



FLEISHMANSM
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS
HILLARD

European Parliament
Digital Trends 2009

Introduction



It is with great pleasure that we present the results of our recent research into the digital behaviour of parliamentarians at the end of the European Parliament's sixth term.

In the 17 years since we established our presence on the Brussels market, we have borne witness to tremendous changes in the way all European institutions work. Over this period no technological development has affected Brussels more than the advent of the internet.

As underlined by the 2008 US Presidential elections the internet can help elected politicians reach out to voters, empower citizens within the political process and provoke fierce debate on the issues society faces. As we all spend more time online the internet has the power to inform policy debates in an immediate and in-depth way that other mass media cannot.

As one of the world's leading public affairs and communications agencies, Fleishman-Hillard has made digital communications a key strategic growth area in Brussels and throughout our global network of offices. Digital tools have revolutionized the way in which many of our clients approach their communications. We fully understand the power of the new media and will continue to deploy this expertise wisely to help clients grow. Wherever they are, we work with our clients to help them manage and shape their issues and reputation both online and offline.

The results of our research seek to shed light on how Members of the European Parliament are using the internet as a tool to reach out to voters and as a source of information to inform their legislative work. We hope that this summary of the main results will help provoke debate amongst policymakers and stakeholders about the impact of the internet on Brussels politics and public affairs.

Caroline Wunnerlich

Executive Vice-President and Managing Director
Fleishman-Hillard Brussels

May 2009

Statistics

- ✦ 75% of MEPs use a personal website extensively.
- ✦ 62% of MEPs have either never heard of Twitter or have no plans to use it.
- ✦ 24% of MEPs use a blog extensively but only 26% of MEPs who blog comment on other blogs once a week or more.
- ✦ 80% of MEPs believe websites to be either very effective or effective in communicating to voters, making websites as effective as one-on-one meetings according to MEPs.
- ✦ 51% of MEPs believe blogging or micro-blogging to be very effective or effective in communicating to voters compared to 81% for writing a newspaper column.
- ✦ 33% of MEPs believe online advertising to be either a very effective or effective way to communicate to voters compared to 57% for television advertising and 45% for print advertising.
- ✦ 93% of MEPs use search engines daily to understand legislative issues. 54% use Google.com while 41% use national versions of the same search engine.
- ✦ 74% of MEPs visit online versions of traditional newspapers on a daily basis, and in any given week 86% visit online EU specialist media.
- ✦ 65% of MEPs visit Wikipedia style tools at least several times each week to understand legislative issues, while 36% visit blogs in the same period.
- ✦ 87% of MEPs believe personal contact with representatives of groups of voters to be very important or important.
- ✦ 42% of MEPs believe coverage in national media to be very important in informing their policy thinking, which is more than twice the number who stated coverage in online EU specialist media to be very important.
- ✦ 32% of MEPs who blog believe blogs to be important or very important in informing their policy thinking, compared with 17% of MEPs who do not blog.

Summary

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) recognise that EU citizens go online and that they therefore need a web presence. Whilst there are a number of early adopters who have demonstrated an understanding of how to leverage additional digital tools for effective communication and campaigns, a majority of MEPs do not venture beyond a website in their efforts to communicate with voters. The number of MEPs who use occasionally or plan to use in the future social networks, personal blogs, html newsletters, social media releases or online video suggests that there is an opportunity for growth in the use of these tools.

MEPs believe that TV remains the most effective way to communicate to voters, even though previous research suggests that Europeans spend more time online than using other media and that the information they find there has more impact than information from other sources. A lack of familiarity with social media may be leading MEPs to underestimate the effectiveness of the internet as a means of reaching out to their electorate.

MEPs use internet resources on a regular basis to understand legislative issues. A variety of online tools are used as part of normal working life for this purpose. While the internet tools, such as RSS aggregators, that collect and sort information for the user may be a great way to save time in the online world, it would appear that MEPs still rely on others to filter content for them.

MEPs are increasingly adopting digital tools for both research and outreach, but information from websites and blogs is currently less important in informing their thinking than information gathered from off-line sources. However, an increase in online engagement by MEPs in their communication with voters may well lead to an increase in the perceived importance of online information sources in legislative work.



How are MEPs using digital tools to reach out to voters?

