The Knight News Innovation Lab

ILLINOIS CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARIES

Tools for enhancing coverage of March 20 election
What are we trying to accomplish?

• **For publishers:** Provide innovative technology for election coverage
  – The Knight Lab’s charter includes helping local publishers adopt new technologies and spark additional development
  – Our focus is on real-world deployments, with services that publishers will find useful immediately and we can continually develop to improve utility and flexibility

• **For consumers:** Provide information and insights that add new resources for learning about candidates
  – Knight Foundation mission: Build engaged and informed communities
Why the Congressional primaries?

- The “wave” elections of 2006, 2008 and 2010 make this year’s primary races particularly interesting.

- The 10-year redistricting amplified the drama of some races—and increased the need for information.

- The meandering shape of districts makes it harder to cover campaign news from throughout the district.
Core objectives

• Utilize **social media** like Twitter and Facebook to offer new perspectives on candidates

• Showcase the **potential of databases** to enhance coverage in easy-to-understand applications

• Encourage local sites—some of whom are traditional competitors—to **utilize links** to each others’ content for the benefit of their readers?

> To meet these objectives, the Lab is monitoring digital media activity associated with the 25 contested races across all 18 Illinois congressional districts
Candidates use social media

• Almost all candidates are now actively managing their social media presence.
  – They’re tweeting and posting on Facebook, and cultivating “likes” and “followers”
Building candidate profiles that extract data from Twitter, Facebook and candidate sites

Capturing, categorizing and displaying what the candidates are tweeting about

Capturing, categorizing and displaying what their followers are tweeting about

Prototype illustrations for discussion purposes only.
Online access to contributor data

• Access to data about contributors in federal elections is available online and through APIs
  – Can be explored down to the individual contributor name, address and employer.

• Relatively few local sites show the data online
  – It’s not hard to show the raw information, but it’s harder to tell a story merely by displaying or mapping the data.

• Our approach: use the data to tell a simple narrative of the geographical profile of a candidate’s funding
  – How much comes from within Illinois? The DC region?
  – Where is the in-state money coming from?
Our data focuses on geography
Links build stronger local media

• A vibrant local information community will thrive through active and frequent linking among sites of varying sizes, focus and ownership
  – This grows in importance as traditional newsrooms shrink and new entrants create more niche content
  – Resistance to showcasing “competitive” content is fading

• Consumers are less interested in obtaining all information from one particular site—but appreciate curated recommendations and selective aggregation

• Creation of aggregation tools will be an ongoing focus of the Knight Lab
Presented in 3 formats

• Partner-branded “white label” pages
  – Served by the Lab with partner-designated branding and navigation
  – Enables sites to have complete pages devoted to each race and each candidate

• Widgets
  – Offer snapshots of data for inclusion on existing partner elections pages

• Showcase site (congessionalprimaries.org)
  – Operated by Northwestern as a home for all of our work on this project, including blog posts with tech and political insights.
  – Will include work still under development that may not be ready/appropriate for partner deployment
Examples of 3 Formats

Complete partner-branded pages for each race and every candidate who has a digital presence

Widgets that enable partners to include Lab apps on their own pages

Showcase site operated by Knight Lab will also contain blog posts explaining the applications and exploring the data

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Partner-branded pages

Complete pages served by Knight Lab with partner logo and top navigation.

Top area is under partner control and may include ad instead of Knight co-brand.

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Brings all candidates with a social media or web presence onto a single page

Provides a jumping-off point to candidate pages

Enables comparison between candidates

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Provides a profile for each candidate

Designed to be linked directly from other pages in your site, or from the RACE page

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Details on features

“What’s this” offers detailed explanation of the feature, posted on the Lab’s showcase site

Content and format of aggregation service may be customized to partner needs

Content and format of aggregation service may be customized to partner needs

More info is provided on partner-branded DETAILS pages

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What’s next?

• Live partner pages, and widgets available for partner review and customization

• Showcase site, partner pages and widgets released for live display to consumers

• Knight Lab begins creating blog posts offering insights into races gleaned from applications. Staff available for interviews.

• Services will be turned off after the primary. Post-mortem review.

• Expanded services for November election!