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THE BIG PICTURE

What is happening on October 22nd?

Ben will be joining [Survivor Philippines](#) and leaving the company in Tyler's hands.

Just kidding. On October 22, we are rolling out an amazing new visual design to all of our 20+ million users around the globe. English locales will also have more accurate, updated, and awesome language about what Change.org is, how orgs can get involved, and how we fund our empowerment platform. Non-English locales will get that same treatment as soon as it can be translated and uploaded.

We are rolling out a more clear, consistent, and transparent approach to our identity, including our new mission, vision, and advertising guidelines. That's the focus of this document.

What will change?

Things will be better! Our site will be visually stunning, and we will have much greater clarity and transparency about how Change.org works and how we fund our platform. We'll still be the same great open empowerment platform that you know and love, and campaigners will still work on inspiring "Changey" campaigns with broad appeal.

The biggest operational change will be to our advertising guidelines (formerly known as our "client policy"), which will now be a Google-like open advertising policy in which determinations about which advertisements we'll accept are based on the content of the ad, not the group doing the advertising.

There are many more detailed questions and answers below, but that's the big picture.

THE ROLLOUT

What's the timeline?

Over the next week, we will be reviewing these changes internally, finalizing our messaging, and completing the visual redesign. We want everyone to feel comfortable explaining Change.org to friends, colleagues, clients, and other contacts and will make sure everyone has the material and messages they need.

On October 19-21, identified staff will have 1-on-1 conversations with important external stakeholders, including certain clients, organizations, and influential people. On October 22, the beautiful new site will go live, and an email will be sent to any people or groups that may feel strongly about the changes to our ad guidelines.

Why did we wait so long to announce this?

We wanted to get the rebrand done right – and that took time. We've spent the last three months working with each team to make key decisions and figure out how to operationalize and communicate them. Additionally, our designers and the product and engineering team have been working around clock to align those decisions with our users' experience on our site.

How are we communicating to our various stakeholders about these changes?

- **Users:** Their experience of the rebrand will be by navigating the redesigned site. Help Center (formerly known as "Help Desk") responses will be developed to handle likely FAQs, and we'll probably mention the redesign in an action alert P.S. We have no plans to proactively announce our new mission, vision, or advertising guidelines to users.
- **Clients:** From October 19-21, business development staff will reach out to a select group of clients that might be concerned about the changes.
- **US progressive community:** A small team of comms and campaigns staff active in those communities will prepare an active rollout and response plan, led by BJW. We plan to be more proactive in engaging these communities than we were in the summer.
- **Press:** The comms team will closely monitor and respond to press inquiries. We are not planning proactive press outreach on the rebrand but are queuing up positive press profiles to launch around October 22.

Can we start talking to potential allies?

Please keep these plans between us until we launch on October 22. We have an extensive plan for external outreach, both to our allies and clients. If you'd like to help out, please email BJW.

What exactly does this mean for our platform policies?

Nothing changes. We will remain an open platform, only removing petitions in extremely rare instances in which the petition itself is violent, hateful, illegal, or involves harassment or bullying.

Will we be unveiling any new tools or features as part of the rebrand?

Not immediately. We're developing new tools for more community moderation and dialogue on the site, which will likely go live over the next 3-6 months. We are also still experimenting with the member-sponsored campaigns tool, which allows Change.org users to pay to sponsor a campaign, and it will be rolled out separately.

How will the redesign affect our homepage and victories page?

The homepage will look more innovative and feature dozens of international victories. Eventually, individual victories pages will also have standardized formats and tone.

We already feature high-impact, inspiring, unifying campaigns, and that will not change. Nor will there be any kind of major shift in the types of victories we feature on the homepage, beyond a renewed focus on showcasing the diversity of campaigns that appeal to our growing user base's unique interests and viewpoints.

OUR CAMPAIGNS TEAM

What exactly does this mean for our campaigns team?

Very little will change in our campaigning. We'll continue supporting campaigns that demonstrate to a wide audience the power of using Change.org petitions to change the world, and we'll keep working together to reach a larger and more diverse community of users. We'll just be more transparent and better at describing the amazing work our campaigns team does.

Will campaigners or client strategists have to work on campaigns they oppose?

No. The campaigns team will continue to organize inspiring, broadly appealing, politically transcendent campaigns, just as it always has. Staff won't be forced to work on campaigns they feel uncomfortable supporting, nor will anyone on the BizDev team be forced to work with an advertiser with whom they do not feel comfortable working.

