



Who to Hire.

The PdF Political Technology Guide.

Executive Summary

April 2010

by
Nick Judd, Assistant Editor
Personal Democracy Forum

Introduction

This guide provides an in-depth look at more than 40 firms that sell political technology tools.

It's designed to be a time-saver for anyone looking to find an existing software solution for a political campaign, a PAC, a nonprofit or an advocacy organization, from campaign staffers to executive directors of grassroots groups.

Our guide covers companies spanning all parts of the political spectrum, including those that work with Democratic and Republican candidates, progressive and conservative advocacy organizations and think tanks, PACs, and grassroots groups of all stripes. We describe each company and its software, and how our network of online politics professionals rated the 20 best-known firms in a survey we conducted in March.

We think this is the only resource out there where you can find, in one place, detailed information about companies that offer online tools geared specifically towards political campaigns and advocacy organizations. The companies we've researched provide tools like:

- E-mail marketing;
- Online fundraising;
- Donor management;
- CRM;
- Mobile messaging platforms;
- Petitions, polls and surveys;
- Peer-to-peer fundraising and activism;
- Tell-a-friend tools;
- and more.

Who To Hire will be updated on an as-needed basis with the latest information on new software, new companies, and new ideas. Our goal is to provide the most comprehensive resource available on the software vendors that cater to people in the political and advocacy arenas.

The first release of the guide is based on four months of research, including hours of interviews with CTOs, founders, presidents and heads of client services at each firm, as well as some of their clients. It is augmented with a survey that asked our network of online politics professionals what they think of these firms and their software. (More on the survey methodology below.)

This executive summary provides a few highlights: A brief overview of our survey results, five new products from across the spectrum included in the guide, and four core technologies that we think will be essential in 2010 and beyond.

But this guide is by no means a list of every player in the political space. By design, we've left out some big-name consultants as well as smaller shops. These vendors are not included because we wanted to focus on people who you could go to tomorrow and start talking about buying an off-the-shelf software solution. If you have the time and the budget to have someone build and maintain a purpose-specific solution for you, or you want a consultant to not only build but also manage and use the technology you need, this guide is not for you.

There are also a whole host of smaller firms not covered here that license exactly the software products

included in the guide. And, we suspect, a there are good number of people out there we just didn't find out about, even after four months of research.

If you think we left someone out, we hope you'll tell us about it. If you find the information in this guide useful, you have comments, or you want to let us know about someone we might have missed, send us an e-mail at resources@personaldemocracy.com.

Survey Results

Revolution Messaging beat out nearly 40 other companies to claim the highest overall reputation in an unscientific survey of our network of online politics and advocacy professionals. We asked our network to rate companies based on four criteria — addressing their software, pricing, and customer service — on a scale of one through five, one being very poor, five being very good. We compiled average ratings on the 20 companies and platforms for which we received enough individual responses to have a reliable score. These ratings are inherently subjective and should not be taken as conclusive or predictive of future service.

In order of their overall average rating, here are the top ten:

Company	Overall Rating
Revolution Messaging	4.36
ActBlue	4.23
Mobile Commons	3.82
Voter Activation Network	3.76
David All Group	3.74
Engage	3.68
Advomatic	3.62
Salsa Labs	3.6
Blue State Digital	3.59
CiviCRM	3.57

Our network of professionals includes employees of some of the firms we ranked in the survey. To get a high ranking, these firms didn't just have to impress consultants, campaign staffers and advocates — they had to survive their competitors' ratings, too.

Of the 325 people in our network who took the “Who to Hire” survey, more of them — 80 people — said they had used Salsa Labs software than any other firm. Salsa Labs software (packaged as Wired for Change or Democracy in Action, or in international, enterprise, or statehouse-campaign editions), performed best in the “fairness of pricing” category with an average rating of 4.22 out of five. However, Salsa didn't lead the pack in any individual category.

The next most widely used platform among our respondents was Blue State Digital, then NGP Software.

