

# Websites play heavily in local campaigns

## Internet presence said to be needed

By Bryan Finlayson

In a mass e-mail last month, Lee [Zeldin](#), the Republican challenging Democratic U.S. Representative Tim Bishop, announced the millionth digital visitor to his campaign website, [Zeldin08.com](#).

While that figure does not differentiate first-time visitors from repeat visitors, Republican Party officials linked the stir in online activity to increased campaign donations and volunteerism in the [Zeldin](#) camp.

"We're seeing new donors every day who are coming from within the district and outside the district to donate," campaign manager Marcus Povinelli said, noting the campaign recently moved its headquarters from Shirley to a larger building in North Patchogue. "We're bursting at the seams here. With a dozen volunteers here, we needed more space."

The Internet, no longer limited in effectiveness to national political campaigns, is becoming increasingly important to local campaigns as well. Just as presidential contenders Democratic Senator Barack Obama and Republican Senator John McCain successfully advertise, raise funds and mobilize supporters via the internet, New York's 1st Congressional District contenders are attempting to reap the same rewards from the digital realm.

Analysts say trends show increasing numbers of people are going to the internet for their national and local political news.

Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, said internet use is playing a larger role in local campaigns. A January 2008 report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, part

of the Pew Research Center, states that 24 percent of Americans get their political news from the internet, up from 13 percent in 2004.

"It's kind of burst on to the scene. Now, even at the local level, we're seeing that it's becoming more important to local politics. We wouldn't have even asked that question in 2004," Mr. Rainie said. "My guess is that in 2012, it's going to be even more important."

Trying to take advantage of that trend, Mr. [Zeldin](#), 28, is aggressively using the internet to further his campaign by dispatching regular e-mails to the media and constituents, posting blogs on his website and streaming video content on YouTube. Mr. Bishop also uses e-mail, posts legislative updates on [Timbishop.house.gov](#) and keeps a photo album account on Flickr.com.

And with the campaign season heating up, political competitiveness in the digital age can be found on the web as well as behind the podium.

Both Mr. [Zeldin](#) and Mr. Bishop have accounts on [Facebook.com](#), a social networking site where supporters, otherwise known as "friends," are tallied. This week, Mr. Bishop led with 261 supporters over Mr. [Zeldin's](#) 117 supporters, Mr. Bishop's spokesman Will Jenkins said.

"Congressman Bishop's Facebook page has twice as many friends as [Zeldin's](#)," Mr. Jenkins said. "So when [Zeldin](#) says he's getting into all that technology stuff, that's great. But the congressman is doing it also and even better."

While Mr. [Zeldin](#) ran a series of biographical TV and radio ads starting May 23, Republicans and Democrats alike agree that the internet is less expensive than the traditional communication mediums of TV, direct mail and phone banks. Mr. Bishop's campaign has not yet run TV or radio ads.

In a race where Republicans will be out-

spent by Democrats, the [Zeldin](#) campaign is seeking to establish a strong online presence. Mr. [Zeldin's](#) strategy is, in part, to use the internet to run a campaign on the cheap.

For instance, donations through [Zeldin08.com](#) spiked in June totaling \$10,000, an all time high, while in May, Mr. [Zeldin's](#) campaign collected \$2,000 in online donations through the website. Meanwhile, the website cost "almost nothing" to create, Mr. [Zeldin](#) said, noting that a volunteer created it for a small commission fee.

In the latest financial disclosure statement to the Federal Election Commission, filed in March, Mr. [Zeldin](#) showed \$71,000 cash on hand and debts owed of about \$70,800, giving Mr. [Zeldin](#) a balance of about \$200 as of March 31. Mr. [Zeldin](#) also gave himself a \$44,000 loan to pay for some expenses. Republican officials said the campaign raised \$100,000 since March.

A filing for the same date shows Mr. Bishop, after having spent more than \$300,000 on expenses, including direct mailings and fees for a campaign strategy firm, ended

the filing period with nearly \$821,000 cash on hand with no debts.

"There is no doubt that it makes fundraising easier," Mr. [Zeldin](#) said, noting typical online donations to the campaign are small, at around \$15. "We are 100-percent positive we are going to be outspent in this David versus Goliath race, but there are other resources and ways to get our message out. The infrastructure of our online presence is something that I am very pleased with."

Mr. Bishop said he uses the internet for communicating political messages and other information to voters. The campaign did not comment on contributions through [Bishopforcongress.com](#).

"My primary goal in using many kinds of media technologies is to help make it easier for Long Islanders to learn about what is happening in Congress and to voice their opinions, concerns and support," Mr. Bishop said in a statement. "That is why I use a full range of communications tools—web, phone, print and personal conversations—to connect with residents, hear their views and report on what Congress is doing."