Will the campaigns team be able to support campaigns against our advertisers?

Absolutely. The 'firewall' that exists now between advertisers and campaigns will continue, and we'll talk about it openly. The campaigns team will continue to run broadly appealing campaigns that tell a story of empowerment and showcase the power of our tools. If there is a campaign that both fits our campaigning criteria and targets an advertiser, we will absolutely help support it.

OUR ADVERTISING GUIDELINES

Overview

What exactly does this mean for our advertising guidelines (previously "client policy")?

First, we want our language to be more accurate. Our open platform is the core of our strategy to empower people everywhere to create the change they want to see. So from now on, we will make it clear that organizations sponsoring petitions on Change.org are "advertisers" (formerly known as "clients" or "partners").

Second, we are embracing a Google-like advertising policy in which we will be open to advertising from any group, provided they are not a hate group and the advertisement (sponsored petition) is not clearly violent, hateful, discriminatory, or promoting illegal activity. We will not filter potential advertisers based on whether we personally agree with their work, nor will we filter potential advertisements based on our gut feelings about the content of the ad itself.

Advertising on our site is not an endorsement, and, like any other platform, we will explicitly reserve the right to refuse advertising as needed to protect our brand as an open empowerment platform.

What's different about this policy?

Overall, the main difference is the default assumption of openness. To date, our advertising policy has been values-based; we have accepted clients case by case, one at a time, based on their alignment with our values as a company. Going forward, our advertising policy will be akin to those of many other leading platforms, open by default to any group that wants to advertise with us. The only exception to that default openness will be hate groups.

Will there be advertisers some of us fundamentally disagree with?

Yes. But we expect that they will be a minority, probably a very small minority.

Why can't we vet every advertiser against a particular set of values?

As background, there are various reasons behind our decision to move from closed to open advertising guidelines. First, we've experienced how closed guidelines, which involved researching and making determinations about every potential advertiser, simply don't scale (more on that below). Second, open guidelines are more consistent with the open identity we've chosen as a company. Third, we believe open advertising guidelines will help us maximize our mission.

Even if we wanted to censor advertisers, as a practical matter it would be unsustainable – for two reasons.

1. We will soon have thousands of advertisers, and it would be impossible to scalably investigate the organizations behind all of these petitions.
2. By rejecting some advertisers because we disagree with them, we'd be implicitly endorsing those we accept and exposing ourselves to daily attacks from people that don't think certain advertisers should fit within a set of values – an unsustainable distraction from our important work.

Ultimately we need to get out of the business of making subjective judgments about advertisers or having public battles about the ads on the site, which distract our team from the important work we're doing. Judging ads based on their content rather than the group characteristics is necessary to achieve that.

Will we be covered with ads from 'bad' organizations?

While this fear is understandable, it's extremely unlikely to actually happen. If it does, we will reevaluate.

Many of the most prominent discriminatory organizations are also well-known hate groups, which we can sustainably prevent from advertising. The few "bad" organizations that are not mentioned by our advertising policy are very unlikely to want to advertise on Change.org, as their campaigns won't appeal to most of our users. Even if they do run ads, the ads cannot themselves explicitly discriminate against a protected group of people, meaning most of the ads many of us fear will not be allowed.

But that said, this is a significant shift, and we're going to be implementing it in a way which is careful and closely monitored. Our commitment to our users is that we will aim to only suggest

sponsored campaigns they might be interested in and avoid suggesting sponsored campaigns that might offend them (more on that below). As such, we will be unable to serve certain types of ads until we can identify an audience positively responsive to those ads. This is especially important as we start up in new countries, where we may not allow political and company ads to begin with, and will only do so after careful consideration.

Bottom line: We won't do anything that could jeopardize our users' positive experiences on the site and trust in our platform.

Is Change.org maximizing profit over impact?

No. Change.org's mission, which guides all our decisions, is to empower people everywhere to create the change they want to see. We decided to be fully open because that is at the core of what we are; to achieve our mission, we must be consistent in our openness.

Financial reasons have played no part in this decision. We are proud of our revenue model, and it will help us accomplish our mission – but it is the latter, not the former, that is our guiding star.

What's in / out?

Why accept advertisements from companies?

One of the most promising movements for positive change in many countries is social entrepreneurship, and there are an increasing number of social good companies that want to use Change.org to advance positive change. We believe that companies can be a force for good, and we want to get them involved in the act of participating in positive social change – not just as targets of petitions, but also as participants in endorsing, starting and sponsoring petitions.