Our survey revealed that open-source software is maturing in the political space. CiviCRM, an open-source integrated online toolkit that rolls event management, fundraising and e-mail management in with its core

constituent relationship management system, led the “fairness of pricing” category with an average score of 4.39. (Being open source, CiviCRM is free if you don't count hosting, maintenance, and development costs — can't beat that.) ActBlue, also free to the user, was the runner-up, and Salsa Labs took third.

Here are the top three companies in each individual category:

Fairness of pricing	Quality of customer service	Capacity and reliability of software	Usability of software
CiviCRM	Revolution Messaging	Revolution Messaging	ActBlue
ActBlue	ActBlue	ActBlue	Revolution Messaging
Democracy in Action	NGP Software	Voter Activation Network	Mobile Commons

Detailed ratings on all 20 companies we've ranked, more information about the survey itself, and up-to-date profiles of 40 companies in all, are available to PdF Network members. A print-on-demand copy of the guide will also be available soon on lulu.com.

Five New Products in Political Technology

“Who to Hire” covers more than 40 companies that cater to political campaigns on the right and left, advocacy organizations promoting many different causes, and PACs both corporate and grassroots. In the guide, you'll find detailed information about each software company and their products, including who each firm likes to work for and what their software was specifically designed to do.

Some of these companies will be ones you've heard of, or maybe even worked with before. But some of them will be companies so new you may not know about them yet. Here is a taste of what's in the guide about new software that has just launched, or is about to launch:

Blue Swarm

A peer-to-peer fundraising and advocacy platform built from the ground up for Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential campaign, Blue Swarm was designed to send bulk e-mail, process credit card donations, manage contact lists and events, and generate reports and analytics.

That's all becoming standard for political technology, if it isn't already, but the software has a twist: Using a permissions structure and database segmentation, Blue Swarm clients can let any supporter use all of these same tools to mobilize his or her own network of friends and colleagues. This software gives an organization's volunteers a very powerful set of tools, including the ability to track and follow up on pledges of support. All of the financial information is available to the campaign, and both campaigns and supporters can use social maps to see the network of volunteers they've mobilized, who's raising money, and what's getting done. Campaign staff have control over what kind of messages go out, and can track the e-mails sent over the system.

The company that built Blue Swarm, eNilsson, spun the software off into its own firm, also named Blue Swarm. Founder Erik Nilsson says it's a nonpartisan firm that will work with clients of any political stripe.

Blue Swarm won the top Reed Award for technology in 2009.

Emotive

Emotive LLC, an online campaign consulting firm with its roots in old-school direct-mail operations, has built and is just starting to sell a platform for online activism built on a combination of open-source and in-house tools. The platform is designed to be affordable and accessible to down-ballot Republican candidates and emerging Republican groups. Emotive's platform allows a client organization — whether a campaign or an issues advocacy group — to collect donations, run mass e-mail campaigns, connect with their legislators, and raise awareness among their friends by publicizing their activities on Twitter and Facebook. Emotive's platform is built on Drupal, the open-source CMS; CiviCRM, the open-source constituent relationship management system; and a collection of analytics and other tools Emotive developed in-house to add functionality to the software suite.

Democracy Engine

As ActBlue becomes the tool of choice for more and more candidates on the left, former ActBlue executive Jonathan Zucker, a campaign finance lawyer and also a former Democratic National Committee finance staffer, thinks he has the next iteration of distributed fundraising.

Democracy Engine is a platform for an organization to identify candidates, non-profits, PACs or other entities for financial support. It's designed so that a PAC, for example, or a big advocacy organization with chapters in each state, can have each chapter of the organization present lists of candidates and causes to support. Democracy Engine then makes that transaction happen, acting as a go-between, on the client's behalf, to make sure the money gets from the donor to the recipient. It's built to handle donations both for political organizations and non-profits.

Rather than the ActBlue configuration where anyone can create a personal fundraising page, Democracy Engine gives an organization tight control over which entities are presented as good recipients for financial support.

Like ActBlue, Democracy Engine caters to the political left.

