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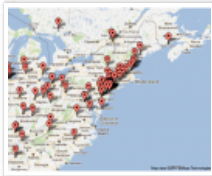
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Avaaz.org: MoveOn Goes International

BY [MICAH L. SIFRY](#) | Tuesday, January 16 2007

I've been collecting string about [Avaaz.org](#) for a while now, but after I queried founders Ricken Patel and Tom Perriello (of [ResPublica](#)) and [Paul Hilder](#), and they begged off on a pre-launch interview, I figured there was no hurry. But their site is now live (thanks [Ruby](#) for pinging me on that), so here's a first take.

Avaaz.org is using "The World in Action" as its tagline, and the first clue that this aims to be something different is the site, which comes in English, French, Korean, Chinese, Spanish and Portugese. The English version, however, is clearly NOT aimed at us Americans: it's got a photo of Tony Blair that reads "Even *he* is pulling out/Block the escalation in Iraq," and starts with this text: "George W Bush wants to pour more petrol on the fires burning in Iraq. But the new US Congress has the mandate to douse the flames. If they hear from all of us, they might find the guts to do it!" (Petrol is gasoline in British, by the way; and douse is to put out.)

At first glance this looks pretty cool and ambitious, a continuation of the "[second superpower](#)" movement that first reared its head in the global antiwar protests of early 2003. But I fear this well-intentioned effort could be just a horizontal move in online organizing, instead of a real step forward.

Though the name "[MoveOn](#)" appears nowhere on the Avaaz site, the giant online activist group's fingerprints are not hard to discern. For one, it's got the same model: build a big list, send them alerts to take action. Nothing [net-centric](#), alas. No connecting members to each other or giving them a [platform](#) with tools for self-organizing. Here's how Avaaz's team describes their approach:

Using the latest technology, Avaaz.org empowers ordinary people from every corner of the globe to directly contact key global decision-makers, corporations and the media. By signing up to receive updates from Avaaz.org, members receive emails and text messages alerting them to new campaigns and opportunities to act online and offline, and to make a real difference on pressing global issues.

Does that really sound like the "latest technology"? (Actually, they are collecting cellphone/mobile numbers, which is an advance of sorts.) The site lists the [Service Employees International Union](#) as a founding partner along with [GetUp.org.au](#), a MoveOn-style site that has had a big impact on Australian politics. Jeremy Heimans, founder of [GetUp.org.au](#), is listed as a co-founder, along with Eli Pariser of MoveOn.

But what I'm hearing is that Avaaz is mainly a spawn of MoveOn. This makes some sense, when you consider that the American group has something like 600,000 email addresses of non-Americans in its list. This [job description](#) for the group's Chief Operating Officer makes clear the connection:

Global public opinion has been called the world's "Second Superpower," but a yawning gap persists between the views and values of the world's peoples and the policies that govern them. Avaaz.org is a new activist community that will be launched in January 2007. **As a joint venture with MoveOn.org, Avaaz.org will aim to fill this gap using the proven organizing techniques of online activism.** The intention is to bring together millions of people around the world who favor a more progressive globalization -- building a well-organized public constituency around key global issues like poverty, climate change, human rights, global governance and major conflict. The organization is pursuing an ambitious growth path. It will ultimately be staffed with 20 full-time staff located in more than 8 countries, along with many volunteers. It is beginning with 700,000 members spread across 148 countries. It also has an Advisory Board that comprises politicians, diplomats, activists and celebrities from around the world. [Emphasis added.]

I also hear that in addition to getting support from MoveOn, Avaaz is also getting help from Aryeh Neier of the Open Society Institute and from Herb and Marion Sandler. However those are just unconfirmed rumors at this point. [Cute-looking group](#), by the way. I'll add updates to this post as I get them.

UPDATE: I have learned that Open Society Institute indeed made a one-year grant of \$150,000 to Res Publica last summer to help them get Avaaz off the ground.

UPDATE2: MoveOn's relationship to Avaaz.org is described this way by Eli Pariser: "We're co-founders of Avaaz with Res Publica – nothing to hide there. We'll be encouraging our international members to be a part, and raising some money for them. We think this model – which in the U.S. has brought 3 million folks into the political process, developed a new small-donor base for Democratic candidates, and helped win a number of key elections, can have an exciting impact worldwide."

UPDATE3: And Ricken Patel of Res Publica chimes in with this: "Each organization [MoveOn and ResPublica] has roughly equal international memberships that will be invited to join Avaaz (Res Publica has built a list of almost 400,000 at www.ceasefirecampaign.org) and we also have had a campaign on Darfur since early 2004 at www.darfurgenocide.org). I think it's fair that we're starting with a MoveOn model plus sms. (look for sms campaigns very soon). But we're looking to innovate in all kinds of ways. We do want to try and get the right synergy between alerts and some kind of social networking model. We also want to try to get more creative about what online communities can support offline."

Technorati Tags: [Avaaz.org](#), [Eli Pariser](#), [GetUp.org.au](#), [MoveOn.org](#), [Net-centric](#), [Paul Hilder](#), [Rob Stuart](#), [SEIU](#), [Tom Perriello](#)

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leesean • 12 years ago

Hi Micah, thanks for blogging about us and helping us to get the word out about [Avaaz.org](#).

I just have some additions to the information you have posted about us. First of all, David Madden, along with Jeremy Heimans, are two of the co-founders of [GetUp.org.au](#), and both David and Jeremy are co-founders of [Avaaz.org](#).

Also, we now have the site online in 9 languages now. We are working hard to improve the site and constantly adding new content. Stay tuned for our future campaigns.

Lee-Sean

<http://avaaz.org>

<http://leesean.net>

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Micah L. Sifry • 12 years ago

Paul--

I'm glad to hear it, and I'm sure you will iterate further. However, as you know from my past writings on this, I think [MoveOn.org](#) could be a much more vital force if it weren't so tightly controlled. Hence this early take on Avaaz, which so far doesn't look that different. We're watching and expecting more goodness.

Micah

p.s. How was I or anyone else to know that it wasn't a launch if you're up with a website, ads in newspapers and collecting names? Perhaps you should s tick a

"beta" label on the site?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Paul Hilder • 12 years ago

thanks for the props Micah. but look, we're not even launched yet, we rushed this out to combat Bush's mad escalation and it's still very beta-gamma - ideas and help welcome - so don't expect all the 2.0 net-centric bells and whistles YET.....

MoveOn are helping but we're building on www.CeasefireCampaign.org and other global efforts too

let's face it, this is needed - and we don't think we're the papal conclave (to reference my ancient piece at <http://www.personaldemocracy.com/node/316/>) - it's all about democracy!

P/

London, Europe, Avaaz

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