent opinions on various topics. Senator Landrieu has also participated in online chats with students during which she answers questions and encourages their input.

Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)
stabenow.senate.gov

Through its "Prescription Drug People's Lobby," Senator Debbie Stabenow's Web site has created an online community of citizens interested in staying informed about the many prescription drug bills in Congress. Besides providing a thorough, one-stop shop for information about this issue, her Web site encourages visitors to share their experiences with her. She then relates these stories to her colleagues on the Senate floor. Senator Stabenow is harnessing the power of the Web to keep citizens informed about pending legislation and to represent their concerns in the democratic process.

Senator Fred Thompson (R-TN)
thompson.senate.gov*

Constituents want to know that your boss is working hard on their behalf - so why not use the Web to let them know that he is doing just that? Senator Fred Thompson's Web site has some of the most comprehensive information on state issues that we saw in our evaluations. His "Working for Tennessee" section includes a synopsis of the major issues that impact the state and its constituents, with links to additional resources throughout the site (such as related press releases). Moreover, each page invites the user to e-mail the Senator for additional information!

House Member Offices

Representative Judy Biggert (R-IL)

judybiggert.house.gov

Rep. Judy Biggert's Web site offers some of the most impressive legislative material we saw in our evaluations. The section called "Judy's Views" includes: explanations of where she stands on the issues and how she's voted on key pieces of legislation; summaries of her sponsorships and cosponsorships and the status of these bills; and answers to frequently asked questions on the legislative process. Despite the complexity of the subject matter, the entire legislative section is easy to understand because it is written as though Rep. Biggert is having a one-on-one conversation with the user.

Representative Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD)

gilchrest.house.gov

The first thing you notice about Rep. Wayne Gilchrest's Web site is its friendly and inviting feel. The colors, layout, and features all work together to draw you in and encourage browsing through the site. The in-depth information provided on the site changes frequently to respond to current events. Statements on the hot topics of the day, interactive features such as an online poll, and a weekly update on legislative activity, help Rep. Gilchrest create a pleasing and informative Web site that encourages visitors to return.

Representative Mike Honda (D-CA)

www.house.gov/honda

Rep. Mike Honda's Web site stood out in our evaluations for the way it presents its issue information. "Mike in Congress" provides in-depth information on three of his key priorities in Congress. For example, he gives an overview about why technology is a priority for him, and then goes into further detail on seven technology-related issues. But Rep. Honda focuses on more than his own priorities – the site includes his positions on 20 different issues in which his constituents are interested!

Representative Mike Pence (R-IN)

mikepence.house.gov

Rep. Mike Pence uses his previous career in radio broadcasting to his advantage in Congress. Rep. Pence gives short daily speeches on the House floor, which his office then provides on his Web site using low-cost, low-tech equipment. These regular audio and video updates show his constituents how hard he works on a daily basis.

Representative Steve Rothman (D-NJ)
rothman.house.gov

Many congressional sites are finding creative ways to be more helpful to their online visitors and Rep. Steve Rothman's site is one of them. For reporters, Rep. Rothman's site includes a "media kit" with downloadable high-resolution photos and press releases organized by date and topic. For constituents, his "Working for District 9" section gives information on New Jersey-related accomplishments. And for kids, the site offers a special Web-based form that encourages them to "ask Steve" their questions.

Standing Committees

Senate Budget Committee (majority—Democrats)
budget.senate.gov/democratic

The Democrats of the Senate Budget Committee have created a Web site that accurately and effectively represents the committee online. This site provides a wealth of information to meet the diverse needs of the audiences that it serves, including an extensive chart library and the equally impressive "budget background." What's more, the Committee translates its complex information into such user-friendly language that citizens, not just budget experts and congressional staff, can understand what it does.

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
(majority—Democrats)*
energy.senate.gov*

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources was praised all around for its user-friendly and well-organized Web site. What really stands out, however, is the innovative way that the site presents its information. The Chairman and Ranking Member on Energy and Natural Resources are given equal representation on this site. The site even offers its visitors access to information from both the majority and minority offices. This bipartisan approach to providing committee information particularly impressed our evaluators, and is likely appreciated by the public as well.

House Committee on Agriculture (majority)
agriculture.house.gov

The House Committee on Agriculture uses its site to provide extensive material that experts want – from detailed bill text and policy information to statements from various third party groups. The educational information found throughout the site is also outstanding. The Agriculture Committee includes on its site a glossary of agricultural terms as well as several pages of "fact sheets" that make the wide range of issues within the committee's jurisdiction easy to understand.

House Armed Services Committee (majority)

www.house.gov/hasc

The Web site of the House Armed Services Committee provides experts with a wealth of information, including current and past legislation, official committee correspondence and reports, and additional materials, such as related GAO reports. The site also offers e-mail newsletters. Now, whenever the Committee updates its Web site with reports, press releases, or hearing schedules, interested parties are updated as well.

House Committee on Education and the Workforce (majority)

edworkforce.house.gov

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce is using its Web site to develop and reform legislation. The Committee launched an online initiative called “Great IDEAs,” designed to solicit feedback on the reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). Interested parties were allowed to submit their suggestions concerning how to improve IDEA based on their own experiences. Education and the Workforce is one of the few committees to encourage public participation in the legislative process.

House Committee on Energy and Commerce (minority)

www.house.gov/commerce_democrats

The Democrats of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce have created a timely and effective Web site that provides more than just the partisan material usually found on minority sites. This site provides statements, dissenting views, correspondence, and other information in a detailed and non-confrontational manner. The Energy and Commerce Democrats not only provide their views and priorities, but the site also makes an effort to include official committee information.

House Committee on Rules (majority)

www.house.gov/rules

Although its function is procedural and internal to the House of Representatives, the Committee on Rules has chosen to create a Web site rich in content for both congressional staff and the public. The site does an exceptional job of posting the committee’s decisions on rules as soon as they are made, giving congressional staff immediate access to the information they want. Additionally, the Committee has made the rules process, which can be difficult to understand, easily comprehensible through its “How Congress Works” section.

House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (majority)

veterans.house.gov

The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs serves a constituency of 25 million American veterans. To meet their needs, the committee has produced a user-friendly Web site filled with information about veterans benefits and offering key

services online. This content-driven and content-rich site serves veterans, Members, and staff alike.

Leadership Offices

Senate Republican Conference src.senate.gov

Do you want to know what your colleagues are saying about the issues? On its site the Senate Republican Conference has created a smorgasbord of multi-media files of their Members' statements. Besides press releases, the Conference also provides radio and TV clips online. Posting these media files to a Web site is easy for congressional staff to do and is accessible to reporters and the public. The Conference can also integrate this information with the Web sites of Senate Republican Member offices.

House Majority Whip Tom DeLay* majoritywhip.house.gov*

The office of the House Majority Whip plays a critical role in communicating upcoming floor activity. It is responsible for producing the schedules and information that describe the legislation that will be considered on the House floor and announce when it will be considered. The office uses its Web site to help serve this function by posting daily and weekly reports of the floor schedule that are also made available through e-mail updates. To supplement the floor schedule, the site also provides access to other legislative resources, such as the Clerk of the House.

House Republican Policy Committee policy.house.gov

The role of House Republican Policy Committee is to discuss, formulate, and come to consensus on the legislative agenda and priorities of the Republican Conference. Its Web site helps in that mission by providing those Members who do not belong to the committee and other outside experts with access to the committee's work. Especially noteworthy on the site are its legislative subcommittee pages, which summarize the subcommittee's agenda (whether it be health, education, or tax policy), along with the latest news releases and meetings of that subcommittee.

CONGRESS ONLINE BRONZE MOUSE AWARDS

The following 33 Web sites received grades of A- in our evaluations. While they should serve as models for other congressional offices, their online practices were slightly less innovative or extensive when compared to the Gold and Silver Mouse sites. To these 11 Senate Member Web sites, 15 House Member Web sites, and 7 committee Web sites, we award Congress Online Bronze Mouse Awards.

Senate Member Offices

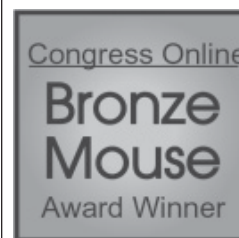
| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) | boxer.senate.gov |
| Senator Jean Carnahan (D-MO) | carnahan.senate.gov * |
| Senator Mark Dayton (D-MN) | dayton.senate.gov |
| Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) | dodd.senate.gov |
| Senator Bill Frist (R-TN) | frist.senate.gov |
| Senator Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC) | hollings.senate.gov |
| Senator Herb Kohl (D-WI) | kohl.senate.gov |
| Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) | kyl.senate.gov |
| Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) | schumer.senate.gov |
| Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) | specter.senate.gov |
| Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) | wellstone.senate.gov * |

House Member Offices

| | |
|---|--|
| Representative Cass Ballenger (R-NC) | ballenger.house.gov |
| Representative Eric Cantor (R-VA) | cantor.house.gov |
| Representative John Doolittle (R-CA) | www.house.gov/doolittle |
| Representative Porter Goss (R-FL) | portergoss.house.gov |
| Representative Gil Gutknecht (R-MN) | www.gil.house.gov |
| Representative Amo Houghton (R-NY) | houghton.house.gov |
| Representative Walter Jones (R-NC) | jones.house.gov |
| Representative Jim Matheson (D-UT) | matheson.house.gov |
| Representative John Mica (R-FL) | www.house.gov/mica |
| Representative George Nethercutt (R-WA) | www.house.gov/nethercutt |
| Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) | www.house.gov/roybal-allard |
| Representative Bernard Sanders (I-VT) | bernie.house.gov |
| Representative Thomas Tancredo (R-CO) | www.house.gov/tancredo |
| Representative Lee Terry (R-NE) | leeterry.house.gov |
| Representative Heather Wilson (R-NM) | wilson.house.gov |

Standing Committees

| | |
|--|--|
| House Budget Committee (majority) | budget.house.gov |
| House Budget Committee (minority) | www.house.gov/budget_democrats |
| House Committee on Financial Services (majority) | financialservices.house.gov |
| House Committee on Government Reform (majority) | www.house.gov/reform * |
| House Committee on the Judiciary (majority) | www.house.gov/judiciary |
| House Committee on Resources (majority) | resourcescommittee.house.gov * |
| House Committee on Science (majority) | www.house.gov/science |



[Senate Member Offices](#)

[House Member Offices](#)

[Standing Committees](#)

[Leadership Offices](#)

THE FIVE BUILDING BLOCKS OF EFFECTIVE CONGRESSIONAL WEB SITES

Congressional staff repeatedly seek our advice on their Web sites: What information should I post on my site? What services should I offer? What do constituents want from us? What are other offices doing? *How can I improve my congressional Web site?* This section of *Congress Online* is a “how to” guide, designed to walk you through the necessary steps for building an effective congressional Web site. Through extensive research, we identified five building blocks that encompass the most fundamental elements of effective online communication. These building blocks, in order of their importance to the success of a congressional Web site, are:

1. audience,
2. content,
3. interactivity,
4. usability, and
5. innovations.

In the following pages, we describe how you can use each of these building blocks in the development or improvement of your own Web site. More specifically, we define each one, and offer guidance on how to incorporate it into your Web site, using the Congress Online Gold, Silver, and Bronze Mouse Award winners as models. We also offer helpful tips on what to avoid when modifying your site. We conclude with a discussion of mistakes congressional offices are making with their sites.

This section will be most effective when used while sitting at your computer and viewing the good practices and features employed by the best Web sites on Capitol Hill. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

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 that the office wants to target, and has methodically built the site around those audiences.

