

Talking digital, acting local

Digital media allow people to engage in campaigning in far more ways than just signing a petition or emailing their MP. And local-level changes don't have to be driven by just offline activity. Here are six ways that your campaign can use the power of online to really make a difference, using examples from UK-based campaigns.

1. Telling compelling individual stories

During the London riots last year 89 year-old Aaron Biber saw his Tottenham barbershop destroyed. Some entrepreneurial locals set up a [Blogger page](#) for Mr. Biber. Using their social networks they created enough of a buzz to raise the money to pay for the repairs and help him open his business again.

A few years ago Ole Seidenberg met Uwe, a man who had been living on the streets of Hamburg since 1988. Ole suggested to Uwe that if he agreed, Ole would video him telling his life story, [post it online](#) and attempt to raise money for him to pay for a roof over his head and a new start. Now Uwe has a place in the warm to stay as well as new clothes and an organiser - a [fantastic story](#) of human endeavour and resourcefulness.

2. Enabling national action on local battles

38 Degrees has worked alone and teamed up with different local campaigns to achieve national presence and significant policy changes. For its [Let's Stop Cow Factory Farms](#) campaign, the organisation worked with several national groups and a local pressure group CAFFO. Together they crowdsourced funds for ads in local newspapers, and got 14,000 people to email a local council to put an end to its approval of proposed cow factory farms.

And let's not forget the opportunities that [change.org](#) has brought. By enabling individuals around the world to launch their own petitions that the organisation can support, millions of people worldwide can now lend their voice to local campaigns thousands of miles away.

3. Enabling local actions in nationwide battles

Barnardo's [Cut them Free](#) campaign asked supporters and others through targeted ads on parenting websites to email their local councillors to pledge online to lobby their wider council to put an end to child sexual exploitation. On signing, councillors would receive a template press release to use to promote this action. Barnardo's also directed supporters whose local authorities signed the pledge to a thank you email action and follow-up email action targeting the Minister responsible for the issue of child sexual exploitation.

Relevant local information can also drive all kinds of campaign participation. For the Save our NHS campaign, 38 Degrees raised an unprecedented £300,000 in more than a week to pay for [billboard ads](#) in marginal conservative constituencies across the country, telling David Cameron what a big mistake he was making with his proposed health reforms.

4. Connecting people with personally relevant information

The award-winning [20's Plenty](#) national campaign to reduce speed limits in towns and cities across the UK has been very successful by providing open data and extensive campaign resources to budding campaigners including councillors.

Its website includes UK-wide localised statistics and maps on roadside casualties, a chart listing local authorities signed up to the campaign, downloadable briefings and other materials, event listings, a blog, videos and news ticker. The organisation also provides plenty of tools for local groups to set up including the loan of a speed detector and an email discussion group for all campaigners.

It's a great example of how providing basic tools to empower campaigners and connecting them via peer networking can reap rewards.

5. Crowdsourcing research and reporting

[Ushahidi](#) first set the bar high with its reporting system for crime and human rights violations in Kenya. Not so much a local campaign as a platform for lots of micro-local campaigns, Leonard Cheshire Disability's [Action for Access](#) site allows people to contribute their own reports on disability access in their local area, and then provides them with resources to then lobby individual businesses/venues.

The Guardian [Investigate your MP's Expenses](#) campaign in 2010 opened up the data from the Freedom of Information request about MP expenses for its visitors and readers to download and investigate. Arguably allowing local citizens to investigate their own local MPs, this was a very successful model which enabled the paper to outsource some of the heavy lifting, call decision-makers to account and raise its brand profile.

6. Mapping and inspiring support from all angles

As part of their [Save our Villages](#) campaign, the National Housing Federation is calling on local councillors, as well as MPs, to back an action plan for affordable homes. Organisations, councils, councillors, MPs and other individuals can register and locate themselves on a 'supporter map,' and the website also suggests text which supporters can propose as motions to their councils.

It's time we realised that campaigning methods don't have to be mutually exclusive – and that digital can make the difference in delivering lasting local change.