Ultimately we expect company-sponsored campaigns will be a small percentage of those on the platform, and as with politics, will be opening up the ad policy to them in the US first before determining whether to open up to them in additional countries.

Are political parties included in the new advertising policy?

Yes. After much deliberation, we have decided to fully open our advertising policy and allow political parties.

Weren't we originally going to exclude political parties?

Yes. We initially planned to exclude political parties, as there are a number of risks involved in allowing political ads, in particular around our brand and user experience. We also thought the decision to exclude political parties would best reinforce our open identity and the way our work transcends political divides.

But we received a lot of feedback from across the team, including staff outside the US, about the importance of the role political parties play in many contexts. One of the primary ways people get involved in civic participation is through politics and elections, and we don't want to close the door to political actors engaging on Change.org - something which they can do through many channels, and which has the potential to increase their responsiveness to citizens overall.

We are also increasingly confident that we'll be able to personalize ads to maintain a positive user experience. So after much discussion, we decided by consensus to open the policy to political parties, in alignment with our open platform.

Will all countries accept political parties?

Not necessarily. Because this is a sensitive issue in many countries, we will make these decisions country by country, based on the timeline that makes most sense for that country and through in-depth conversations with country staff. In most cases, we won't accept either parties or corporates at all during the early start-up and market incubation phases of business development, focusing instead on the non-profit market. In a number of countries we may simply never accept them, due to the risks attached. Country leads and campaign directors will propose how this should be approached in each country.

In the U.S., will we accept Republican advertisers?

In due course, yes. Anyone can advertise on Change.org.

That said, we have a commitment to our users to match them to campaigns they might actually be interested in. So we will not accept any new ads from political candidates or parties until we have the personalization technology to serve them to users who will be interested. That technology will not appear until sometime in 2013.

There is an important distinction here: we need to strike a balance between an open advertising policy and excellent user service. It's irresponsible for us to sell advertising to a group that we don't have the audience to support, and it's bad user service to show users ads they don't want to see. Our next challenge is to build the targeting tools into our product that can fully support the openness we believe will change the world.

What about astroturf or corporate front groups?

We really struggled with whether or not to exclude these types of groups in our advertising policy, but in the end, we decided that doing so is just not feasible, as there is no defensible way to draw the line. For group after group, determining whether they are a front group is a fundamentally political decision – so if excluding front groups is explicitly in our client policy, then we are affirming that every client we take is not a front group. That simply doesn't work for an open advertising policy. We have faith in our users to make good decisions about what advertisements to support or not.

What about hate groups?

We will not accept advertisements from hate groups.

What's a hate group?

Hate groups have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics, and we will not work with organizations commonly referred to by legitimate, widely respected organizations as hate groups. In the U.S., for example, we will likely use the Southern Poverty Law Center, which maintains a list of known hate groups, as a guide.

What about anti-abortion, pro-gun, and union-busting advertisers?

We will be open to advertisements from any group other than hate groups.

We are establishing an open, non-partisan advertising policy that supports a ubiquitous, global brand, one that is relevant in many countries and across many cultures. We are open to organizations that represent all points of view, including those with which we personally (and strongly) disagree.

But while these organizations might advertise on our site, we should not assume that every “worst case scenario” will come to pass. Advertisers won't want to advertise on Change.org if we're not delivering the audience they're looking for.

If we're calling out discriminating content and hate groups, why is there no mention of animal cruelty?

We carefully considered adding a clause against animal cruelty to our ad policy, and received a lot of constructive feedback on this.

Our ad guidelines' default is openness. When we exclude particular advertisers or advertisements, people inherently assume we're endorsing those we don't reject. That assumption exposes Change.org to regular attacks from people who disagree with our decisions on which advertisers and advertisements to accept and which to exclude. For example, if we called out “animal cruelty” in our advertising guidelines, then we'd be subject to regular lobbying over sponsored petitions about everything from hunting and fishing licenses to animal euthanasia, anything related to a circus, and horse racing. Change.org could be attacked for allowing ads as simple as “Broadcast the Kentucky Derby live on ESPN” to a sponsored petition about the euthanasia of racehorses after they break a leg.

Many people see the examples above as cases of animal cruelty. Many others disagree. We don't want to put ourselves in the middle of that debate if we can avoid it, as lobbying around these kinds of sponsored petitions would take lots of time and energy to respond to and arbitrate, so we need an extremely compelling reason to add another condition to the ad guidelines that justifies spending that extra time and energy.