Overview

The most fundamental rule for the success of any communications effort, including an effective Web site, is “know your audience.” A Web site that is not targeted to the needs of its audiences cannot be successful – regardless of the time and effort that went into creating it. For this reason, whether you are a Member, committee, or leadership office, a clear and strategic understanding of who your audiences are, and what they want, is essential.

On the Web, audiences can generally be divided into two categories: seekers and recruits.

[1. Audience](#)

[2. Content](#)

[3. Interactivity](#)

[4. Usability](#)

[5. Innovation](#)

- **Seekers** are the primary audience of a congressional Web site. They come to the site of their own volition and with their own needs and motives in mind. Basically, seekers are the people a congressional office is *reactive* to, whether on or off line.
- **Recruits** are often a subset of the seekers. They are the people the office wants to target – the people that the office is *proactively* trying to reach. Recruits are the people with whom the office wants to build relationships, both on and off line.

Member, committee, and leadership offices will have different sets of seekers, depending on their function or jurisdiction within the Congress, and different recruits, based on their goals and priorities. The key to creating a successful Web site lies in identifying the various audiences your site attracts and determining which of these groups comprise the bulk of your seekers. To help offices with this task, the Table 1 below describes the typical audiences we identified for Member, committee, and leadership offices, and the considerations each office must take into account when identifying their seekers and recruits.

| Office Type | Typical Audiences | Key Considerations when Identifying Your Audiences |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Member Offices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constituents • Reporters • Activists • Students and Educators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the key constituencies in the district or state? • What are the Member’s key issues? • What are the Member’s goals and priorities? |
| Committee Offices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal congressional* • Internal partisan* • External non-professional* • External professional* • Combined professional and non-professional* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role and jurisdiction of the committee? • What are the Chair’s goals and objectives? |
| Leadership Offices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public • Reporters • Party supporters in and outside Congress • Congressional staff • Lobbyists and advocates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role and purpose of the office within the leadership structure? • What are the goals and priorities of the Leader? |

**The various audiences of committee offices are described in greater detail in Figure 1.*

FIGURE 1 -- AUDIENCES CLASSES OF STANDING COMMITTEES

- **External, non-professional audience.** Some committees have sizeable audiences that are both external to Capitol Hill and comparable to Member office constituencies. These audiences are usually composed of individuals and groups that have a strong personal, not professional, interest in the issues the committees handle. Committees whose audiences fall into this category must – like many Member office Web sites – focus their attention on providing answers to frequently asked questions and access to frequently requested information and services to individuals and small groups.
- **External, professional audience.** Other committees have largely professional audiences of lobbyists and advocates who have a high degree of familiarity with the committees' issues and inner workings. Committees whose audiences primarily fall into this category must concern themselves with providing timely and detailed legislative information and access to committee documents that this demanding audience needs, especially since the audience will get the information it needs one way or another, whether it be online or from a committee staffer.
- **Internal congressional audience.** A select number of committees primarily serve the administrative and organizational needs of Member Offices and committees. As a result, there is seldom reason for the general public to seek information from these Web sites, so these sites must primarily be concerned with providing the information the internal congressional audience will seek. In many cases, committees that have primarily internal audiences will focus their Web efforts on their intranet Web sites, rather than their public Web sites. For this reason, these committees often maintain fairly basic public Web sites.
- **Internal, partisan audience.** Minority Web sites have entirely different purposes, goals, and audiences than majority sites. They do not “own” the committee information. All they really own is their own documents and dissenting views. Their audiences are almost completely composed of people of the same party (and often only congressional staff of the same party). The efforts of minority staff are focused on providing content to these much smaller audiences. For these reasons, and as a result of limited resources, minority Web sites do not exist for every committee.

Tips for Identifying and Targeting Your Web Audiences

Identifying your seekers and recruits is the most fundamental step that you will undertake in creating an effective Web site. Once you have done so, you will be able to meet the many needs of your various audiences. The key to identifying your online audiences is to recognize that they are the same people to whom you respond, and whom you target, off line. The following guidelines will help you identify the audiences that you will be serving and understand how you can better meet their needs.

- **Focus on constituents first.** Members have natural constituencies to whom they must respond. Certain committees and leadership offices may also have citizen audiences, depending upon their jurisdictions and profiles within the Congress. Our award-winning sites clearly address their constituents' needs. Almost everything on *Sen. Tom Carper's (D-DE)* site is put into context for Delawareans, including pages of county-specific information, and a section devoted to congratulating citizens for their achievements. The same can be said about *Sen. Jeff Bingaman's (D-NM)* site, which uses language and special features to welcome and help the residents of New Mexico.
- **Be responsive to—but not completely focused on—the press.** Reporters are a key audience for any congressional office, but they make up only a small percentage of the total traffic to a congressional Web site. We found that reporters *are* using Member, committee and leadership Web sites for research, though they still rely on personal interviews with Members and press secretaries when writing their stories. Offices should create sections of their Web sites devoted to meeting reporters' needs, rather than gearing the entire site toward them. *Sen. Tom Harkin's (D-IA)* "Tools for Journalists" and *Rep. Chaka Fattah's (D-PA)* downloadable media kit are examples of how our award winners are providing customized features for reporters. Other sites, such as those of the *Senate Republican Conference* and *Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN)*, are posting audio and video files that reporters can then download at their convenience.
- **Build relationships online as well as off line.** Most offices focus their attention on developing relationships with their recruits off line through mass mailings, press coverage, legislative initiatives, and strategic scheduling. However, the offices with the best Web sites recognize that they have the ability to influence and energize their recruits online as well. Building online relationships is one of the many strengths of the *House Republican Conference* site. This site brings its numerous recruits back over and over again by allowing them to: create a user profile that will display content on the home page based on their chosen topics of interest; participate in an online discussion board; and subscribe to several e-mail newsletters. Member offices, meanwhile, can forge relationships with specific groups in other ways. *Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA)*, for example, has an entire section focused on informing and meeting the needs of veterans, a core constituency for his office. And the best part about building positive online relationships is that they can easily become positive off line relationships too.
- **Use your site to mobilize activists.** Issue advocates, whether they are senior citizens organizing letter-writing campaigns or lobbyists in Washington, DC,

play a significant role in the legislative process. Activists are now using the Web to organize and communicate, and it is important for congressional offices to consider their needs as they develop their Web sites. A couple of our best sites are helping advocates in unique ways. *Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)* has devoted a section of his Web site to teaching citizens and others how to communicate their concerns effectively to their elected officials. On the other side of the Hill, *Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)* offers legislative information brochures containing detailed issue information that constituents and interest groups can download, print out, and distribute for themselves.

- **Use your Web site to advance the strategic goals of the office.** The use of promotional language and accomplishments-oriented content, often used with success off line, can have the opposite effect when used online. This type of information should be on your site, and it can be extensive, but it should not be something that visitors immediately confront on the home page. It should instead be something which they can read if they choose to do so. The best sites are those that convey their boss' strategic goals and agenda without seeming to be too political or self-promoting. *Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT)* accomplishes this through user-friendly information architecture and content that focus on the needs of Vermonters first. The "Front & Center" section, describing his legislative agenda, while located in the center of the page, is not the first place visitors look. Instead, they are drawn to the Vermont and constituent services sections because of his innovative layout. *Rep. Judy Biggert (R-IL)* includes a list of accomplishments and awards called "Judy's Resume" with the biography posted on her site.
- **Provide timely and relevant information for congressional staff.** Congressional staff are an important audience for congressional Web sites, especially for committee and leadership sites. Determine what information and services congressional staff – including those from state or district offices – will need, and then decide whether they are better offered on a public Web site or on an internal intranet. The *House Majority Whip*, for example, makes it easy for congressional staff to access the information they are seeking. Daily and weekly schedules of legislative activity are not only posted on the Web site, but are also offered as e-mail updates, ensuring that staff are notified of schedule changes as they occur. One of the most impressive aspects of the *Senate Budget Committee* site is the extensive "Chart Library" that allows staff to download and use any of the numerous charts, graphs, and statistical information produced by the committee. The *House Committee on Rules* also helps congressional staff (its primary audience) do their jobs more effectively by posting committee decisions about legislative procedure as they happen, dramatically reducing the need to provide such information off line.

What to Avoid

- **Using self-aggrandizing language and graphics.** Your Web site is very different from a newsletter or TV appearance. It is not a broadcast medium, and people do not passively see it. The only reason people make the active effort to

come to your Web site is to find information that THEY want. The less your Web site seems like an advertisement of the Member's achievements – and the more it is an information resource – the more successful it will be.

- **Posting generic information.** Many sites that we evaluated provided such generic information that it could have come from anyone. It is very important for Member offices to personalize their sites. This will draw constituents in and makes the sites more valuable. Most of our award-winning sites were able to distinguish themselves through: mention of specific citizen groups or individuals; alerts to upcoming district or state events; information about how legislation affects the region; and references to people, places, and events back home.
- **Building the site around a single audience.** Many congressional offices still see their Web sites as media relations tools, rather than as virtual offices. As a result, they are building their sites around the needs of reporters. However, focusing on one audience, whether it's the media or constituents, neglects the interests and needs of other groups that the site attracts. It thus fails to take advantage of a tremendous opportunity to inform, serve and build relationships with all of the office's key audiences at nominal cost.
- **Treating your online audiences as separate and secondary to off line audiences.** Many offices use their Web sites to direct constituents to contact them off line for the information and services they are seeking. Yet, people who choose the Web as their method of contacting a congressional office are doing so precisely because they prefer to have their needs met online. Respond to their needs accordingly, and you will find you have more satisfied "customers," at less effort and expense to the office than you ever thought possible.

2. Content

The site provides up-to-date information that is specifically targeted to meet the needs of the defined audiences. This information attracts new visitors and supports the goals of the office.

Overview

Content is the most extensive and substantive component of a congressional Web site, and it is inextricably linked with audience. If an office fails to clearly identify its seekers and recruits, it will be nearly impossible for it to provide the information and services that they desire and that will encourage them to return. Once its audiences have been identified, however, an office can create a Web site that will:

- Provide excellent services to constituents and stakeholders;
- Support the goals and legislative priorities of the office;
- Attract and retain visitors;
- Save time and money on constituent services;
- Strengthen the public's understanding of the Congress; and
- Foster the public's trust in the democratic process.

The Five Building Blocks of Effective Congressional Web Sites

Congressional offices can do this for their Web audiences by being conduits, online, of the same high quality information and services they provide off line. More specifically, they can provide:

- **Legislative Information.** Legislation is what Congress is about, and offices that make it easy to find and understand legislation – and the role of the Member, committee, or leadership office in the legislative process – are providing a critical service to citizens.
- **Issue Information.** Most citizens think of legislation in terms of broad issues, rather than specific bills. They especially want to understand the issues in Congress that affect them directly.
- **Demonstrations of Accountability.** Citizens want to know that their representatives in Congress are accountable to them. They want to understand what Members are doing, with whom they are meeting, how they are voting, and how they can be reached.
- **Press Information.** Specialized features, information and services can make the site more relevant and interesting to reporters. Offices that make it easy for reporters to research a story about the Member, Chair, or Leader or about issues before Congress, are providing a valuable service to the press.
- **Educational Information about Congress.** Most citizens outside the Beltway have forgotten their high school civics classes. Offices can do constituents a great service by finding ways of making educational information easily accessible throughout the site so visitors can refer to it whenever they have questions.
- **Constituent Services.** Offices should provide access to the full range of information, services, and resources that are commonly requested off line. When applicable, committees and leadership offices can also provide online services to citizens.
- **Member Information.** While it shouldn't be the primary focus of the site, every congressional Web site should include a section for visitors that contains information about the Member's (or Leader's or Chair's) priorities, interests, accomplishments, experience, and expertise.