Tusk Mobile

Tusk Mobile says it has exclusive rights to sell the mobile platform developed and sold by Distributive Networks — that's the platform, and the company, Barack Obama's campaign used for its mobile messaging — to Republican candidates and campaigns. The Tusk platform can send and receive text messages; act as an automated switchboard, directing volunteer callers to phone-bank from their mobile phones, via interactive voice; run surveys and polls; and pass information received via text-message to other media, like the big screen at a rally, in real-time. In early 2010, Tusk was working on a way to partner with state Republican organizations to make their mobile platform affordable for candidates at the state and local levels.

ActionKit

Built to provide analytics-driven advocacy, fundraising and mobilization for organizations, ActionKit is a toolset heavily inspired by work the developers did for MoveOn.org, CREDO, and One.org over the last decade. Built by Patrick Michael Kane's development company, We Also Walk Dogs — named after a company in an R.A. Heinlein short story that accomplishes impossible tasks — ActionKit is available, but new

features are still being rolled out. It's designed to do sophisticated e-mail blasts and analytics, online fundraising, and petitions, among other things. The ability for supporters to plan and host their own events, like Obama-campaign-style house parties, is slated to come out this spring.

ActionKit is for progressive candidates and organizations.

These are just five of over 40 companies listed in the guide. In "Who to Hire" itself, we go into far greater detail about each company, the software they offer, and what's in store in future releases.

Four Core Technologies for 2010 and Beyond

E-mail service

No amount of bells and whistles will supplant a solid e-mail list as the heart of an online campaign. In 2010, the most innovative technologies empower your supporters to use their own contact lists for e-mail activism and fundraising; allow you to target different messages to different recipients in the same e-mail blast, using sophisticated list segmentation; and generate your e-mail lists from a master database of donors, voters, volunteers and other stakeholders. Which leads into the next core technology ...

Database management

There are two differing schools of thought when it comes to list management. One school believes that all of your contacts should find their way into a single master database, which you can then segment out at will. Those segments would then be exported to your e-mail program, your fundraisers, and elsewhere. The other school of thought is that it's more important to have your various database programs — your fundraising database, your e-mail database, your volunteer database, and so on — compatible with one another. Thanks to a recent rise in the popularity of open APIs, it should be possible to build a system that allows most of your software to pass information about stakeholders back and forth without exporting to an intermediate format like a comma-separated file. Some of that data can even move in real time.

Peer-to-peer activism

Giving tools to your supporters to hit friends and colleagues up for money on your behalf, spread your message and show support on their social media profiles is a proven force multiplier in politics. Patrick Michael Kane of We Also Walk Dogs says that, after analyzing the results of actions taken through the tools his firm built for organizations like MoveOn.org, he's found that use rates for a given action go up when supporters can post the action to their Facebook account with a few clicks of the mouse. On the right, Mindy Finn and Patrick Ruffini of Engage found related results while working on Bob McDonnell's campaign to become governor of Virginia. They reported that Facebook and Twitter helped spread messages far more quickly than TV ad spots ever could. Rob Willington, the online director for Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown's insurgent campaign, has praised Brown's Ning network, which allowed volunteers to organize themselves. These same people will speak disdainfully of devotion to a specific platform or even the abstract concept of "social media," however; social media isn't the point. The point is giving volunteers the ability to take action without your campaign lifting a finger: Personal fundraising pages, embeddable fundraising widgets, and click-to-share buttons are just the beginning.

Mobile

For a smaller campaign, mobile messaging may be just too complicated or expensive to do well — and not doing it well runs many risks. Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, for example, famously shared a shortcode with a service that gave participants the name and address of the closest teen pregnancy clinic when they texted in their ZIP codes. For campaigns that can find a good provider and make it work, however, mobile messaging experts tout potentially tremendous returns: Open rates for text messages are, consultants like Chris Taylor of Tusk Mobile say, above 90 percent; opt-in rates are high; and the immediate nature of the medium is a useful way to get people to events or to make calls. The real frontier for mobile now — the next big question — is in fundraising. During the crisis in Haiti, mobile carriers agreed to waive their fees on donations by text message, and the entire world saw millions raised in record time. There will be no such fee concession for political campaigns, meaning mobile political fundraising faces hairy questions such as when and even how to charge someone for a political contribution. If the campaign needs cash before Nov. 4, but money from last month's text-message campaign won't trickle in until donors' billing cycles end, what then? Developers like Revolution Messaging's Scott Goodstein say they are working on these problems.

