

# INTHRIVE

A D V O C A C Y   S O L U T I O N S

**Monthly** Digest: October 2024

Your source for policy and advocacy guidance.

## What's inside?



Creating Public Opinion Online



Get tips on how to speak at a hearing for MAXIMUM impact on YouTube



Where will Inthrive be next?

by **David Smith** on October 1 2024

At this point we all know the power of the internet to impact the culture. The mass dissemination of truths, real or fake, through online message boards influences culture at both the micro and macro levels. While many of us see this myth making as a destructive and culturally divisive power, what if it's just the democratization of how ideas and myths are formed in a culture? And if I don't have to fear it how can I use it to enhance my advocacy and advance my policy?

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

### Creating Public Opinion Online



Two things:

- 1) *This is not your social media like Instagram, Facebook, or even X.*

When you are just posting to your page or account you're not going to engage new audiences and communities. You can keep your allies informed but you're not going to expand your base by changing minds. ***Unless you're interacting within communities (like groups) that go beyond your base.***

- 2) *This is not an op/ed or editorial.*

These are great for targeting politicians or raising awareness about your issue in the political class but they don't allow for the engagement and conversation that transforms public opinion.

Now, on to how you can form public opinion online....

In ['A History of Fake Things on the Internet.'](#) Walter Scheirer argues that creating and sharing information democratizes the making of shared social myths-how we view the

world. In longer form message boards and similar online platforms people have the ability to create and share stories. Sometimes true, sometimes based in truth, and sometimes completely fabricated. If you question the power of this look at the stories created about Haitian immigrants and the real world issues this has created in Springfield, OH. These forums of people, sometimes from large geographical areas and other times from specific neighborhoods share stories and shape community opinions.

## **But how can I apply this to advocacy & lobbying?**

Will I be able to directly influence legislators and bureaucrats this way? Possibly, if they frequent the online communities you target. But, more directly, you'll shape public opinion from the grassroots and can build your movement that way. But how?

I've worked with several clients where I've taken stories (both from directly impacted folks and scholarly or news articles) and then strategically shared this narrative in pertinent online message boards. Through this democratized form of story making we've shaped local public opinion, driven new levels of engagement on national issues, and expanded their base so they can be more influential in the future!

But you can't just post and forget about it. Here are the steps I've developed that have the most impact:

### **1) Find a community that is not directly related to your target policy but is impacted by your issue.**

If you engage with a community that is directly related to your target policy you're preaching to the choir and you won't change minds & public opinion. Instead, find a community that is impacted by your issue. For example, I had a client that was looking to build support for urban solar and they'd identified infill lots in cities that have abundant vacant property. Instead of going to online communities built around green energy, I targeted online communities in Detroit and similar cities that could benefit from the policy and we built momentum to create small scale urban solar farms.


### **2) Don't preach. Share and ask.**

If all you do is drop a press release type message people aren't going to engage. They may think you're a bot or spammer and could possibly ban you from the forum! Instead, craft a message that provides space for interaction. Ask a question, encourage the community to share their opinion. You may be pushing a policy but you want them to discover the benefit of what you're proposing.

### 3) Stay engaged.


If you post and then disappear you're not growing engagement and changing opinion. You may have people reply but if you don't respond in that forum people will stop replying and your message will fade away. However, if you actively engage with community members in a respectful manner then you'll be seen as an expert and future posts will be even more influential.

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 Are you intrigued by how you can shape public opinion but need more guidance or support? Contact me, David Smith, at [David@InthriveAdvocacy.com](mailto:David@InthriveAdvocacy.com) to see how we can work together to get that win!


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### What's new in "Better Advocacy in 10 Minutes or Less"?

 Follow Inthrive on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com) to keep your skills fresh with [Better Advocacy in 10 Minutes or Less](#)! There's a new video with [tips on how to speak at a hearing for MAXIMUM impact](#).

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### Where can you meet Inthrive: Advocacy Solutions?

 Inthrive Film Festival: October 18th & 19th in Richmond, VA, you can get your first look at the new films that will be touring the country in the Inthrive Film Festival. Catered opening reception and special screening of Adamu Chan's *What These Walls Won't Hold* on Friday, October 18. The main festival runs from 11am to 5pm at Richmond's First Baptist Church Saturday, October 19. [More details here](#).

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[www.InthriveAdvocacy.com](http://www.InthriveAdvocacy.com)  
[David@InthriveAdvocacy.com](mailto:David@InthriveAdvocacy.com)  
Inthrive: Advocacy Solutions  
8337 Abbey Rd.  
Richmond, VA 23235