Tips for Selecting Timely and Relevant Content

Deciding what to present on your Web site can be tricky. Congressional offices are clearinghouses of information, so how do you decide what information should be posted online? Uploading everything you have available is not feasible, nor is it necessary. The following guidelines will help you focus your attention and resources on information and services that will best meet the needs of your audiences.

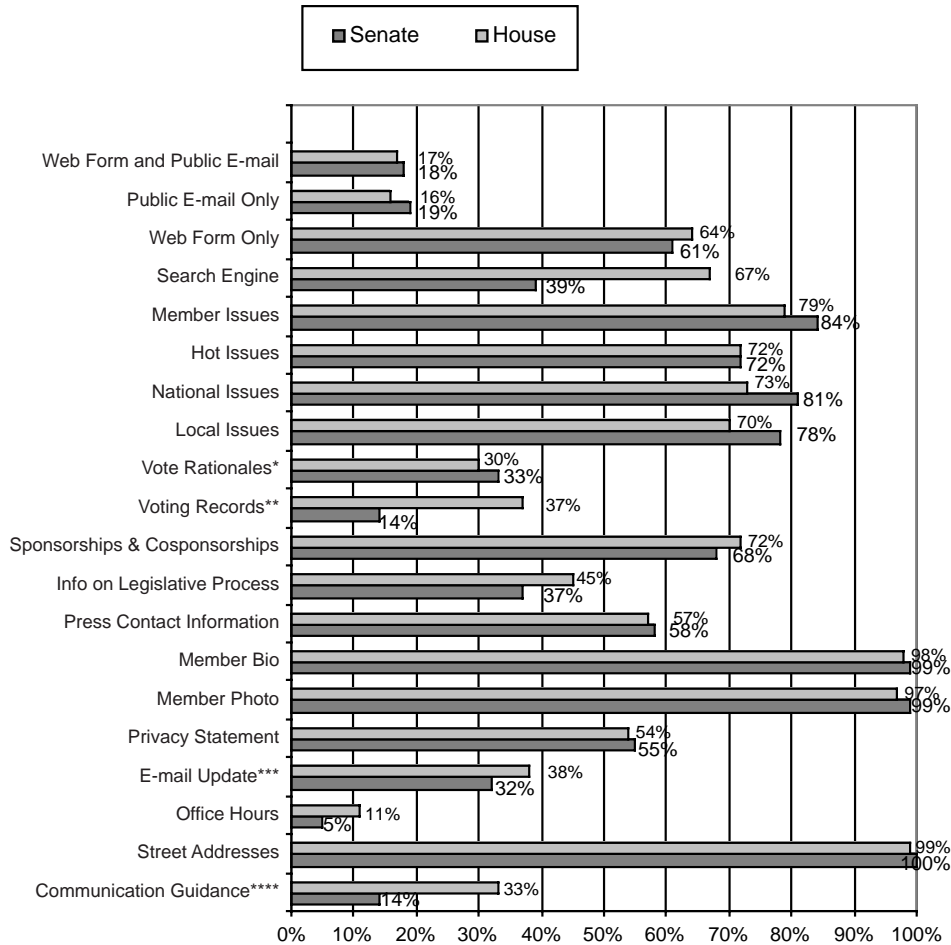
- **Focus on legislative information first.** Offices should focus on the business of Congress before branching out to other information. All of our award-winning sites—Member, committee, and leadership—provide outstanding legislative information. For example, *Rep. Mike Honda's (D-CA)* site provides links to

floor statements, voting records, committee assignments, and sponsorships and co-sponsorships. The site further provides links to legislative schedules and educational information on the legislative process, as well as a link to, and search engine for, Thomas. The *House Armed Services Committee* site is an excellent model for other committee sites. This site provides a description of its jurisdiction, as well as hearing schedules and transcripts, the status and text of legislation referred to the committee, and committee rules and procedures. Leadership office sites, such as that of the *House Majority Whip*, highlight and provide information about, and links to, legislation that supports their key goals.

- **Create an information service.** Your Web site is first and foremost a resource for constituents, advocacy groups, and reporters to consult when they need specific information. Treat your Web site as an extension of your entire office, not just your press operation, and be sure to provide the information, resources, and assistance that people turn to your office to find. *Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT)* provides a wealth of information about and for Vermont on his site, including instructions and guidance for accessing federal resources and services (i.e. grants, small business assistance, and casework help). Visitors to Member sites should also be able to initiate basic service requests – for flags, tours, photos, and documents, for example – and to solicit assistance with academy nomination and internship processes. Committees and leadership offices with natural constituencies can also provide service information online. The *House Committee on Veterans' Affairs* Web site provides information on veterans' benefits for its key audience.
- **Respond to commonly asked questions online.** There are some questions that staff in congressional offices must answer time and time again – though these questions vary from office to office. Find out what these questions are, and provide relevant, informative, well-organized, and frequently updated answers on your Web site. *Rep. Nick Smith (R-MI)* has an “Information Center” on his home page that answers many of the questions frequently posed to his office.
- **Include information on a variety of issues.** Citizens' concerns about issues important to them should be addressed on congressional Web sites. Provide information on local district/state issues, national issues, issues on which the Member is active, as well as current “hot topic” issues that are appearing in the headlines at a given time. *Sen. Bill Frist (R-TN)*, for example, provides his stance, voting record, and related press materials on a broad range of topics – from his top priorities to those of his constituents'.
- **Provide access to neutral sources of information.** You increase the value of the information you present and improve your credibility if you provide access to resources that will help visitors find answers to relevant questions that your site does not answer. Supporting information allows visitors to explore issues in greater depth, and they will be more likely to view you positively, even if they do not share your opinions and conclusions. *Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE)* broadened the scope and depth of his site by including related Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports and links to federal agency and other third party Web sites in his issue pages.

FIGURE 2 – COMPARISON OF FEATURES ON SENATE AND HOUSE MEMBER OFFICE WEB SITES

In our evaluation of Member Office Web sites, we looked for a range of features that our research showed were important to constituents. Following are the percentages of Senate and House Member offices that incorporate some of those features. This list does not represent everything we looked for, nor does it indicate the quality of the features, since any Web site that had a specific feature is included in these numbers.



* Any material that describes a Member's reasons for his or her vote on specific legislation.

** Any material that provides information about whether a Member voted yea or nay on specific roll call votes. Included were links to roll call votes provided by the House and Senate, links to non-congressional Web sites that provide Members' voting records, and Member-provided voting records, both comprehensive and abbreviated.

*** The ability to subscribe to e-mail updates or newsletters from the Member.

**** Any material that explains how to communicate with the Member.

- **Demonstrate accountability and accessibility.** Congressional Web sites can demonstrate accountability by providing voting records, rationales for key votes, and schedules – and they can do so without overburdening their staffs. Your constituents will not be interested in knowing about every meeting your boss attends or every vote taken. Stick to the most relevant and current information: meetings with constituents, public Member appearances in the district or state, committee hearings, the House and Senate floor schedule, as well as the Member’s views or votes on key issues (or current “hot topics” in the news). Check out the Web sites of *Rep. Melissa Hart (R-PA)* and *Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO)* to see the different ways you can provide schedule information, and the Web sites of *Rep. Chris Shays (R-CT)* and *Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)* for votes provided by date and topic.
- **Explain what you do.** Some offices provide educational information on their kids’ or students’ pages, but kids are not the only ones who need it. *Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-PA)* has a prominent section on his home page that explains how government works. His site includes an actual case study of how his “GEAR UP” initiative became public law. Your site should also include information about how the committee process works; explanations of legislative and congressional terms; and general descriptions of what a Member, Chair, or Leader does on a given day.
- **Give reporters what *they* need, not what *you* want them to have.** Reporters use your site to research their stories, so provide the information they’re looking for in an easy and accessible way. Most of our award-winning sites not only keep their press releases up-to-date and organized chronologically, but provide them by topic as well. Reporters also look for statements from the Member, Chair or Leader; Members’ rationales for their votes on key legislation; summaries of important national issues; and descriptions of Members’ accomplishments in Congress. Some sites, like that of *Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)*, also provide downloadable photos of recent events and pre-recorded audio and video messages.

What to Avoid

- **Creating original content for every page.** Writing all of your text from scratch wastes valuable staff time and resources. Instead, use materials already available or produced by your office and adapt them for the Web. You can use documents such as briefing materials, press releases, talking points, and constituent correspondence. The chances are that you have the information you need at your fingertips, though it may require minor modifications in format and text.
- **Writing for your boss and not your audience.** Congressional jargon and the legislative process are difficult for most people off the Hill to understand. Focus on making the information on your site understandable, rather than impressive and official-sounding.
- **Promising, but not providing, online assistance with constituent services.** The constituent services section on your Web site should provide services, not

The Five Building Blocks of Effective Congressional Web Sites

advise constituents to contact your office. If constituents had wanted to contact your office off line, they would have done so. Directing them to contact your office fails to meet their needs and preferences, and increases demands on your staff.

- **Providing unnecessary information and features.** Visitors come to your Web site for legislative information and services, not to be entertained with games, movies, local news and weather, or demonstrations of cutting-edge technologies. The best sites are those that focus on providing the information visitors came to find.

3. Interactivity

The Web site offers its visitors opportunities to express their views and fosters on and off line communication.

Overview

Constituents want congressional communications to be a two-way street – whether they are on or off line. They feel that communication with their Members is too infrequent – that Members only communicate with them when an election is coming up. 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 register their opinions and to have their opinions acknowledged and considered. To this end, congressional Web sites can play a particularly important role in fostering interaction with constituents and other audiences, in keeping them informed, and in building strong online relationships with visitors.

Online interactivity does not have to be complicated, time consuming, or even “high tech.” E-mail remains one of the easiest and most preferred interactive tools. Almost all offices currently provide public e-mail addresses or Web forms. However, a growing number of congressional offices (38% in the House and 32% in the Senate) are also sending out e-mail newsletters or issue updates, one of the most effective online interactive tools available. Nor are e-mail updates exclusive to Member offices: leadership offices are also using e-newsletters to communicate their party’s message, promote their agenda, and notify stakeholders of upcoming floor activity. A few committees are providing committee schedules and legislative tracking services through their e-mail communications.

In addition to e-mail updates, congressional offices can provide a range of other features that promote interactivity: online surveys and polls, “e-mail a friend” options, audio and/or video files, bulletin boards or online town halls, and guidance on communicating with the Member, committee, or leadership office.

Tips for Fostering Interactivity and Engaging Citizens

The Internet offers many tools that can provide quality interaction – and even dialogue – between Members of Congress and constituents without that interaction hav-

ing to take place in person or in real time. Using these tools, congressional Web sites can offer citizens a variety of opportunities to participate in the legislative process in ways that are most convenient for congressional offices, since many of them do not require a reply. The following guidelines will help you use your Web site to promote interactivity between constituents and your office.

