



## Running A 2010 Campaign In Michigan? Don't Forget To "Friend" and "Tweet!"

By Paul King

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* recently pronounced that the 2009 word of the year is "unfriend." The verb is defined as "to remove someone as a 'friend' on a social networking site such as Facebook." Given that my version of Microsoft Word's spell checker recognizes neither "unfriend" nor "Facebook" as legitimate words, it's obvious that the Internet is expanding the English lexicon faster than we can print dictionaries, or burn them onto disks. Furthermore, it's increasing campaign strategists' opportunities for connecting and communicating with voters and consumers just as fast. In Michigan it's no different.

Our recent poll of likely voters in Michigan gleaned that 80 percent have email and over half check it at least once a day. **More than one-in-four have an account on one of the various online social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.)** When analyzing the data further, we find that Facebook is the most popular of these sites with Michigan voters. More than 20 percent of the respondents say they have a Facebook account, far more than those who have MySpace (6 percent), LinkedIn (5 percent) or Twitter (3 percent) accounts. And there is seemingly no end in sight to Facebook's growth in popularity, unless of course it starts charging for memberships. Facebook and sites like it are quickly becoming valuable coalition building tools, helping political and PR campaigns cultivate political gold: votes, volunteers and financial contributions.

Among younger voters, the numbers are staggering. **Nearly 75 percent of Michigan voters under the age of 35 belong to an online social network and over half belong to Facebook.** That's nearly twice the percentage of those 35 to 54, and four times higher than those 55 and older. One needs to look only as far as the last Presidential Election to see the important role that social media played in raising youth support, awareness and money for candidates and issues.

ONLINE ACTIVITY	ALL	MEDIA MARKETS						PAST VOTING BEHAVIOR			AGE		
		F/S/BC	DET MET	GR	LAN	TC/SOO	UP	VOTE DEM	SPLT TIX	VOTE GOP	18-34	35-54	55+
Email	80%	83%	82%	78%	72%	78%	92%	81%	80%	84%	94%	92%	75%
Social Network	27%	22%	25%	30%	37%	24%	28%	25%	30%	26%	72%	37%	18%
-Facebook	22%	17%	20%	26%	28%	24%	28%	19%	26%	23%	52%	30%	16%
-Myspace	6%	7%	5%	8%	7%	8%	7%	6%	9%	5%	31%	9%	3%
-LinkedIn	5%	4%	6%	7%	7%	0%	0%	6%	4%	6%	13%	8%	4%
-Twitter	3%	1%	3%	3%	2%	5%	7%	4%	3%	2%	7%	3%	3%

Nevertheless, we don't want to overemphasize the significance of these data. **It's important to remember that 97 percent of the voters still don't "tweet" and 78 percent don't "friend."** While these sites are becoming important weapons in the arsenal of political and PR campaign warriors, especially for organizing young voters, they still can't replace standard communication methods like earned media, direct mail, and radio and TV ads. However, as the older generations fade and the younger e-savvy generations take their place, the Internet and sites like Facebook and Twitter will continue to play a larger role in national, and yes, Michigan campaign strategies. Who knows, maybe the word of the year in 2019 will be "iVote." It's already in the online lexicon.

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