We've added a clause about discriminatory ads because advertisers are likely enough to post discriminatory ads that we have to proactively exclude them. We don't want to become the arbiters of what is or is not discrimination, but it's a likely enough possibility that we need to take proactive steps to ensure that we are able to prevent it.

In the case of animals, for now it seems highly unlikely that anyone will want to post an ad on [Change.org](https://change.org) advocating a form of animal cruelty commonly understood to be egregious and unacceptable. So while we are committed to our animal friendly user base, we don't believe that adding a specific clause about animal cruelty is strategically wise. Indeed, doing so might create a notable distraction to the good work we do engaging this community. As Change.org grows, if we find that advertisers are running ads promoting commonly understood and egregious form of animal cruelty then we will re-evaluate.

How will it work?

What will be the criteria for vetting advertisements?

Like other leading platforms, ads on Change.org cannot promote hate, violence or discrimination. They can't contain inaccurate or deceitful content, and they can't break the law. BJW will develop a full vetting process in Q4, but key questions of implementation are

addressed below.

How will we identify potentially problematic advertisements under our new advertising guidelines?

All organizations wanting to advertise on Change.org will continue to work with a member of the business development team to sign a contract and design an advertisement. If a Change.org staffer feels that a potential advertisement may violate our ad guidelines, s/he will report the concern to adpolicy@change.org, which goes to Sarah, BJW, Paul.

What if we begin working with an advertiser that I think poses a serious risk to Change.org, but it isn't a hate group?

Follow the same procedure above by emailing adpolicy@change.org. We reserve the right to refuse advertising based on technical limitations, resource constraints, or to protect our company, but we will exercise this right extremely rarely and only with an explicit decision by Ben.

To be clear: this would happen only if an advertisement or advertiser does not violate our advertising guidelines, yet...

1. technical limitations prevent us from being able to serve the ad without putting off lots of our users. For example:
 - a. A pro-life group wants to run an ad calling on the president to make abortion more difficult, even in cases of rape. The ad doesn't violate our policy, but we don't have enough users who we know would support it.
 - b. A conservative organization wants to run a provocative advertisement calling on X country to build a wall to "protect the border from illegal immigration." The ad doesn't violate our policy, and we probably have enough conservative users to get some decent signatures on the ad, but we don't have the kind of personalization technology to ensure the ad will only be shown to those conservative users.
 - c. The Muslim Brotherhood wants to run a provocative ad, but we do not yet have a large enough base of Egyptian users that would find the ad compelling.
2. the ad poses an extraordinary threat to Change.org's global brand through highly inflammatory advocacy that's widely seen as illegitimate. This would not happen just because we were uncomfortable with an advertiser or didn't like their politics. For example:
 - a. A highly divisive and wildly provocative European politician wants to sign a €3 million contract with us promoting a campaign to legalize bestiality.
 - b. A prominent British academic's organization wants to sign a £1 million contract with us promoting a campaign asking the EU to launch a formal inquest into whether or not the Holocaust happened.
 - c. A famous South African politician wants to run a major ad campaign calling for anti-retroviral drugs to be made illegal.
 - d. BP wants to run an ad in the aftermath of one of the largest oil spills in world history calling on the government to stop persecuting them.
3. the ad would lead to Change.org being threatened with legal action. For example:
 - a. "Anonymous" wants to run an ad encouraging people to spread and share classified information.
 - b. A tabloid wants to run a big ad campaign calling on Prince William to admit he is a closeted homosexual, which risks legal action against Change.org for defamation or slander.

What is the decision-making process? Who has final veto power over whether or not an advertisement violates our ad guidelines?

We will be finalizing the process over the next few weeks. The basics are that after an advertisement has been flagged to adpolicy@change.org, Sarah, BJW and Paul will work in committee to make a determination. They will consult with country leads whenever necessary.

If the concern centers around a violation of our ad guidelines (e.g. the ad is potentially discriminatory or deceitful), then BJW will make the final call, consulting with Ben and Paul as needed.

If the concern centers around our inability to effectively match an advertisement with Change.org users (i.e. we lack users who would be interested in the advertisement or lack the technology to effectively target those users), then Sarah will make the final call, consulting with Ben and Paul as needed.

Effect on staff

We'll probably end up working with advertisers who have opposing views. Will we set up firewalls between client strategists working with opposing clients?

