

Flex your (political) muscles

Written by By Cheryl Pearson-McNeil Special to the NNPA
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November is only six short months away, so the 2012 campaign for the White House is moving full-speed ahead. Because we live in the miracle of this fantastically dizzying digital age with news and information at our fingertips and coming at us from infinite sources; and because more than 274 million Americans are connected to the Internet, you probably won't be surprised that we have converged upon the Internet for any and all tidbits surrounding the presidential candidates since the beginning of the year. Even though Mitt Romney is the presumed Republican nominee, I think it's fascinating to see which candidates attracted the most visitors to their sites. Don't you? Aw, come on, aren't you a little curious? Nielsen recently profiled the voter-age audience (18+) to see who was checking out which of the (once upon a time not so long ago) five presidential candidates. The sample was extensive, covering 15 different sites during January 2012, including: ABCNEWS Digital Network, CBS News Network, CNN Digital Network, Daily Kos, drudgereport.com, Fox News Digital Network, Google News, Huffington Post, MSNBC Digital Network, NPR, NYTimes.com, Politico, USATODAY.com, Wall Street Journal Digital and Yahoo! News Websites. Any of those among your favorites?

- In January, President Obama's site received more unique American adult visitors than the four Republican candidates' sites combined. ("Unique" is defined by web analytics as unduplicated or counting only once to a website over a specified time period, as opposed to "new" or "returning.")
- Hispanics comprised 17% of MittRomney.com, 37% more Hispanics than were active online during the entire month of January 2012 (12%).
- RickSantorum.com attracted the lion's share of women visitors (60%), which was the largest male/female split among the candidates.
- Interestingly, 76-year-old Ron Paul, the oldest of the Republican hopefuls, drew the youngest visitors. More than a third of his hits were from members of the 18-34 group. Though it was almost neck-and-neck with Newt Gingrich with male visitors, 56% and 51%, respectively, RonPaul2012.com won by 4.3 percentage points.

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- Newt Gingrich's website guests were the most affluent and educated. Twenty-seven percent reported earnings of more than \$100K and half had either a Bachelor's or Post-Graduate degree.

The analysis of why American voters visit which sites is up to the political pundits. Part of the research Nielsen conducted also focused on the News & Information sites that feature political content. Are you surprised to learn that Google News wins the race for the highest concentration of young visitors, those 18-24? Survey results showed that 23% more 18-34 year olds visited Google News in January 2012 than were active online. (It is heartening to me to know that our young people are interested, engaged and involved in our political process.

My son is only a few years away from legally casting his first vote. Sigh.) More results:

- The next age demographic, Americans 25-49, are most likely to visit Politico and Drudge Report (31%).
- Of all the sites studied, NPR enjoyed the largest growth in visitors (up 21% since October 2011).
- 28% of visitors to Wall Street Journal Digital have a household income of \$100K or more.
- Surfers who land on the Drudge Report page were most likely to have a Bachelor's degree, which is more than double the percentage of all active college grad Internet users (36% vs. 17%).

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- College graduates were more likely to visit a specific candidate's site than visit a News & Information site.

I'm always telling you that knowledge is power, and stressing how you wield power as consumers and how important it is that we pick and choose to use that power wisely. Well, I hope you don't tire of hearing me stress this point. This election is important – no matter which side of the political aisle you may stand on. Read. Watch. Listen. Learn – so you can make the most informed decision possible. The choice and power are in your hands.

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