- **Provide contact information.** Every congressional Web site should prominently display basic contact information, including telephone and fax numbers, the office's physical addresses and office hours, and their e-mail address or a link to their Web form. Surprisingly, many congressional sites bury this information, and some do not provide it at all. Others, like that of *Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)*, go beyond the basics, providing staff contact information, specific instructions on how to schedule an appointment with the office, and detailed guidance on how to write an effective letter or e-mail.
- **Post clear e-mail and correspondence policies.** Clear policies regarding e-mail correspondence reassure citizens that the office will process their communications efficiently. *Sen. Jeff Bingaman's (D-NM)* e-mail policy tells constituents how their correspondence is handled internally within the office and sets expectations for when they can expect a response from the Senator.
- **Create an online forum to directly respond to constituents' concerns.** Bulletin boards, such as that of *Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA)*, and online town halls are innovative and seldom used interactive tools. Posting constituent correspondence (with their permission, of course) and providing responses to them online enhances constituents' sense of congressional accountability, a critical concern for many citizens. Providing online answers to questions can also reduce constituents' need to contact the office for assistance.
- **Allow constituents to sign up for e-mail updates.** Opt-in e-newsletters are an easy way for citizens to keep informed about their Member's work and about legislative activity on issues that interest them. *Rep. George Nethercutt (R-WA)* sends out weekly newsletters to update his constituents about legislation, including past and upcoming votes, the floor schedule, and recent bill co-sponsorships. The *House Republican Conference*, which has over 75,000 newsletter subscribers, offers citizens the opportunity to specify how often they want e-mail updates, what format they prefer, and the topics in which they are interested.
- **Take advantage of low-tech features, such as feedback and comment forms.** Approximately 80% of congressional sites now provide Web-based forms, but offices should follow the examples of our award winners to take full advantage of all that these forms offer. *Sen. Chris Dodd (D-CT)* provides constituents with four different Web forms for various types of correspondence. Visitors to *Sen. Mary Landrieu's (D-LA)* Web site can "sign" an online Guestbook without expecting a reply from the office. The *House Committee on Energy and Commerce* provides an anonymous Tip Line that encourages citizens to report waste, fraud and abuse.
- **Let constituents' voices be heard through online surveys and polls.** Online surveys and polls offer quick and easy ways for constituents to register their opinions. One of the few sites to offer regular polls is that of *Rep. Chris Shays (R-CT)*. Recently posed questions on his site cover both national issues, such as

war with Iraq, and local issues, such as the establishment of casinos in his district. It's important to provide the results of the polls so people can see where they fall, but be sure to explain to respondents how the results will and will not be used within the office.

- **Foster trust in your Web site by protecting citizens' privacy.** Privacy statements should be included on every Web site, but currently only about half of congressional offices provide them. They should be written in user-friendly language that is designed to put visitors at ease about the information the site is collecting. If a Web site requires people's names and addresses before they can correspond with the office, the privacy statement should explain why the information is being collected and what will happen to it later. It is especially important to describe the steps that the office will take to safeguard any personal information it obtains. A good example to follow is that of *Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)*. She posts an extensive privacy policy and her Web site is P3P-enabled. This means that when users visit her site, their browsers will automatically check her policy against their user preferences.

What to Avoid

- **Inviting interactivity your office is not prepared to handle.** Interactivity can provide many benefits to your office, but only if you've planned for it. For example, asking for feedback on a policy issue is great, but you have to prepare for the higher volumes of correspondence that will result. Setting up management procedures beforehand will allow your staff to efficiently process the increased volume, rather than being overwhelmed by it. Think carefully about the interaction you are encouraging and the implications it will have for your office operations.
- **Cutting off communication when Congress is in recess.** Most citizens do not understand, or are not familiar with, the intricacies of the congressional schedule. Constituents in our focus groups assumed that if Congress is in recess, it means their elected officials were golfing or on vacation. While there isn't much legislative activity to report during recesses, you can correct this misperception by posting a schedule of town hall meetings, reorganizing your home page content, or providing a preview of what Congress or your boss will be doing after the break. Every August we see scores of congressional Web sites that haven't been updated since mid-July. Don't let yours be one of them!
- **Failing to follow through on e-mail newsletters.** Establish a policy concerning your e-mail updates *before* visitors sign-up, and stick to it. Create clear expectations regarding what information citizens will receive and when they will receive it. A weekly legislative issue update or monthly newsletter on health care should be exactly that. An agreed-upon policy will also establish clear guidance for office staff responsibilities for the newsletter's content and distribution.

4. Usability

The design and information architecture of the Web site provide quick and easy access to information and services.

Overview

The ease with which visitors can access and use a Web site – the site’s usability – can greatly affect its success. Research shows that Internet users will put up with a difficult-to-use Web site if the content is very good, but if they have to work too hard or wait too long to find the information they came for, they are less likely to come back.

Usability is a critical factor for any Web site, but it is particularly important for a public or government Web site. Government Web sites, including those of Members of Congress, should be easy for all Americans to use. The audience of a public Web site has a wide range of technical knowledge and ability, and the members of the audience will access the Web site with a variety of hardware, software, bandwidth, and access devices. For these reasons, public Web sites must be designed with the lowest common denominator in mind. The elements of usability that are especially important in this regard are:

- **Ease of navigation.** Visitors should be able to move quickly and smoothly through the site using the navigation tools, menus of options, and links provided.
- **Readability.** Your site must be simple for visitors to read. Factors that impact readability include: the font size and style; the contrast of font and background colors; the absence of distracting animations and moving text; and the length and structure of sentences and paragraphs.
- **Scannability.** The degree to which text can be scanned, rather than read in its entirety, greatly influences a site’s usability.
- **Timeliness.** Your site should be up to date and all information on it should be clearly dated.
- **Load time.** Ideally, Web sites should take no more than 15 seconds to load using a standard Internet connection.
- **Accessibility.** Congressional Web sites should be accessible to all visitors, even those with disabilities. Follow the standards for accessible Web sites found on the Federal Access Board’s Web site at <http://www.access-board.gov/indexes/accessindex.htm>.
- **Consistency.** Consistent layouts, designs, formats, and menu bars throughout the Web site ensure that visitors can quickly and easily navigate the site without having to figure out something new on every page.
- **Information architecture.** Organize your information in a way that is logical to your audiences by using language, topics, and information groupings that make sense to them.

- **Look and feel.** Careful attention to layout, graphics design, color and other factors will ensure the site is user-friendly and also produce a pleasing, inviting, eye-catching design.

Tips for Designing Usable Web Sites

By effectively incorporating the elements of usability, you greatly enhance your visitors' overall experience with the site. Conversely, if you do not keep the users' interests in mind, you will risk losing their attention or exposing them to a frustrating and negative experience with your office. Follow these tips to improve your site's usability:

- **Organize by issue, not by document type.** Most offices organize their Web sites by document type, with press releases in one location, speeches in another, legislation and casework in still others. This is not user-friendly, as far as your audiences are concerned. Constituents are interested in specific issues and don't want to look in three different places to find what they're seeking. A better option is that offered by *Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)*, who has 16 different issue pages with links to speeches, press releases, media files, and CRS reports on each topic. The *House Committee on Education and the Workforce* also follows this model, and provides issue pages on all the topics within its jurisdiction.
- **Write and revise documents for the Web.** Speeches, op-eds, articles, newsletters, press releases, and chat room transcripts are generally too long to be read comfortably online. If you want to include the information contained in these documents on your Web site, summarize and shorten it, and adapt it to a Web format. The Web site of *Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN)* provides easy to read pieces, using short sentences and paragraphs, bulleted lists, links to other information, and clear, concise language.
- **Follow the "three click rule."** To the degree possible, the information architecture of your site should allow visitors to get from any one page on your site to any other page in three clicks. This is especially important for frequently accessed sections and information, and less important for supporting information and document archives. Several of our best sites, including those of *Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)* and *Rep. John Larson (D-CT)*, provide plenty of helpful navigation options to help visitors move around the site easily.
- **Keep your format and navigation consistent on every page of your site.** Don't force your audience to learn new formatting and navigational rules on every page of your site. Each page should follow the same pattern. If you have a blue navigation toolbar on the left side of one page, there should be a blue navigation toolbar on the left side of every page. If you have links imbedded in text in one issue section, you should do the same thing in every issue section. *Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD)* uses the same horizontal and vertical navigation throughout his site. The only thing that changes on his pages is the content.
- **Make your site accessible to everyone.** Accessibility affects every visitor to your site. Clean, simple design and navigation, limited tables and frames, and text equivalents for all audio and video (including alternative text for photos and images, and text transcripts for pre-recorded greetings, speeches and other mes-

sages) will help ensure that your site can be used by everyone. The more complicated your site, the greater the likelihood that some online visitors, whether they are using a text reader or simply an older browser, will not be able to access what they are looking for. *Sen. Jeff Bingaman's (D-NM)* home page is one example of a site that follows these guidelines to create an accessible design. This site uses a clean, linear page layout, limited use of graphics (the home page banner, for example), and provides extremely detailed descriptions of its photos and graphics.

- **Make information, not graphics, the focus of your pages.** Every page of your site should be identified as yours, but using a banner or graphics that take up most of the screen serves no purpose. It also makes it difficult and frustrating for users to read the information they're after because they have to keep scrolling to get the information they are seeking. At least two thirds of every page on your site should contain useful information. Follow the example of *Rep. John Larson (D-CT)* and let your content be the focus of your pages.
- **Organize information carefully and clearly.** Think carefully about what kind of site design will make the most sense to your audience. Don't force visitors to wade through a lot of information that you consider important, but they do not. *Rep. John Boozman's (R-AR)* home page highlights the information most important to constituents: upcoming events, recent votes and news, constituent service links, contact information and more. The easier it is for people to find the information they need, the more likely they will be to return to your site in the future.
- **Include helpful navigational tools, such as a search function and site map.** While they are common practice off the Hill, only 67% of House sites and 30% of Senate sites have search engines. Search features and site maps – indexes to a Web site – allow visitors to find information quickly and easily. The *House Republican Policy Committee* offers a selection of features on its navigational menu, including an alphabetical site index, site map, search function, and site navigator.
- **Use the journalistic method of presenting information.** Like a newspaper, information on a Web site must provide a concise overview first and include the details later. That way, anyone interested in the details can keep reading (or clicking), but those who only want the basics can find them quickly and easily. The *House Committee on Veterans' Affairs* provides one paragraph summaries of recent news with links to the "full story."

What To Avoid

- **Cluttering the screen.** Visitors become frustrated by distractions and delays in their searches. Don't overwhelm users by posting everything on the home page. Provide the most important and most requested information first.
- **Failing to keep your information fresh and updated.** Outdated information is not only frustrating for visitors, it can also be misleading. Citizens may not realize that the information on which they are relying is no longer relevant. Ad-

ditionally, if people who are visiting in February 2003 see the most recent information is from the beginning of December 2002, both you and your site will lose credibility.

- **Creating graphics-intensive, slow loading Web sites.** Your site should load in 15 seconds or less using a standard Internet connection. Bear in mind that, despite the growing availability of broadband connections, the majority of wired households in America still use a 56kbps or slower modem to connect to the Internet. Try to steer clear of high-resolution graphics and “high tech” and slow visitors to view. Important or frequently requested information should be posted in HTML only, or provided in both formats.
- **Using animated graphics and hard-to-read text.** Movement on a Web page can be very distracting, and it can greatly increase the amount of time it takes to download a site. If you do include features such as scrolling text or moving graphics, test your site with constituent volunteers and see how they react to them. Additionally, using text that is too small, or a combination of several fonts, makes the site difficult to read. If visitors can’t see what you have to offer, your site is useless to them.

5. Innovations

Creative features enhance visitors’ experience on the site by making it more interesting or easier to use.

Overview

Innovations are the icing on the cake. They can help make a congressional Web site more interesting, easier to use, or more valuable to constituents. Innovations are not necessarily the products of cutting-edge Internet technologies, nor are they necessarily unique to a single site. They are the products of creative and strategic thinking about features and devices that will enhance a visitor’s experience on the site. Employing innovations successfully can be tricky, however. Used well, they can enhance the content and design of a Web site and make it much easier to use. Used poorly, they usually interfere with a visitor’s ability to get the information he or she came for.