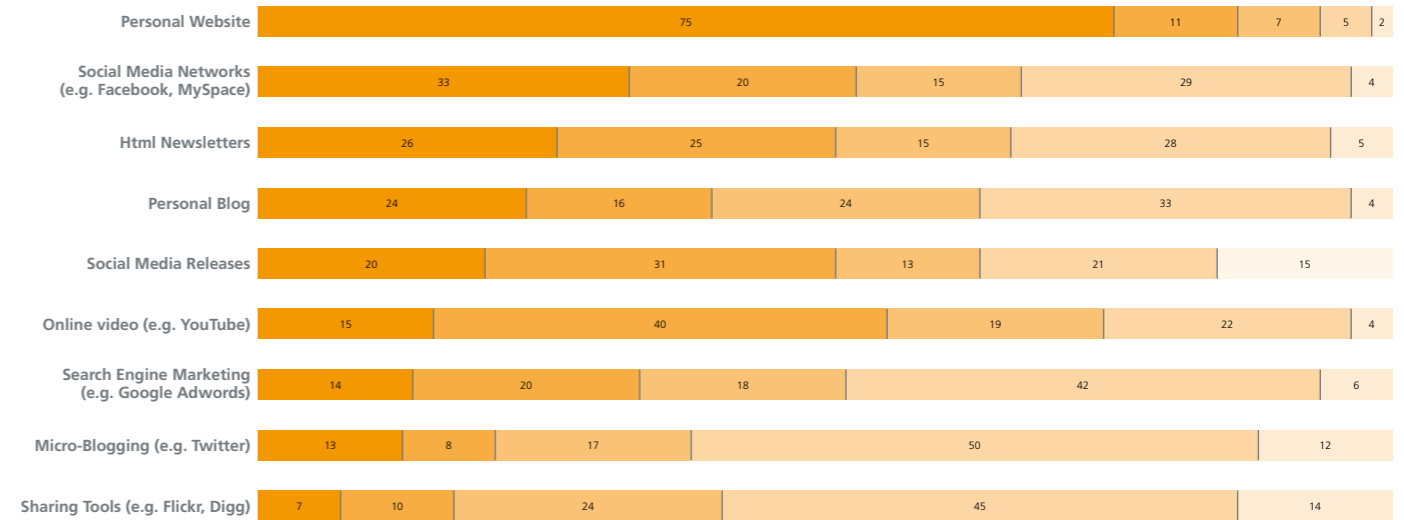
MEPs have recognised the importance of having a strong web presence in communicating with voters with 75% of respondents claiming to use a website extensively for this purpose. Whilst there are a number of early adopters who have demonstrated an understanding of how to leverage additional digital tools for effective communication and campaigns, a majority of MEPs do not venture beyond a website in their efforts to communicate with voters. Among the main political groups, members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) are the clear leaders in the use of digital communications tools. Its members lead in the use of all categories except blogs and social media releases where the liberal ALDE group is ahead.

MEPs view the internet as a broadcast medium rather than an opportunity to engage in personal and direct contact with voters. The most commonly used tools are websites and newsletters, while the tool most MEPs plan to use in the future is online video.

62% of MEPs have either never heard of Twitter or have no plans to use it



Which of the following online tools do you use to communicate to voters and other interested parties? (%)



■ Use extensively ■ Use occasionally ■ Do not use but plan to use in the future ■ Do not use and do not plan to use ■ Never heard of it



How do MEPs view the effectiveness of communications tools in helping them reach out to voters?