We'll be adult about this and figure it out together. No one will be forced to work with an advertiser with which they don't feel comfortable, and we'll continue to embrace a culture of diversity and openness to different points of view.

Will we be hiring people with different political views to serve new advertisers?


We will continue to hire the best people in the world regardless of their political orientation. We will strive to ensure current and new staff identify with our mission of empowering people everywhere to create the change they want to see and contribute to a strong, positive company culture. This includes a commitment to Change.org's values, a desire to empower incredibly diverse people (most of all the disempowered), and a global perspective.

Improving the ad experience

Can we be more transparent about our business model?


Yes! We are immediately improving transparency around our revenue model via a new "How We Make Money" page on the site. This page will make clear that Change.org is a company, it will explain the advertising process, and go into detail about how sponsored petitions work (including images of the upsell).

Can we be more transparent about sponsored petitions, specifically?

Yes! The product and engineering team is preparing to test a tweaked design for the upsell that has a banner at the top calling out the sponsored petition and some additional copy to make it more clear to users that they are opting in to receive emails from the organization sponsoring the petition. We are also going to experiment with a  hover over to explain even further. Below is an early iteration of what this might look like:


✓ Thanks for signing. You might like this sponsored petition:

Support Self-enabling bandwidth-monitored hierarchy 1 of 2 [Skip](#)



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SIGN

17 SUPPORTERS

We can't promise that this will test well and be implemented, but we want to be transparent about the different things we are considering, and to make clear that we are taking this seriously.

When will we be able to target ads better?

This is one of the top priorities for the product & engineering team over the coming year, because it will help us maintain our commitment to users that we provide opportunities to create the change they want to see. We hope to improve our ability to target ads in a number of ways. Namely:

- **Machine learning:** we are developing the technology to match action alerts to users, which utilizes everything we know about a user (what petitions they've signed, geography, demographics) to match them to the petitions they're most likely to be interested in. This is complicated technology but should bear fruit in 2013. Once that happens, we should be able to repurpose the technology and use everything we know about a user (what petitions they've signed, geography, demographics) to match them to the ads (sponsored petitions) they're most likely to be interested in.
- **Tagging:** we want to move from our current 8-cause system to a much more flexible tagging system. Once complete, users and Change.org staff will be able to tag any petition in many different ways, for example as "pro-choice." We will then be able to show that "pro-choice" advertisement to people who have signed petitions tagged as "pro-choice" while suppressing people who've signed "pro-life" petitions. This is technically complicated, and we're hoping to make significant progress in 2013.
- **Transparency:** we are going to implement a more transparent advertisement and opt-in process so that users better understand how sponsored petitions work and who they're connecting with. We'll also be investing heavily in building strong feedback loops so that sponsored campaigns our users don't like will be hidden or even taken down from the site. This is going to be essential to our success as we build a much larger and more diverse base.

But how will we target massive sponsored petitions?

When signing a contract with advertisers, we always first determine the number of supporters we think we can help them recruit through the site. For advertisers who might have controversial petitions that would offend a large percentage of our users, we wouldn't be able to sign a contract, or would only be able to sign a very small contract, until we can get much better at targeting the people who would positively respond to those ads. Even then, we would only be able to sign a contract for the number of people we think might be interested in their issue.

OUR USERS

How will our users' experience change Oct. 22?

The site will have a new visual look everywhere, and English locales (and hopefully others too!) will have updated language on the About Us, Our Business Model, and Our Advertising Policy pages. Soon, those locales will also have new What the Campaigns Team Does pages.

Do we plan to officially announce the new site to our users?

We'll probably mention the redesign in an action alert P.S., but beyond that, we have no plans to proactively tell users about the new design or our new mission, vision, or advertising guidelines. Users' experience of the rebrand will be by navigating the redesigned site.

Were users interviewed?

Yes. We interviewed users as part of our visual design process and surveyed users as part of our identity process.

Are there any aspects of the redesign that users might be upset or excited by?

The new site's really beautiful – great job, Nate and team! – so we hope our users will be really excited by that. Users who found petitions through cause-based categories may need a little extra time to adjust. (Side note: Only 2% of users ever clicked on these categories, so they were confusing for our brand without being very useful for most. We'll soon have topics instead!)

Other than that, we don't envision any other aspects of the site upsetting users. If our users want to share feedback, Carol's team will be working hard (as always!) to respond quickly to user questions, concerns, and comments following the launch of the redesign.

Do we anticipate petitions about the changes?

Absolutely! We're a petition website, after all. ;)