Innovations, when used properly, are an effective way to distinguish your Web site and exceed audience expectations. Generally, the most valuable and interesting innovations we found in our evaluation process were those that made us ask, “Why don’t more sites do that?” Some of the innovative elements we identified were:

- Step-by-step help with casework and other constituent services
- Database-driven Member schedules
- First-person accounts from the Member about congressional activities
- A case study of how an actual piece of authored legislation became a law
- Information segmented by region, county, audience-type, etc.
- Media kits with printer-friendly press releases and downloadable photos

- Highlights of constituent or local achievements
- The ability to personalize content

These features may seem basic or even obvious to some Web users. However, because many of them are found on so few congressional Web sites, we considered them as innovations.

Tips for Employing Innovations

Innovations should not be used as an opportunity for Web designers to display technical talent. Innovative features on a congressional Web site should make your visitors' experience on your site more valuable. Keep in mind that innovations cannot compensate for what your site lacks in other regards. Without a solid foundation built on the other four building blocks, visitors will not return and innovations will be rendered useless. Use the following guidelines to ensure that any innovative features you include will improve the quality of your Web site.

- **Offer features that make your site easier to use.** Innovations can make the information you present easier to access or understand. For example, a few of our award-winning sites are organized around the needs of their many audiences. *Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV)* has different sections targeted to the needs of students, veterans, seniors, reporters, and others. *Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA)* recognizes four key audiences by offering menu choices for Iowans, students, teachers, and the press. This enables visitors to identify the audience into which they fit, and to quickly get to the information that meets their needs.
- **Offer features that improve communication.** Bulletin boards, online polls, the ability to e-mail information on a page to a friend, and other interactive features can enhance communication between you and your constituents without adding to staff workloads. *Rep. Earl Blumenauer's (D-OR)* page on effective advocacy is another innovative way to improve communication. It advises citizens about how to communicate effectively with Congress, by telling them what to ask, who to ask, how to ask, and how to follow-up.
- **Advance your mission through innovations.** Several offices use their award-winning sites to build support for their legislative priorities and initiatives. *Rep. Chaka Fattah's (D-PA)* Education Resource Center, *Rep. Earl Blumenauer's (D-OR)* section on Livable Communities, and *Sen. Patrick Leahy's (D-VT)* "Front & Center" section each focus on the strategic goals and objectives that these Members view as central to their terms in office.
- **Take advantage of innovations already available to your office.** Don't feel that you must create your own innovations: take advantage of features from other sites that are available for your use. The *House Republican Conference* site, for example, provides a feature that allows House Republicans to post a graphic and link to the Conference's "War on Terrorism" Web page. In the past, the Conference has provided other useful features, such as a tax refund calculator, for offices to use on their own sites. The *Senate Republican Conference* provides its Members with audio and video files in a similar fashion. If you click on *Sen. Sam Brownback's (R-KS)* audio or video archive, for example, a

The Five Building Blocks of Effective Congressional Web Sites

new window will open with a list of his messages available on the Conference's Web site. You can also use automated press archive features available from the House and Senate, or a feature from the Library of Congress that enables visitors to search Thomas right from your Web site. House offices can also simplify their e-mail management by utilizing the customized Web-based forms available from House Information Resources (i.e. for tour requests, scheduling requests, casework, feedback, etc.).

- **Provide features that convey the unique things your boss does.** Some of the most interesting innovations we saw were those that reflected a Member's personality and strengths. For example, *Rep. Mike Pence's (R-IN)* award-winning site draws on his background in radio by providing daily audio and video clips of short floor speeches and media appearances. Another award winner, *Sen. Bob Graham (D-FL)*, posts online accounts of his "workdays," spent on-the-job with constituents – as a construction worker, college professor, even a counterterrorism agent.
- **Offer features that empower citizens and encourage participation in government.** One of the most powerful aspects of an effective Web site is its ability to affect change and create online communities. Several of our award winners have used innovative features to involve constituents and others in the democratic process. *Sen. Debbie Stabenow's (D-MI)* "Prescription Drug People's Lobby" informs concerned citizens about the many prescription drug bills in Congress and encourages them to share their stories with her. The *House Committee on Education and the Workforce* used its Web site to solicit feedback from parents, educators, and advocacy groups on the reauthorization of key pieces of legislation.
- **Create features that improve service to citizens.** Fulfilling constituent service requests can be repetitious and time-consuming. Our award winners have incorporated innovative features on their Web sites that reduce their workload and save citizens time. For example, *Rep. Steve Rothman (D-NJ)* and *Rep. Nick Smith (R-MI)* offer step-by-step casework guides to help citizens who need assistance from federal agencies. *Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID)* has provided a "Fast Forms" box on his home page with quick links to commonly requested forms and applications, such as military academy nominations and flag orders. On a broader scale, *Rep. George Radanovich's (R-CA)* "Life Events" section provides a range of information organized by life's major events – from birth to school, taxes, and retirement.

What to Avoid

- **Providing "entertainment" features solely designed to impress visitors.** Graphics-intense "splash" pages, large photos, music, and introductory "movies" are very frustrating to visitors and serve no discernible educational or communications purpose. They also tend to discourage visitors from continuing to use the site and may discourage some users from ever returning. If you choose to offer these features on your site, don't force them on visitors. Allow users to opt in to them if they wish to.

- **Failing to consider the usability of innovative features.** Innovations such as drop down menus or Java pop up menus can reduce the space or text needed to convey certain information. Keep in mind, however, that such features are difficult for novice users and users who access your site with text readers.
- **Overextending your resources with high-tech and complicated features.** Some features require so much technical skill or such extensive updates that they drain office resources and are quickly forgotten. For example, we saw a number of Web sites that had abandoned their practice of offering regularly updated audio or video clips – and just left the old audio and video on the Web site. Offices should think carefully about how much time a feature will take to maintain, and either set up an effective management process to keep it fresh, or leave it out if it seems that it will be too time consuming.
- **Providing features with a lot of movement.** Flashing or moving graphics and scrolling text are very distracting to people who are trying to read the text on your Web pages because their eyes are automatically drawn to the movement. Waving flags, animated “e-mail” icons, and revolving bullets are just a few examples of features that we found in our evaluations. Think of these features as a children’s song: it’s cute the first time you hear it, but after that it becomes an annoyance.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR CONGRESSIONAL WEB SITES

To help guide your effort to improve your Web site, we compiled a list of key questions for each building block for you to think about. As you review your Web site and begin to think about where it could use greater depth, additional features and information, and overall improvement, ask yourself the following questions.

Audience

1. Is the site informative, inviting, and relevant to all of your primary audiences?
2. Does the site provide information reporters will need to write a good story?
3. What elements of the Web site indicate that it is targeted to its particular audiences, rather than to a generic audience?
4. With whom is the office trying to build relationships? What does the Web site do to satisfy those people's needs and interests?
5. Do the topics addressed and issues discussed reflect the interests and concerns of your audiences?
6. Does the site prompt visitors to return or develop on or offline relationships with the Member or office (not necessarily dialogues, but active interest in what the Member or office is doing)?
7. Does the site provide the information and interactivity to enable activists to learn about the issues and legislation that interest them and to communicate their views to the Member or office?
8. Does the site further the strategic goals of the Member, committee, or Leader?

Content

1. If your site were a visitor's portal to Congress, would the visitor be able to access enough information from your site to understand the activities of the Member, committee, or Leader in the larger congressional context?
2. Does the site provide educational and legislative information visitors will need to understand the activities of the Member, committee, or Leader?
3. Can visitors easily find answers to questions about services the Member, committee, or Leader can provide without contacting the office?
4. Does the site provide the context and guidance visitors will need to use the information on the site effectively?
5. How easily can a visitor link to useful information on and off the site? Is related content accessible from relevant places throughout the site?
6. What do citizens come to your office to find off line and is that information represented on the site?
7. Is the information clear and comprehensive enough to help reduce the burden on staff by making frequently-requested information easily accessible online?
8. Is the information helpful and informative to your primary audiences?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR CONGRESSIONAL WEB SITES (*continued*)

Interactivity

1. Does the site make it easy for visitors to figure out how to contact the office via postal mail, fax, e-mail, phone, and in-person?
2. Does the site guide visitors in how to best communicate with the Member, committee, or Leader?
3. Are there audiences with specific communications needs – such as reporters, activists, congressional staff, or agency staff – that the site can assist?
4. What does the Web site do to encourage communication on and off line between its audience and the office?
5. Does the Web site foster communication among constituents?

Usability

1. How easy is it to move through the site? Is it easy to get lost or confused?
2. Is the site design and layout consistent?
3. Is the information organized in a logical, user-friendly way that makes sense to people outside the Beltway?
4. How easy is it to locate specific information on the Web site?
5. How easily can an Internet user accessing the Web site with standard hardware, software, and bandwidth, access and use the site?
6. Is the site up to date? Is the content timely and relevant?
7. Is the look and feel inviting and helpful or does it detract from the site?
8. Is the text big enough? Does the background make it hard to read? Are there distractions on the pages?
9. Are there headers, bullets, links and other devices to help visitors scan the pages and target what they came for without having to read too much?

Innovations

1. What innovative features would make the site more interesting or easier to use? What would make visitors say “why don’t more sites do that?”
2. How well do the existing innovations, if there are any, enhance the site’s design and content and the visitor’s experience on the site?

MISTAKES CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES ARE MAKING

One of most common questions we are asked about the award-winning sites is “How do they do it?” When two offices use the same resources or the same vendor to create their Web sites, what makes one of them earn an A and another only a C? We’ve found that the distinction results less from what happens on the Web site and more from what happens behind the scenes. Most of the award-winning offices have integrated their Web sites into everything they do – on and off line. They have created management processes, technical infrastructures, policies, and priorities that support the Web site on an ongoing basis and ensure that it is comprehensive, up-to-date, interesting, and targeted to the needs of their audiences. This enables them to keep a steady, but manageable, stream of information and ideas flowing to the Web site from everyone in the office, from the Member, Chairman, or Leader on down to the staff assistants.

Conversely, we found that less effective Web sites are often the result of failures on the parts of many offices to plan, manage, and execute their Web sites effectively. The most common mistakes we saw offices making were:

- **Failing to get buy-in from the top.** A Web site cannot be truly successful unless it has management commitment. There needs to be someone in authority committed to ensuring that the site is integrated into the work of the office, whose priority it is to keep the Web site informative and up-to-date. This person must ensure that the office sets aside time and resources to get the work done, solicits participation from the entire staff, and provides incentives for contributing to the site – and disincentives for non-contribution. Otherwise, when faced with all other priorities and responsibilities in the office, the Web site will languish. In most of the award-winning offices, the Web site has the active interest and participation of the Chief of Staff or Staff Director and other top-level managers. Many even have the interest and support of the Senator, Representative, Chairman, Ranking Member, or Leader that the site supports. As a result, these offices get their Web work done, and done well.
- **Failing to strategically plan their Web sites.** Most congressional offices leave the planning of their Web sites to the “techies” who will be creating them – usually a Systems Administrator, House or Senate support staffer, or vendor. They see the Web site as a technical undertaking, not as a strategic opportunity. As a result, many offices are supporting generic Web sites that fail to convey the goals, responsibilities, and priorities of the Member, Chairman, Ranking Member, or Leader and fail to meet the needs of the office’s audiences. The offices with the best Web sites approach their sites just as they approach any other important initiative: strategically. They bring the right people together, devote time and thought to what it is they are trying to achieve, and devise a clear and comprehensive plan for the Web site. Then, they make sure the site is designed and executed according to their specifications. As a result, they are able to build sites that complement and enhance their goals and meet the information and service needs of their specific audiences.
- **Failing to allocate resources to the Web site.** The financial and staff resources in congressional offices have not seen increases commensurate with the in

creased demands of the Information Age. Most offices are overwhelmed because they see themselves as responsible for doing everything they were doing before the Internet went mainstream – and more. As a result, their Web sites suffer from lack of resources, which are viewed as permanently dedicated to other purposes. However, the offices with the best Web sites have shifted resources away from other tasks, such as printing and mass mailing, and allocated them to their Web sites. They have also made an effort to shift both the office and constituents toward electronic communications. Many of the offices have realized great returns as a result of this shift of resources, including: reduced postage costs, reduced printing costs, fewer phone requests for documents, more productive use of staff time, and positive feedback from constituents and stakeholders.