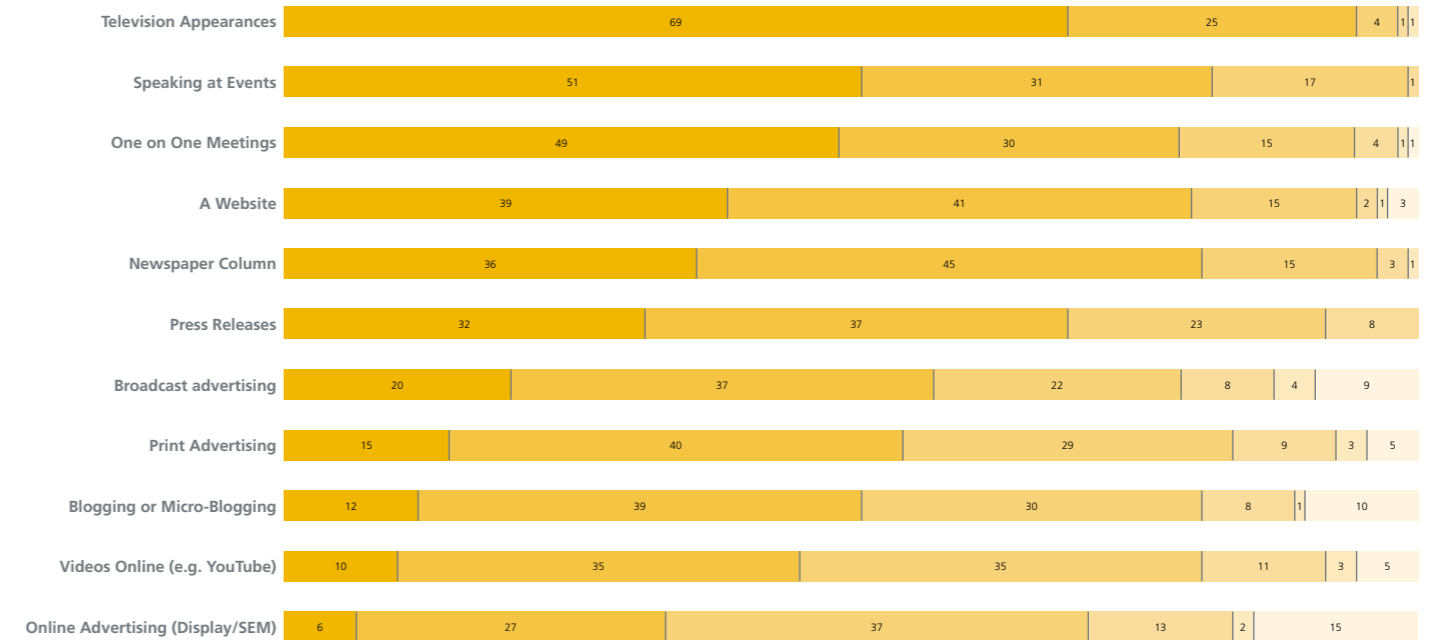
Despite changes to media usage patterns in Europe, MEPs continue to believe overwhelmingly that television is the most effective means to reach voters. However, a personal website is seen as just as effective in reaching out to voters as other 'earned' opportunities such as personal contact with voters through events, one-on-one meetings or writing a newspaper column.

Other forms of online engagement such as blogging or micro-blogging, online video and online advertising are seen as some of the least effective tools. This may be due to the lack of familiarity with these tools. For example, MEPs rank Search Engine Marketing and other forms of online advertising well below other forms of advertising despite its targeted and cost-effective nature. Search Engine Marketing for instance would enable an elected representative to target key groups in his or her constituency in ways which could never be achieved through broadcast media such as newspapers and television.

80% of MEPs think a website is a very effective or effective tool to communicate with voters



How effective do you believe the following activities to be in communicating to voters and other interested parties? (%)



Very effective Effective Somewhat effective Not very effective Not at all effective Don't know



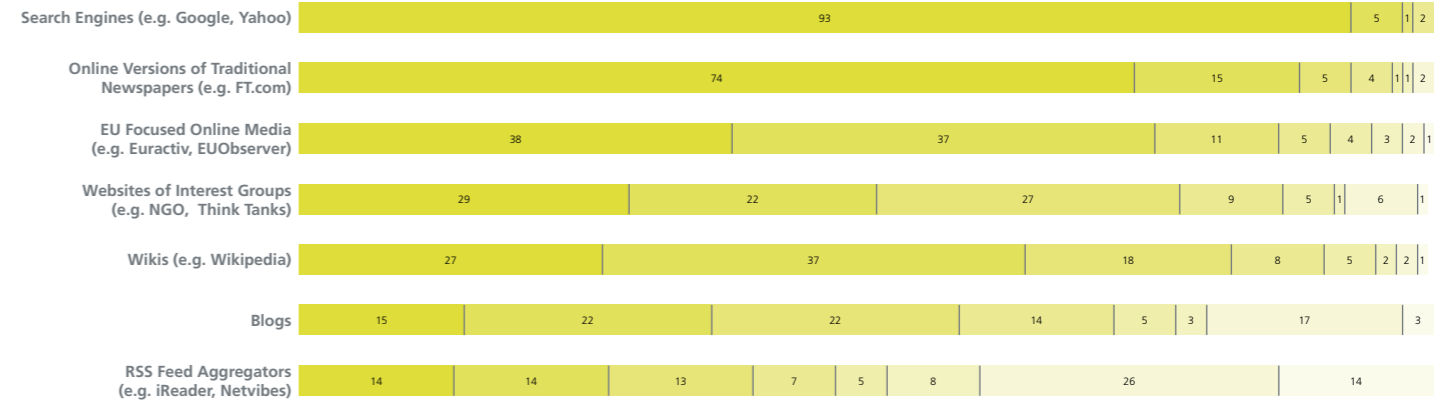
How are MEPs using the internet to understand legislative issues?

