PREPARING FOR THE
112th CONGRESS GOLD MOUSE PROJECT

Becoming One of the Best Websites on Capitol Hill
## Agenda

1. About the Gold Mouse Project
2. What to Focus on First
3. What’s Next (After the Basics)
4. Managing a Successful Website
5. Top 10 Improvements To Make Today
6. Additional Resources

### About the Gold Mouse Project

Identify best and innovative practices in House & Senate offices

Since 1998, CMF has assessed the quality of congressional websites

Based on:
- Focus groups with constituents
- Interviews with congressional staff, industry research, and
- Surveys of political reporters and advocacy groups
112th Congress Gold Mouse Project Timeline

- **Spring 2011**: Criteria updated and refined
- **Summer 2011**: Evaluations take place
- **Fall 2011**: Data analysis, grades assigned
- **Winter 2011**: Winners announced, results released

111th Congress: Republican Websites Scored Better

- Democratic websites outnumbered Republican websites 3:2
- “C” or higher:
  - Republicans 62%
  - Democrats 54%
111th Congress: Republican Websites Scored Better

- Most common Senate letter grade: “A”
- Most common House letter grade: “F”
- Not surprising, given that Senate offices generally have more financial and staff resources than House offices
Senate Sites Scored Better Than House Sites

Reactions from Real Award Winners

“We are very excited and honored to be recognized by CMF.”

“WOW!!!! THX U so much [...] The [Member of Congress] is very HAPPY that you have selected her website for such an honor”
Reactions from Real Award Winners

“We’ve been stuck at Gold for the last two evaluations!”

“It’s just a Bronze Mouse sort of a day.”

What To Focus on First

1. Usability
   “Can I navigate the website and find what interests me even if I’ve never used the site before?”

2. Timeliness
   “Is the information on the website up to date?”

3. Information on issues
   “What are the issues before Congress? What issues are important to the Member and/or state and what’s being done?”

4. Constituent services and casework
   “What services can my Member provide me with and how does the process work?”
The website’s readability, organization, ease of navigation, and look and feel

“Can I navigate the website and find what interests me even if I’ve never used the site before?”

20% of Member sites did not have a functional search engine
Timeliness

- All content up to date, including issue pages, vote rationales, accomplishments, video, and audio
- Information was considered timely if it was clearly from the current session of Congress

“Is the information on the website up to date?”

While 42% of Member sites had a THOMAS search box, only 22% searched the current Congress (111th)
National issues, state-specific issues, the Member’s priority issues, and key vote rationales

“What are the issues before Congress? What issues are important to the Member and/or state and what’s being done?”

On a 5 point scale, the average Member website scored a 3.6 on national issues

What’s being done about important issues?

Relevant video, blog posts, and press releases for each issue

Links to actions taken on each issue, including relevant letters, sponsored and cosponsored legislation, and votes
What's being done about important issues?

Includes hot topics and information for each subcommittee

Related hearings and documents are also available

Constituent Services and Casework

What casework is, how to start the process, the most common problems and solutions, online resources, links to federal agencies, and a privacy release form for constituents to download

“What services can my Member provide me with and how does the process work?”

49% of Member websites did not have information on how the casework process works
What services can my Member provide?

Clear, detailed information about what casework is and how to get help, as well as an FAQ.

Sen. Feinstein’s site even lists the staff that handles each area of casework.

What’s Next (After the Basics)

5. District/State information
   “Is there information specifically for and about the state or district?”

6. Accountability
   “What is the Member doing in Congress?”

7. Legislative Process
   “How do Congress and the legislative process work?”

8. Floor Proceedings
   “What’s going on in Congress?”

9. Media Communication
   “Does the website include all the media created by the office?”

10. Communication Technology and Use of Social Media
    “Can users interact with the office in different ways?”
Key state info, general and demographic information, map of the state, and local resources

"Is there information specifically for and about the state?"

27% of Member websites had links to census information about their state
Accountability

The Member’s legislative activity, voting record, roll call votes, and sponsored and co-sponsored legislation

“What is the Member doing in Congress?”

54% of Member websites posted their voting records

What is the Member doing in Congress?

Voting record readily accessible and readable

Links to sponsored and cosponsored legislation
How Congress works, how a bill becomes a law, how Congress functions, what a Member does, and other educational resources

“How does Congress work?”

49% of Member websites contained information on how a bill becomes a law.

The Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources has an extensive FAQ that touches on everything from the committee’s jurisdiction to the definition of “recess.”
Floor Proceedings

What is currently happening in Congress, the chamber’s schedule, current floor proceedings, and the Congressional Record

“What’s going on in Congress?”

53% of Member websites had links to the floor proceedings
The amount and quality of the media content, press releases, video, audio, and columns or op-ed pieces

“Does the website include all the media created by the office?”

While 98% of Member sites posted press releases, only 40% were sortable by topic

Does the website include all media?

News releases are posted by date and in the issues section

The latest information, from floor statements and newsletters, to press releases and commentaries
Facebook and Twitter, RSS feeds, blogs, social bookmarking, online polls or surveys, and any other new media tools

“Can users interact and connect with the office in different ways?”

83% of Member sites had RSS feeds

Can users connect with the office in new ways?

Official social media tools are linked to on Sen. Mark Udall’s official website

Posts are frequent, tailored toward the medium, and go beyond just a headline service
Managing a Successful Website

It takes the whole office:
• Getting Buy-In From the Top
• Making the Website a Priority
• Formulating a Strategic Plan
• Allocating the Necessary Resources
• Creating a Team-Oriented Approach
• Meeting the Needs of Constituents on their Terms

Top 10 Improvements To Make Today

6. Add links to chamber schedule and floor proceedings
7. Add links or guidance on how Congress works
8. Add Census and other demographic information about your state
9. Add press contact information
10. Connect your official Facebook, Twitter, or other social media tools to your website
Top 10 Improvements To Make Today

1. Use your website! Click on every link to make sure they are working properly
2. Test the forms on your website: email form, search feature, etc.
3. Update sponsorship and co-sponsorship links
4. Add guidance on how to best communicate with your office
5. Add links to roll call votes

Additional Resources at pmpu.org

• Gold Mouse Project Page
  o Blogs
  o Resources and announcements

• Current and Past reports:
  o Findings from the 111th Congress Gold Mouse Project
  o 2007 Gold Mouse Report
  o 2006 Gold Mouse Report

• Your website grade and rank
  o Emailed to your Chief of Staff in April, contact CMF for a copy

Links to Mouse Award-winning Websites
Coming Soon

With award-winning panelists:

- Jacob Wood – Senator Lisa Murkowski
- John Fossum – Senator Mark Udall
- Rosemarie Calabro – Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
- Mike Kanick – Senator Sherrod Brown

Q & A
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