- **Making the Web site the responsibility of a single staff person.** When the Internet was still a novelty and constituents preferred to contact a congressional office via phone or postal mail, it was fine for the Web site to be managed by one low-level staffer who squeezed it in between answering the phone and writing mail. Now that the Internet has reached the mainstream and Internet users prefer to use the Web to any other mode of communications, this staffing arrangement no longer works. With only a couple of exceptions, the offices with the best Web sites have realized that no one person – especially not a junior-level staffer – can produce the content and conduct the strategic, big picture thinking necessary to have a truly effective Web site. And in those offices in which one staffer is responsible for the Web site, that person has authority to create and manage content for the site, as well as access to all of the information in the office, and strong relationships with everyone on the staff, which he or she draws upon to manage the Web site effectively. In most offices, everyone will need to integrate the Web site into their day-to-day thinking, and management will need to create a team-oriented approach through which all staff understand the importance of the Web site to the success of the office.
- **Managing the Web site as an afterthought.** Many congressional offices, even some of those with management buy-in, view their Web sites as something nice to do when there is time, rather than as something integral to everything they do. Rather than adjusting their other responsibilities to accommodate the responsibilities associated with effectively maintaining their Web sites, these offices continue doing things the way they've always done them. As a result, they are failing to take advantage of the communications and productivity benefits that effective Web sites can offer. The offices with the best sites, on the other hand, have realized that the Web site is an extension of everything they do: one that has the potential to reach and serve even greater numbers of constituents – at less cost – than any other tool in their repertoire.
- **Thinking of the Web site as an advertisement for the office, not an extension of it.** Many congressional offices use their Web site to “advertise” the information and services they can provide, without actually providing them online. The most common argument for this practice is that the office would prefer that staff interact with constituents, provide a personal touch, rather than depend on the impersonal nature of the Web. For this reason, many offices describe the general information and services they offer and provide a phone number or address for constituents to use to learn more. This is counterintuitive to

Mistakes Congressional Offices are Making

Internet users, who think of a Web site as an alternative means to find the same information and services they could find by calling, writing, or going in-person to the office. If they wanted to call, write, or stop by, they would have done so. Instead, they chose to go to the Web site. The offices with the best Web sites have realized this, and they are providing information and services that enable their audiences to serve themselves. Not only does this reduce staff and visitors' time and effort, it also enhances the image of the Member, Chairman, Ranking Member, or Leader. Visitors who find what they are looking for online give as much credit to the office as do visitors who get what they need offline. A satisfied customer is a satisfied customer, whether or not there is any human interaction.

- **Creating their Web sites with only Internet users in mind.** One of the most common arguments offices use against devoting resources to their Web sites is that the Internet has not opened Congress to *all* Americans. Although well over half of Americans have Internet access, there are still a sizeable number who do not. What many of the offices with the best Web sites have found, however, is that their online information, in addition to serving those with direct access, is also serving citizens off line in myriad ways. Teachers and librarians are distributing educational information. State and local agencies and non-profit organizations are referring to service information. Grassroots advocates and businesses are distributing issue and legislative information. Citizens are printing out e-mail newsletters and distributing them to neighbors. And reporters are incorporating information into their stories. Thus, the Internet is fostering greater access to congressional information, even in districts and states without a high percentage of Internet users. Offices that take advantage of this fact and create online content that can be easily replicated or disseminated on paper have the potential to inform and serve even more constituents with their Web sites than they ever imagined possible.

CONCLUSION

The Internet is here to stay. The public is going online in droves, and with people of every demographic becoming increasingly dependent on the Web, the digital divide is shrinking. By now, 59% of American households have Internet access, and an even higher percentage of Americans are online on a regular basis through Internet use at work and school. The Internet has become integrated into our lives, and it is transforming social, political, and economic institutions throughout the country – and throughout the world. It is poised to become at least as important as traditional off line communications media, and institutions that fail to use the Internet effectively will be viewed as antiquated and inadequate.

The improvement in congressional Web sites in the last year demonstrates that Congress is meeting the challenges of the Information Age. Hundreds of congressional offices have grown to recognize the value of the Internet as an important service and communications tool. Members are devoting time and resources to their Web sites, integrating them into their work, and attempting to provide the legislative information and services citizens are seeking. The impressive practices of this year's Congress Online Award winning Web sites illustrate new and effective ways that congressional offices can serve their constituents by devoting time and energy to their Web sites and using their resources wisely.

Unfortunately, 25% of congressional offices have not yet understood the value of the Internet, nor have they yet felt compelled by their stakeholders to provide information and services online. These offices are missing a valuable opportunity to interact with more citizens than ever before possible, to streamline their operations and enhance their productivity, and to meet citizens' needs more easily and more thoroughly than traditional communications tools can allow.

The Congress Online Project commends the offices that have embraced the Internet as a promising tool for communicating with, and better serving, citizens, and we encourage those who have not yet done so to follow their lead. It is our hope that, through this report, the offices which have not yet shifted to online communication will have the tools and incentives they need to create Web sites that citizens can depend upon.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF CONGRESS ONLINE

The dramatic improvement of congressional Web sites is exciting because it indicates that congressional offices, which are typically slow to adapt to technology, are quickly embracing the Internet. Increasingly, offices are viewing their Web sites as important communications tools that can effectively engage citizens in the legislative process. As a result, the Internet is transforming the way congressional offices manage information and interact with citizens. This transformation is subtle, but significant. As the Internet transforms the practices of individual offices, so too will it transform Congress, as an institution. In fact, this is only the beginning of a long and significant change process that the Information Age will bring to Congress.

One of the biggest challenges that Congress will face as a result of the Internet will be managing its resources to take advantage of the communications and productivity benefits that Internet technologies offer. The pioneers of Congress online are the people working hard behind the scenes in individual Member, committee, leadership, and institutional offices to provide exceptional Web sites. Unfortunately, these pioneers are, by and large, working alone, and they will soon reach a point past which they cannot go without additional staff and financial resources. Indeed, most of our award winning offices achieved their success by using their existing resources fully and efficiently. Further improvements can only come from the sharing of knowledge and resources. The online pioneers in Congress will soon need to combine their efforts and share their visions, resources, and experiences to develop a coordinated strategy for the Congress of the future.

As part of a coordinated effort, Congress will need to consider a range of issues, including the need to create a unified presence on the Web. Congress will soon feel pressure to better meet the demands of citizens who want easier access to congressional information. Through the e-government efforts of the Federal Executive Branch and of many state and local governments, citizens are becoming accustomed to easy and user-friendly Internet access to government resources. For example, citizens can now go to the FirstGov Web site to access the vast online information and services provided by the Executive Branch, rather than having to individually visit the hundreds of agency and commission Web sites to find what they need. Unfortunately, there is nothing similar to FirstGov for Congress. There is no one Web site that provides easy access to all of the information a citizen might need from Congress. Instead, citizens must determine, on their own, which of the more than 700 congressional Web sites will have the information they seek. To provide citizens with easier access to congressional information, Congress will need to create a FirstGov for Congress – a Congress.gov.

The creation of the new Capitol Visitor Center may present an ideal opportunity to begin building that unified presence. For the first time in history, there will be a single point of entry to the U.S. Capitol – a place for visitors to gather to learn about Congress and the Capitol and to gain access to the work and people on Capitol Hill. Just as the Capitol Visitor Center will serve the millions of people who visit Congress in-person each year, so could a virtual visitor center serve the tens of millions who visit Congress electronically. Such a resource could provide

information about visiting Capitol Hill, educational information about how Congress operates and what Members do, and historical information about the most powerful legislative body in the world. It could provide a single, user-friendly point of access to the vast resources currently found on the hundreds of House and Senate Web sites. A single, centralized resource could also reduce, or even eliminate, the need for 540 Member offices to create and provide their own educational and tourism resources online.

If Congress is to adopt the Internet in a way that is truly beneficial to both citizens and the institution in the long term, it will need to implement the type of well-supported, coordinated e-government planning effort now being conducted by the Executive Branch. The FirstGov Web site is only one part of the extensive e-government initiative that the Executive Branch is implementing. The Executive Branch – at Congress’ direction – is also establishing the leadership, dedicating the resources, and opening the communications channels necessary to create a “citizen centric” e-government. To develop a comparable *legislative* e-government, Congress should:

- ∑ **Coordinate leadership** by establishing an official venue – a task force, caucus, or joint committee – through which the online pioneers can meet and lead the change process.
- ∑ **Develop a research agenda** to identify the opportunities, challenges, and possible impacts of legislative e-government on the institution and the nation.
- ∑ **Develop a coordinated vision and strategic plan** for legislative e-government, based on research findings and existing knowledge.
- ∑ **Commit resources** – financial and human – to a coordinated, Congress-wide initiative to strategically implement legislative e-government.
- ∑ **Implement legislative e-government** in strategic, incremental stages to ensure that the people, business processes, and culture of Congress have time to adapt to changes that occur.

The Internet is going to transform the legislative branch and democracy, with or without studied and coordinated integration. Without study and careful strategic planning, however, there is greater risk that the transformation will result in a weakening of the institution through unwise and uncoordinated spending, the implementation of inefficient “stovepipe” projects and technologies, failure to meet citizen expectations, staff confusion and frustration, and failure to support Members’ goals.

Now is the time to prepare for the changes and challenges that still lie ahead. The pressure to create a single online access point to Congress or to coordinate Internet resources and systems is not yet very great. It soon will be. With the proper leadership, Congress can use the Internet to strengthen our democracy. In this way, Congress can serve as a model for the Information Age as it did for the Industrial Age. This will be a daunting task. There are many political, cultural, procedural, and technical obstacles that stand in the way. Congress will have to overcome them. This is a “dare to be great” moment – a time for the online pioneers in Congress to elevate their sights and leave as their legacy a stronger and more accessible Information Age Congress.

APPENDIX A: DETAILED METHODOLOGY

Research

To identify the elements critical to the success of effective Web sites on Capitol Hill we conducted one year of research, beginning in the Fall of 2000. There were seven components to our research. These included:

- **Focus Groups with Constituents.** We conducted eight focus groups with constituents nationwide to identify their general impressions of Congress, congressional communications, and congressional Web sites. The results of the focus group research can be found in our report *Constituents and Your Web Site: What Citizens Want to See on Congressional Web Sites* (<http://www.congressonlineproject.org/focusgroups.html>).
- **Interviews with Congressional Staff.** We interviewed more than 100 Senate and House management, administrative, and technical staff to determine their objectives for, opinions about, and experiences with congressional Web sites and Internet communications.
- **Industry Research.** We identified and analyzed Web site standards and best practices in a wide range of industry sectors to determine how they might best be applied to the congressional environment.
- **Survey of Political Reporters.** We asked a small sample of government and political reporters inside and outside the Beltway to fill out a short e-mail questionnaire about their impressions and expectations of congressional Web sites.
- **Survey of Advocacy Groups.** To identify what advocacy groups want from congressional Web sites, we interviewed practitioners in the field of electronic advocacy, conducted an online survey of advocacy groups, and reviewed literature about electronic advocacy and public affairs.
- **Reviews of Non-congressional Web Sites that Provide Congressional Information.** We examined a range of public, private, and non-profit sector Web sites that provide access to information about Congress and Members of Congress and/or foster interaction with Members of Congress to determine what information and features they offer to the public.
- **Reviews of Previous Evaluations of Congressional Web Sites.** We collected and analyzed the methodologies, findings, and recommendations of previous evaluations of congressional Web sites to identify what other research had already been done.