A large number of MEPs are using internet resources to inform their daily legislative work. When MEPs need to research something, like most of us, they tend to google it. 93% of MEPs claim to use search engines daily for their legislative work. 65% visit Wikipedia style tools once a day or several times each week to understand legislative issues. Online traditional media is consulted more regularly than EU specialist media, while blogs are read by around half of MEPs once a week or more. Many MEPs are not making use of time-saving tools such as RSS aggregators which would allow them to receive bespoke news directly to their inbox.

65% of MEPs visit Wikipedia style tools at least several times each week to understand legislative issues



How frequently do you, or your staff on your behalf, use the following online tools/resources in your daily legislative work? (%)



■ At least once a day
 ■ Several times each week
 ■ About once a week
 ■ Several times each month
■ About once a month
 ■ Less than once a month
 ■ Rarely or never
 ■ Never heard of it



48%

of MEPs believe meetings with representatives of their voters to be very important in the way they make decisions about policy



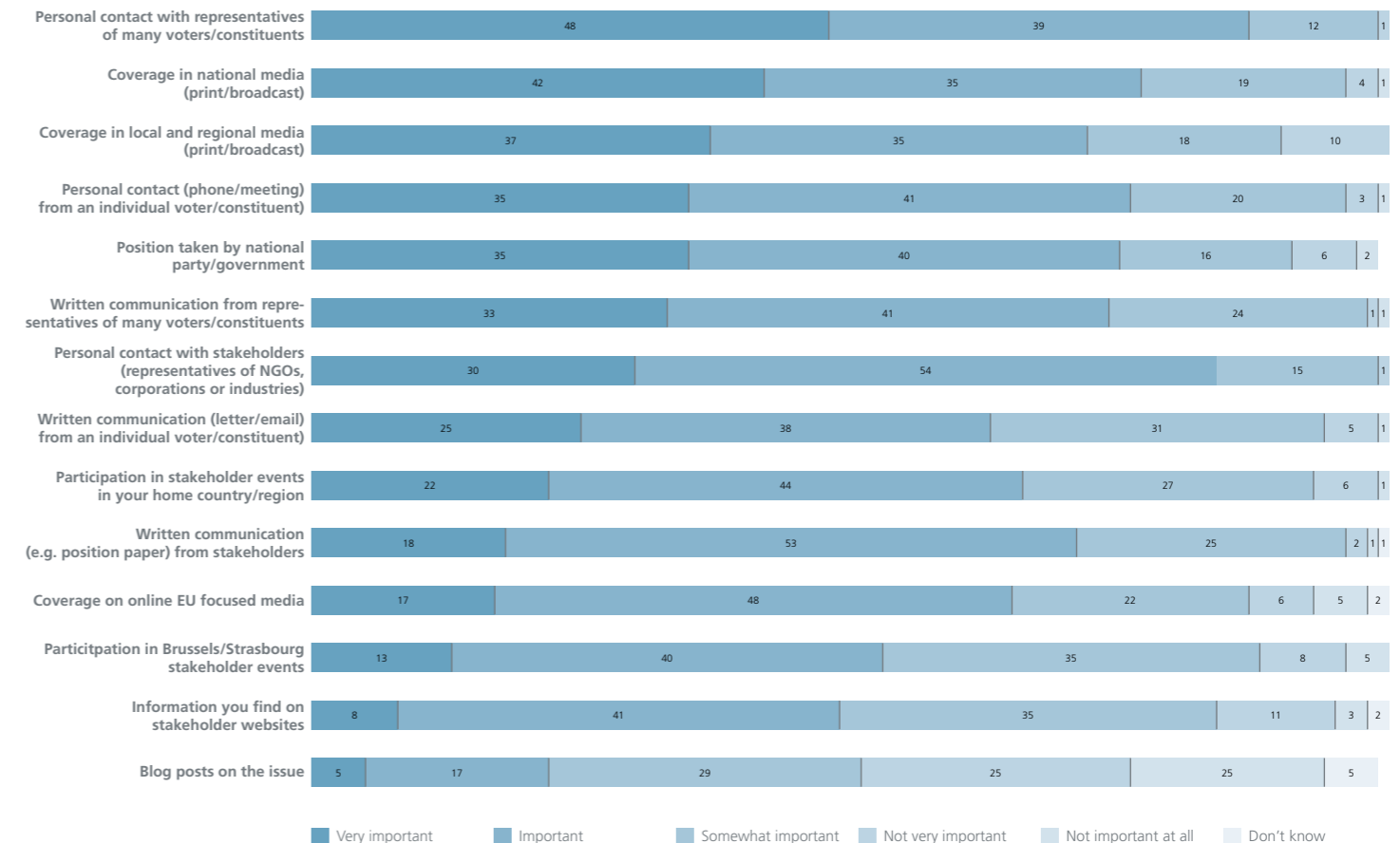
How important are digital tools in informing MEPs' thinking on policy issues?