About the Survey

Survey methodology

We are disclosing the ratings for companies who garnered more than 12 responses in our survey, along with the number of respondents who gave their opinion for each of those companies. There are also companies covered in the guide that we didn't ask about in the survey — their products launched too recently for us to reasonably expect enough folks to be able to answer questions about them.

Design

The survey presented respondents with groups of companies and asked them to indicate if they had worked with or used the software of any companies in each group. If they indicated that they did, it routed them through a logic tree that allowed them to rate companies they said they had experience with on a scale of one to five (see Figure 1).

There are a couple of odd ducks in this list – entities that are not “companies” in the strictest sense. These include ActBlue, which is a political action committee, CiviCRM, which is maintained by a loose confederation of software engineers who collect funding through a foundation, and Democracy Engine, which is an amalgam of several legal entities. In the survey, we called them companies anyway. In “Who to Hire” itself, we explain their unique structures.

The companies were listed by company name. In cases where a company's software was better known than the company itself, or where a company had recently changed names, we listed the other name as well.

*** 1. Please rate the following aspects of Blue State Digital's products and service on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very poor, 5 being very good.**

	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	N/A
Quality of customer service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capacity and reliability of software	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Usability of software	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fairness of pricing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comments	<input type="text"/>					

Figure 1.

Distribution

In March 2010, we e-mailed one-use-only invitations to people in our network of conference attendees, techPresident readers, PdF Network members, and other friends and colleagues. Of that list, 325 clicked through to take the survey, with the understanding that one lucky person – who left a name and e-mail address upon completing the survey – would win a ticket to our conference this June in New York City. We sent one invitation e-mail and, about a week later, a follow-up email to people who had received the first e-mail but did not click the link.

Between the first and second email, we received requests from some companies who wanted to be included in the product guide. We also received a request for Complete Campaigns to be listed alongside Aristotle, its parent company. We tried to accommodate those requests in the second survey e-mail, and in an addendum survey distributed to people who had already taken the survey. Results from the addendum were appended to the results from the main survey and averaged together.

Responses addressing Complete Campaigns' service and price fairness were rolled into Aristotle's ratings.. Complete Campaigns did not receive enough responses to report on opinion about its software, which we had planned to rate separately and explain in the Aristotle entry in "Who to Hire."

Tabulation

Our survey results are the simple averages of ratings in each category. (Responses of N/A in a particular category do not count towards the average.) Overall ratings are an average of the category averages for each company.

Here's the list of every company we asked about:

ActBlue	FilPAC
Advocacy Data (was Advocacy Inc.)	Grassroots Enterprise
Advomatic	Kimbia
Aristotle (or Complete Campaigns)	Liberty Concepts
Blackbaud	Maelstrom Solutions
Blue State Digital	Media Mezcla
Blue Utopia	Mobile Commons
Capitol Advantage (Now part of CQ Roll Call Group)	Mozes
CiviCRM	New Media Communications
Click & Pledge	NGP Software
CMDI	Plus Three
Convio	Political Media
David All Group	Piryx
DCS Politics	Revolution Messaging
DDC Advocacy (was Democracy Data)	Salsa/Democracy in Action/Wired for Change
Distributive Networks	TrailBlazer
Electionmall	Tusk Mobile
Emotive LLC	Under the Power Lines (VoterFetch)
Engage DC	Voter Activation Network
eNilsson	vShift
	The WebStrong Group

Conclusion

These are just some of the highlights of the “Who to Hire” report. The full report includes complete write-ups on 40 companies, including detailed descriptions of their software offerings, use cases, client examples, and interviews with their representatives. It also includes detailed ratings for the 20 best-known companies in our pool, covering user judgments on the usability and reliability of their software, the quality of their customer service, and the fairness of their pricing.

The full report is available online solely to [Pdf network members](#), who pay an annual \$60 subscription to belong to the Network. It will also be available as a print-on-demand document for nonmembers at a onetime price of \$75.

The online guide will be a living document. We will continue to add company profiles and content to existing profiles, including user comments from Pdf Network members.

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