Building Blocks for Effective Web Sites

Through this research, we identified five building blocks that underlie the success of the most effective Web sites on – and off – Capitol Hill. These building blocks, in order of their importance to the success of a Web site, are:

1. **Audience.** The Web site conveys the sense that the office has clearly identi-

Research

Building Blocks for
Effective Web Sites

Committee and
Leadership
Classes

Committees

Leadership Offices

Evaluation Process

fied its Web audiences, both those seeking information from the office and those that 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. This information attracts new visitors and supports the goals of the office.
3. **Interactivity.** The Web site offers its visitors opportunities to express their views and fosters on and off line communication.
4. **Usability.** The design and information architecture of the Web site provide quick and easy access to information and services.
5. **Innovations.** Creative features enhance visitors' experience on the site by making it more interesting or easier to use.

Together, these five building blocks encompass the most fundamental elements of effective online communication. These building blocks were selected not merely because they describe the current best practices in congressional Web sites, but also because we expect them to remain fundamentally important over time. At the same time, we believe that they provide enough flexibility to incorporate new Web standards and thinking that may occur in the months and years to come. For these reasons, they form the basis of our guidance to congressional offices and the basis of our evaluations of congressional Web sites.

Because we identified audience and content as the most important building blocks, our evaluation process weighted audience and content more heavily than interactivity, usability, and innovations. Additionally, because innovations are the least important building block to the success of a congressional Web site, we assigned the least weight to innovations. As a result, our evaluation process weighted the building blocks as follows:

- Audience: 25%
- Content: 25%
- Interactivity: 20%
- Usability: 20%
- Innovations: 10%

Within each building block, we identified the most important criteria for congressional Web sites to incorporate. Different criteria were identified for Member, standing committee, and leadership Web sites, and each criterion was assigned levels of priority, from one to five. Criteria with level one priority were the most important, and criteria with level five priority were the least important.

Committee and Leadership Classes

Because the roles and audiences of committees and leadership offices differ greatly, there are also great differences between the factors that contribute to the success of one committee Web site versus another, or to the success of one leadership Web site versus another. In order to account for this in our evaluation, 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 have to serve more technical and profes-

sional audiences, while others serve the general public. Thus one class of committees must be held to higher standards for providing technical information 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 technical information they provide.

The use of these classes enabled us to use the same criteria in the evaluation of all of the sites in each group: committee and leadership, while still ensuring a robust and accurate evaluation of each individual site.

Committees

The classes for committees were based on their primary audiences. All committees must provide for the same basic audiences – the general public, the press, experts on the issues in their jurisdictions, congressional staff, and citizens affected by their actions – but they differ in the degree to which each of these audiences demand access to their work. As a result, we separated committees into the following five classes:

1. Standing committees with significant external professional audiences.

These were 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.* Examples of committees in this class include the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and Budget, the Senate Committee on Finance, and the House Judiciary Committee.

2. Standing committees with significant external non-professional audiences.

These were 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.* Committees in this class include the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, and the House Committee on Agriculture.

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 novices and to experts.* Examples of committees in this class include the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and the House Committee on International Relations.

4. Standing committees with primarily internal congressional audiences.

These are the committees with jurisdictions that are largely internal to Con-

gress. *These committees were held to high standards for providing information and services for congressional staff 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, the Senate Select Committee on Ethics, the Committee on House Administration, and the House Committee on Rules.

5. **Standing committee minority offices with primarily internal partisan audiences.** Minority offices of committees do not control the bulk of the information that most visitors will be seeking on committee Web sites. As a result, they were held to lower standards for providing official documents, schedules, and publications than were majority Web sites.

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 and 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 focus on each of these things will differ, however, based on their responsibilities. To allow for this in our evaluations, we divided leadership into the following three classes:

1. **Leadership offices with primarily authoritative roles.** 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 spokesmen for the party both on and off Capitol Hill, and their Web sites will be of interest to citizens as well as to party activists and congressional staff. As a result, *they were held to high standards for providing authoritative party information for both citizens and congressional staff.* The leadership offices that fell into this class were the Speaker of the House, the House Majority Leader, and the House Minority Leader. The Majority and Minority Leaders in the Senate do not have separate leadership Web sites.
2. **Leadership offices with primarily organizational roles.** These are the leadership offices that conduct the organizational business of the party. Though their content and services, and therefore 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 staff and lower standard for providing information and services that are accessible to citizens.* The leadership offices that fell into this class were the Senate Republican Policy Committee, the House Minority and Majority Whips, and the House Republican Policy Committee. The Minority and Majority Whips in the Senate do not have separate leadership Web sites.

3. Leadership offices with primarily communications roles. 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 staff, as well as for communicating the parties' messages and accomplishments in ways that were accessible and informative to audiences on and off Capitol Hill.* The leadership offices that fell into this category were the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, the Senate Republican Conference, the House Republican Conference, and the House Democratic Caucus.

Evaluation Process

Our evaluation methodology was designed to be as fair and objective as possible, without being based solely on quantitative 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 and navigability of the site, the look and feel, and the degree to which the information meets his or her needs. As a result, a purely quantitative, checklist-based evaluation does not begin to measure actual user experience. To measure both the qualitative and quantitative factors that contribute to user experience as fairly and objectively as possible, we devised a multi-step evaluation process, which was conducted between August and November 2002. This process consisted of the following three steps.

Step 1: Benchmarking and Grading

This step was the most detailed and most rigorous step in our evaluation process, and it was the only step that examined all 610 Member office, standing committee, and leadership office Web sites. This was the step that determined the grades of all congressional Web sites.

We used the same criteria used in our 2001 evaluations, but this year, rather than using this step as a rough cut and using step two as the fine sort, we combined the first two steps of our 2001 evaluation process into one step. As a result, every congressional Web site was subjected to a detailed analysis this year, to which only the sites that went on to the second evaluation step were subjected last year. This enabled us to compare every Web site to benchmark criteria for its group (Member office, committee, or leadership) and, for committee and leadership sites, its class.

Additionally, this year, we assigned a numeric score, rather than an overall grade, to each site, which allowed us to better differentiate among them and to provide even more detailed guidance and analysis than we provided in 2001. The scoring system was carefully developed to ensure that the numeric scores corresponded exactly to our 2001 grading system and could be easily converted to grades. As a result, at this point in the evaluation process, every Web site on Capitol Hill had been subjected to a thorough evaluation and assigned grades. The top 25% of sites – those that had received grades of A and high Bs – went on to step 2 for further differentiation.

Step 2: Fine Tuning

This round of evaluations was designed to more finely differentiate among the best sites by measuring them against criteria that were not fundamental components for a successful Web site, but which our research showed considerably enhance visitors' experiences. If the evaluation process were viewed as a test, this round would have been the extra credit. It shuffled the scores of the A sites and bumped some of the B sites to As, and it enabled us to determine which sites would go to the final step of the evaluation to vie for Gold Mouse Awards. The top 62 sites were sent to the Expert Panel.

Step 3: Expert Panel Review

A nine-member Expert Panel was asked to review the highest-scoring sites and determine which would receive Congress Online Gold Mouse Awards. The panel was divided into teams, with one team reviewing the House Member office Web sites, one team reviewing the Senate Member office Web sites, and the third team reviewing the committee and leadership Web sites. The experts each individually evaluated the sites according to his or her own experience and expertise, using the five building blocks as guidelines. Upon completion of their individual evaluations, each team was also asked to agree on their award recommendations and to present them, and any sites about which they had questions, to the entire group. As a group, the Expert Panel came to consensus about which sites would receive Gold Mouse awards. They also recommended sites to receive Silver and Bronze Mouse awards. All of their recommendations are reflected in the final results. Additionally, the remaining A sites, which were not sent to the Expert Panel to vie for Gold Mouse Awards, were given Bronze Mouse Awards.

APPENDIX B: SELECT RESOURCES

Congress Online Project Reports

These reports were written with congressional offices in mind. They provide research, guidance, and advice targeted to the specific needs and challenges of the Internet environment on Capitol Hill.

Congress Online 2003: Turning the Corner on the Information Age (2003)

<http://www.congressonlineproject.org/webstudy2003.html>

This is the Web address for the electronic version of this report. *Congress Online 2003: Turning the Corner on the Information Age* and its companion report, released in January 2002, are the centerpieces of the Congress Online Project. They describe criteria for evaluating congressional Web sites; identify the best House and Senate Member office, committee, and leadership Web sites; describe congressional Web site trends and practices; and provide guidance to help congressional offices adopt the best practices.

Congress Online: Assessing and Improving Capitol Hill Web Sites (2002)

<http://www.congressonlineproject.org/webstudy2002.html>

A companion to this 2003 report, *Congress Online: Assessing and Improving Capitol Hill Web Sites* describes the results of the Congress Online Project's 2001 evaluation of all congressional Member office, committee, and leadership Web sites. It also provides detailed information about the research and methodology of the evaluation, identifies the best Web sites on Capitol Hill, and provides guidance to help other offices incorporate the best Web site practices we identified.

Constituents and Your Web Site: What Citizens Want to See on Congressional Web Sites (2001)

<http://www.congressonlineproject.org/focusgroups.html>

This issue brief by the Congress Online Project describes the results of eight focus groups with citizens nationwide to determine their perceptions of congressional communications, needs from congressional Web sites, and feedback on congressional Web sites. In addition to providing the basis for this issue brief, this research has been incorporated into the Congress Online Project's evaluation methodology and ongoing guidance to congressional offices.

[Congress Online Project Report](#)

[Web Site Design Resources](#)

[Non-congressional Web Sites that provide Congress-Related Information](#)

Web Site Design Resources

Following are resources that congressional offices may find helpful as they consider changes and innovations to their Web sites. The Congress Online Project has found them to be reliable and informative, but responsibility for the content posted on any of these Web sites is the sole responsibility of the organizations that host the sites.

Access Board Federal Accessibility Guidelines and Standards

<http://www.access-board.gov/indexes/accessindex.htm>

The Access Board is a Federal agency devoted to ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities to everything from office space and vehicles to telecommunications equipment and Web sites. This section of their Web site provides information, standards, guidelines, and guidance on creating Web sites that conform with the Federal accessibility standards with which any new federal agency or departmental Web page must comply.

Usability.gov

<http://www.usability.gov>

This site, created and maintained by the National Cancer Institute, provides current, research-based information about how to make Web sites and other electronic user interfaces more usable, accessible, and useful. It also links to a variety of quality Web sites and resources on usability, accessibility, and related topics.

Useit.com

<http://www.useit.com>

Dr. Jakob Nielsen is one of the foremost Web site usability experts in the world, and this is his Web site. It contains a wide range of helpful, interesting, and easy-to-understand information about making Web sites usable and avoiding some of the biggest and most widespread usability mistakes.

Webmonkey

<http://www.hotwired.org/webmonkey>

This is one of the oldest and best respected – if somewhat irreverent – resources for tips, guidance, how-to information, and advice on creating Web sites. The site has information targeted toward beginners, Web builders, and Web masters, which makes it easy for just about anyone wishing to get started on building a Web site.

Webopedia

<http://www.webopedia.com>

A searchable encyclopedia of Internet and technology terms, this site provides easy-to-understand definitions so that just about anyone can get a better handle on the jargon of the Internet and technology.

Non-congressional Web Sites that Provide Congress-related Information

The following are popular non-congressional Web sites that provide Congress-related information. We provide them here as resources for congressional offices to use to get ideas about what kinds of congressional information citizens are interested in and how to present that information in interesting and user-friendly ways.