MEPs believe personal contact to be the most important activity in informing their policy thinking irrespective of whether this contact comes from individual voters, representatives of groups of voters or stakeholders.

While MEPs use internet search engines and Wikipedia on a regular basis in their policy work, they rank information found on blogs and websites below personal contact, media coverage, written communication and events in terms of its importance. In the future, increased online interaction by MEPs may increase the importance of the internet in informing their thinking, as evidenced by the fact that currently, MEPs who blog are to believe blogs to be important in informing their policy positions.

Media coverage in local, regional and national media is likely to be considered more important in informing policy thinking than coverage in EU specialist media.

How important are the following in informing your thinking on policy issues? (%)



Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

With the European electorate spending an increasing amount of time online, MEPs need to make sure that they are communicating in this space. The internet can offer a cost-effective and personal way to reach out to voters and can increase the effectiveness of traditional forms of communication.

- 1 - Understand and use the full range of digital media tools available to get the same message out in different ways. Much of what you are already producing can be reused online using the different platforms.
- 2 - Embrace social media as a cost-effective means to make personal connections to voters who are likely to carry your message to others.
- 3 - Investigate Search Engine Marketing as a cost-effective means to target voters in geographically defined areas who are already interested in the issues you wish to address.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

The results of our survey demonstrate that traditional public affairs tactics will remain of paramount importance in any EU-focused public affairs activity. However as MEPs increasingly go online for information about policy issues, the industry's practitioners need to consider digital communications as an integral part of any effective public affairs strategy. Digital will cease to be an optional extra and will become a central part of any campaign which reaches out to policymakers.

- 1 - Ensure your messages on key policy issues are easily found on search engines and reflected in key sites like Wikipedia and European online specialist EU media.
- 2 - Investigate Search Engine Marketing as a cost-effective means to ensure MEPs get your key messages on key legislative dossiers for the time these issues are debated in Parliament.
- 3 - All politics is local. Build and leverage national and local networks for direct advocacy and media coverage to complement your Brussels-based outreach.

Methodology

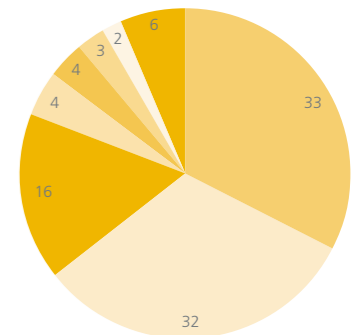
Fleishman-Hillard Brussels surveyed Members of the European Parliament between 1 April and 1 May 2009. The research was carried out using an online survey tool on the basis of eight multiple-choice questions.

110 Members of the European Parliament responded to the survey. This figure represents around 14% of the current 6th legislature.

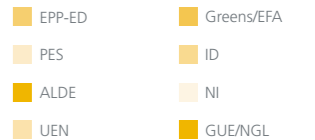
The sample is broadly representative of the Parliament as a whole, with responses from all national delegations with the exception of Luxembourg and a fair weighting of responses from the main three political groups in relation to their number of seats in the Parliament.

The statistics used in this report are only indicative of the actual use of digital tools by MEPs. However the sample size and spread of MEPs is large enough for interesting conclusions to be drawn.

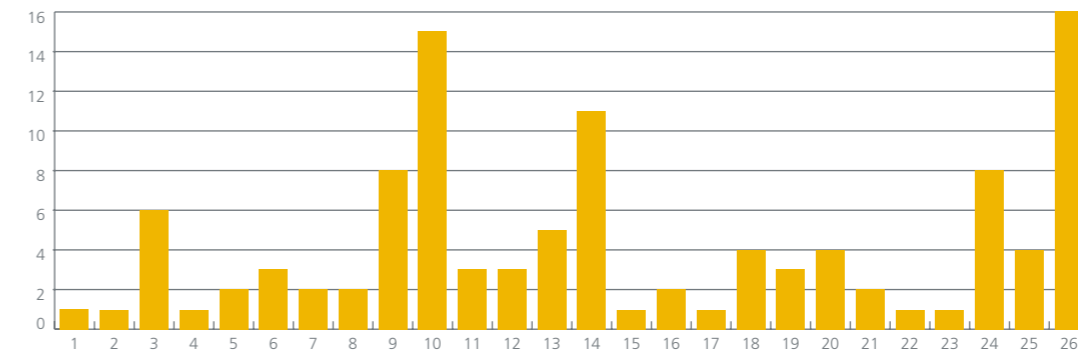
A list of the questions posed and the data collected are available at www.epdigitaltrends.eu



Survey respondents by political group (%)



Survey respondents by nationality (%)



- | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1 - Austria | 7 - Estonia | 13 - Ireland | 19 - Poland | 25 - Sweden |
| 2 - Belgium | 8 - Finland | 14 - Italy | 20 - Portugal | 26 - United Kingdom |
| 3 - Bulgaria | 9 - France | 15 - Latvia | 21 - Romania | |
| 4 - Cyprus | 10 - Germany | 16 - Lithuania | 22 - Slovakia | |
| 5 - Czech republic | 11 - Greece | 17 - Malta | 23 - Slovenia | |
| 6 - Denmark | 12 - Hungary | 18 - Netherlands | 24 - Spain | |

Charities

For each completed questionnaire, Fleishman-Hillard donated €10 to one of the following charities (as selected by the MEP respondents when completing the questionnaire):



ONE LAPTOP PER CHILD is a charity that seeks to create educational opportunities for the world's poorest children by providing each child with specially designed laptops, thus ensuring they are better connected to each other, to the world and to a brighter future.

For more information please visit: www.laptop.org or www.olpceu.org

FULDA-MOSOCHO PROJECT is a charity which was set-up in 2002 to overcome female genital mutilation among the Kisii ethnic Community of Kenya.

The Fulda Mosoch-Poject is being managed by the Centre for PROFS in cooperation with Vivid Com

For more information please visit: www.weibliche-genitalverstuemmelung-ueberwinden.com

"Kenya - end of female genital mutilation": www.weibliche-genitalverstuemmelung-ueberwinden.com/Dateien/Fulda_Mosocho_Video_ENG

PROFS
Center for PROFS



MEP thoughts

"As more and more of our voters go online for their information, MEPs have a great opportunity to connect with their constituents on the net. Back in 2004, I was the only candidate in Germany to have campaign posters with just a URL on them; in the 2009 election I may be one of the few to use the full range of internet tools. As the EP Digital Trends survey shows we have a long way to go to catch up with our US colleagues but a great deal to gain."



Alexander Alvaro MEP
(ALDE, Germany)



"The Internet can only bring citizens and MEPs closer together. It has proved a valuable medium for trying to bridge the gap between Brussels and Tallinn. Blogging, the website, my Youtube channel and most recently Twitter have all been useful when trying to reach out to the constituents."

Katrin Saks MEP
(PES, Estonia)

"MEPs struggle for column inches at the best of times and yet more and more of our voters go online for their information. I have taken my campaign online and I would encourage my colleagues to do the same."



Christofer Fjellner MEP
(EPP-ED, Sweden)

About us

ABOUT FLEISHMAN-HILLARD IN BRUSSELS

Fleishman-Hillard is one of Brussels' leading public affairs and communications consultancies. Our staff of over 45 multinational and multilingual consultants has first-hand experience of the European Union institutions, national governments, business and journalism across all industry sectors and areas of EU policy. Our office acts as a hub for Fleishman-Hillard's public affairs practice in the European Union, providing centralised management for our clients' public affairs activities across the continent.

We offer a full range of public affairs and communications services from direct advocacy to media relations. We lead the way in integrating digital tools in Brussels into a wide range of campaigns. Public Affairs 2.0 <http://pagoesdigital.wordpress.com> is our blog on the use of digital in politics, public affairs and communications in Europe. You can also follow us on Twitter <http://twitter.com/Eurotwittering>

OUR DIGITAL CAPABILITIES

Our digital team helps clients with the whole range of digital communications including strategy (online reputation management, strategic planning, audits), online engagement (blogger relations, social networking, search engine optimization and marketing), as well as content and technical development (website development, web writing, social media releases, metrics/analytics, widgets, RSS, etc.)

For more information visit our Brussels website, <http://eu.fleishmaneuropa.com>

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www.epdigitaltrends.eu

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