AOL Government Guide's VoteNote

<http://votenote.aol.com>

Part of AOL's expansive Government Guide, VoteNote helps citizens find out who their elected officials are; learn about and track legislation and issues; understand the basics of communicating with and visiting Capitol Hill; communicate with other citizens and elected officials; and more.

Center on Congress at Indiana University

<http://congress.indiana.edu>

Directed by former Member of Congress, Lee Hamilton, the Center on Congress defines its mission as improving public understanding of Congress by explaining Congress to ordinary people. The Web site provides a range of informative and educational resources for citizens of all ages to help them better understand how – and why – Congress works, including the roles and schedules of Members of Congress, the legislative process, and the Federal budget process. It also contains a glossary of congressional terms to help citizens understand the jargon of Congress.

Congress.org

<http://www.congress.org>

Congress.org is a public service of Capitol Advantage that allows users to learn more about Congress, their representatives, other elected officials, and issues; communicate with other citizens and with elected officials; have their representatives' voting records sent to them each week; and more.

Project Vote Smart

<http://www.vote-smart.org>

Project Vote Smart is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that attempts to provide unbiased information about candidates and office holders at all levels of gov-

ernment throughout the United States – including Congress. It provides voting records, issue information, and congressional scheduling information, as well as performance evaluations of office holders' records on a wide range of issues from a variety of well-known special interest groups.

YourCongress.com

<http://www>YourCongress.com>

Created by a former Hill staffer, YourCongress.com was built to provide information about what's going on in Congress and how Congress works in a humorous and accessible way. The site provides profiles of Members of Congress; educational information about how Congress works and what Members do; legislative tracking capabilities; the ability for citizens to try their hands at writing a bill; and more.

APPENDIX C: CONGRESS ONLINE PROJECT EXPERT PANEL BIOGRAPHIES

John Aravosis

President, Wired Strategies Internet Consulting

As a lawyer, writer and political strategist, John has provided counsel on legal, technological, and political issues to the federal government, non-profit organizations, the media and private industry. With over ten year's experience in both public policy and technology, John specializes in using his unique blend of Internet, political, legal, marketing and international skills to create large-scale grassroots mobilizations. He is particularly known for his work on StopDrLaura.com (<http://www.stopdrlaura.com>), a year-long online campaign that led to the cancellation of conservative radio show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger's new TV show and a 2002 Golden Dot Award for civic excellence in online issue advocacy from the Democracy Online Project.

Before starting Wired Strategies (<http://www.WiredStrategies.com>), John served as the "online organizer" at the Children's Defense Fund. There he devised and implemented the online strategy for the successful CHILD Act campaign and created and managed one of the nation's earliest, largest and most effective child advocacy e-mail/fax networks. In addition to his Internet background, John has significant political and international experience. He served as senior foreign policy adviser to Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) and campaign advisor to Senators Chuck Robb (D-VA) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA). He has also worked at the World Bank, the Lyonnaise des Eaux in Paris, France; the US Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Italian Embassy in Washington, DC; and the office of former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. John is also a successful writer, having written for *The Economist*, among other publications, and he is a regular political pundit, having appeared on "The O'Reilly Factor" and "Hardball with Chris Matthews," among other shows. John speaks 5 languages, has visited or worked in 28 countries, has a joint law degree/master in international relations from Georgetown University, and lives in Washington, DC.

Janet Caldwell

Director, IBM Institute for Electronic Government

Through IBM's Institute for Electronic Government (<http://www.ieg.ibm.com>), Janet directs a robust research agenda with renowned academic and practitioner partners. Located in Washington, DC, the Institute is a global leadership resource in governance, economic development, citizen services, technology, education, and healthcare for the digital society. In the Center's cybercast studio, Janet oversees a variety of TV programs delivered over the Web.

Formerly the Director of Strategic Management for the County of Fairfax, Virginia, her innovations in government won national recognition at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Janet serves on the Harvard Policy Group, the Advisory Board for the Global Development Gateway, The World Bank, and Governor

[John Aravosis](#)

[Janet Caldwell](#)

[Michael Cornfield](#)

[Max Fose](#)

[Kathy McShea](#)

[Chris Porter](#)

[Joiwind Ronen](#)

[John Sampson](#)

[James Vaughn](#)

Gilmore's e-Communities Task Force. She was also a member of our 2001 Congress Online Project Expert Panel. An author, researcher, and frequent speaker, she holds an MBA, and a BA in sociology. Ms. Caldow resides in Vienna, Virginia, and Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Michael Cornfield

Associate Research Professor, George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management

In addition to his professorship at the Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM) (<http://www.gwu.edu/~gspm>), Mike serves as Research Director of the Institute for Politics, Democracy, and the Internet (formerly the Democracy Online Project) (<http://www.ipdi.org>). The mission of the Institute is to promote the use of the Internet in ways that uphold democratic values. Mike's products for the Institute include the pamphlet *Online Campaigning: A Primer*, a study for Harvard University of how the Internet was used during the 2000 Republican convention, and two books: *Politics Moves Online* (The Century Foundation, forthcoming) and *The Civic Web*, co-edited with David M. Anderson (Rowman & Littlefield).

Mike writes a monthly column, "The Online Campaigner," for *Campaigns and Elections* magazine, the leading trade publication for professional politicians. He is interviewed frequently about online politics by the press, and has lectured on the subject at colleges, universities, and association conventions throughout the world. A professor at the GSPM since 1994, Mike teaches the core course on strategy and message development, and a course on politics and the new media. He has written on media and politics for a variety of academic and general publications, including *The Wilson Quarterly*, *The Washington Monthly*, the *Journal of Communication*, *Political Communication*, *The Political Standard*, *Communication Booknotes Quarterly*, and the *National Civic Review*. He analyzed the 1996 presidential debates and the nation's first online election (March 2000) on C-SPAN. Mike received his Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University.

Max Fose

Partner, Integrated Web Strategy

Integrated Web Strategy (<http://www.iwsnow.com>) is an Internet consulting company specializing in helping political campaigns, non-profits, and corporations integrate the Internet into their overall strategies. Through Integrated Web Strategy, Max worked for several contested races during the 2002 election cycle, including the Talent and Graham for U.S. Senate campaigns. During the 2000 election cycle, he was the Internet Manager and Treasurer for the McCain 2000 Presidential campaign. The American Association of Political Consultants recognized his work by awarding him the top Pollie Awards for "Best Overall Internet Campaign" and "Special Award: Best Use of the Internet."

Prior to his work on the McCain 2000 campaign, Max was the Vice President of an Arizona political consulting firm. He has also worked for Gramm for President, the Arizona Republican Party, the National Republican Congressional Committee,

Appendix C: Congress Online Project Expert Panel Biographies

and McCain for Senate '98. Max served on the 2001 Congress Online Project Expert Panel.

Kathy McShea

Public Affairs Counselor, Emerald Strategies, Inc.

Kathy is the former Director of Consumer Information at the U.S. Department of Energy, where she led an agency-wide overhaul of the agency's Web site and toll-free phone system to ensure that popular information products and services are easy for consumers to find and use. The resulting energy.gov Web portal was recognized by Government Executive magazine in 2000 as one of ten "Best Feds on the Web," and by the Association for Federal Resource Information Managers presented her with a "Leadership Award" for the project. Prior to her service at DOE, Kathy was Media Director of the DC Office of Consumers Union, the publisher of Consumer Reports, and chief spokesperson for U.S. Senator Carl Levin (D-MI).

Kathy is now applying her 15 years of experience as a public affairs counselor to Emerald Strategies, Inc. (<http://www.emeraldstrategies.net>), her boutique online public affairs practice, designing custom information architecture and Web governance solutions for Web managers that leverage the power of Web sites to make public service organizations stronger. She speaks frequently about technology and politics at professional gatherings and conferences and also teaches graduate studies in political communication as a member of the adjunct faculty at American University and George Washington University. This is her second year as a member of our Expert Panel.

Chris Porter

Founder and CEO, YourCongress, Inc.

A 10- year veteran of Capitol Hill where he served in virtually every position, from intern to Chief of Staff, Chris left in 1999 to launch YourCongress.com (<http://www.yourcongress.com>), a non-partisan Web site that uses humor to inform people about Congress. YourCongress is dedicated to providing everyone – "especially people who fell asleep in social studies class" – with an easy and entertaining way to find out what's going on in Congress. YourCongress combines basic information about Congress, fun interactive tools, and a peek behind-the-scenes – all with an irreverent slant and written in plain English. Chris was recognized for his work when YourCongress received a 2001 "People's Voice" Webby Award for "Best Government and Law" Web site from the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. Chris has appeared on C-SPAN and National Public Radio and hosts job-hunting seminars for people seeking careers on Capitol Hill. Chris is also the author of *How to Get a Job in Congress (Without Winning an Election)*.

Joiwind Ronen

Managing Director of Consulting Services, Touchstone Consulting Group

Touchstone Consulting Group (<http://www.touchstone.com>), formerly GDSS, is a DC-based management consultancy with a long heritage of serving senior execu-

tives in government. Previously, Joiwind worked at the Council for Excellence in Government where she directed the nation's premier coalition of expert business, government, nonprofit, and research leaders focused on information technology as leadership tools for government. Over a period of three years, she helped local, state, tribal, federal and international governments use technology to become more results-oriented and relevant to citizens.

Joiwind holds a BA in Politics from Pomona College and a MPP from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and she has worked with and for government over the past ten years. She has spoken extensively on e-government throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. She has served as an Advisor to the Development Gateway of the World Bank, and as a member of the E-government Associates Group of the OECD, a member of the Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory Committee. Joiwind was a member of the 2001 Expert Panel of the Congress Online Project.

John Sampson

Federal Government Affairs Manager, Microsoft Corporation

After a ten year stretch working for the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives, John joined Microsoft Corporation's (<http://www.microsoft.com>) Law and Corporate Affairs division in April 1998. Since then, he has worked as the company's liaison to Republicans in the House in their Washington, D.C.-based federal government affairs office. John is trusted as an industry ambassador with a knack for deciphering the complexities of the technological ecosystem. Members of Congress and their staffs rely on him to help them understand timely technology issues such as cyber-security, online privacy, protecting intellectual property, fighting software counterfeiting, opening foreign markets through trade agreements, and the many public policy questions raised by technological change.

Through his previous work in Congress, John developed a rare combination of legislative, political, management, publishing and technology experience. His Hill career culminated as a senior policy aide to House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX).

John was born and raised in San Francisco, California and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of California at San Diego in 1988.

James Vaughn

Director for Government and Political Programming and Products, America Online

Through his work at America Online (<http://www.aol.com>), James is responsible for the Government Guide (<http://governmentguide.com>), My Government and Election Guide 2002 and other products. He is also responsible for developing new e-government opportunities with the public and private sectors. He advises both the AOL Time Warner Foundation and the AOL TW Government Affairs office on e-government and civic engagement. Additionally, he is the project director for BenefitsCheckup.org (<http://www.benefitscheckup.org>), an interactive

Appendix C: Congress Online Project Expert Panel Biographies

database that helps seniors and caregivers determine whether they are eligible for federal, state and local assistance.

James also currently serves on a National Council of State Legislators special task force on teaching state legislators how to more effectively use the Internet to better serve constituents. He's a frequent speaker at government conferences and his "Ten Things Governments Can Do to Make Their Websites Consumer Friendly" was published in the Federal Communicators Network's Communicators Guide. He focused on the Internet and the delivery of government services in his Masters Degree in Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. His undergraduate degree in Diversified Liberal studies was truly diverse – and took him from studying theatre in San Diego to international affairs and law in Nairobi, Kenya at United States International University.

