

THE MOUSE THAT ROARS

Web 2.0 and the evolution of online animal advocacy

By Mat Thomas and Tricia Barry

It goes without saying that computers have transformed almost every aspect of our lives since the Internet came to prominence. Consider, for example, that when Farm Sanctuary started in 1986, personal computers were still considered newfangled and the World Wide Web was basically nonexistent. Yet we recognized early on the promise and potential of the "Net" to help us fulfill our mission, and continually provide new and better forms of e-activism for animal advocates as technological innovations take hold.

Particularly within the last five years, Web 2.0 – a cluster of interactive technologies that greatly enhance personal expression, information sharing and collaboration – has brought countless new computer users into a world that they themselves are building. With more information more quickly and easily available than at any other time in history, and direct contact to remote continents accessible with a mere mouse click, humanity has yet to fully absorb the radical social and personal changes we've undergone as a result of this unprecedented communications experiment.

That's one reason why the Internet is so exciting: it never ceases to amaze, and how we make use of it is increasingly only limited by our imaginations. For those looking to become more Web 2.0-savvy, here is an introduction to some of the most popular and effective ways to take action online for animals.

Tracking the animal protection movement online

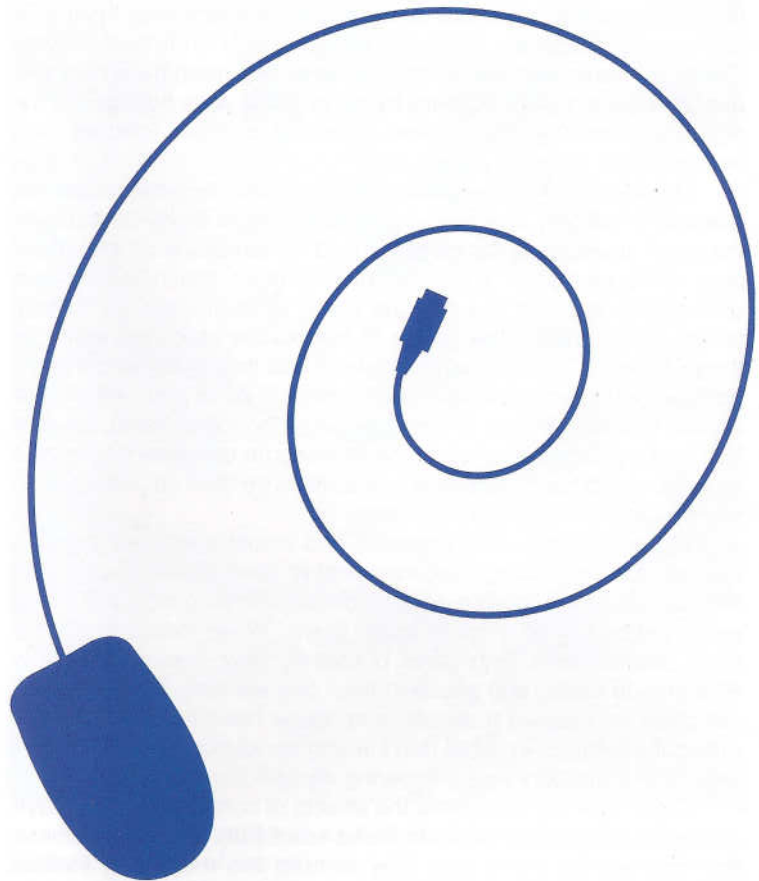
To begin to take effective action on behalf of animals, advocates must be "in the know" on the most recent developments related to the issues that matter to them. Today it's easy to stay on top of the latest news by setting up key word alerts via Google, Yahoo! or any number of search engines. Blog search engines, like Technorati, allow you to track key animal issues mentioned in blogs. News-thirsty advocates can also download a free **RSS** (Real Simple Syndication) reader and track updates to their favorite sites.

Social bookmarking takes news tracking to another level by allowing you to share the Web pages, online articles and photos and videos that you've tracked and bookmarked with a wider audience, who can comment on and bookmark these items as well. **Listservs** have been around for a long time and many are still active. Just about every region in the U.S. has at least one listserv that provides information about the latest local potlucks, protests and meetups. There are many groups out there catering to vegans and animal advocates that you can join, and you can even start your own to share content, facilitate online discussion and promote activism efforts.

Participating in social networks

At this point, if you don't have a presence on MySpace or Facebook, you are missing out on countless opportunities to advocate on behalf of animals. So, get connected! **Social networks** allow people to post personal profiles with text, photos, music, and videos. Literally hundreds of millions of people around the world are tapped into these online communities, and Farm Sanctuary is too! If you're not already our friend on Facebook or MySpace, become one today. You can find us in **Facebook Causes** or at myspace.com/farmsanctuary.

In addition to these general social networks, more sites are popping up that are specific to nonprofits and those wanting to



support and fundraise for their favorite cause. Care2, Think MTV and Causecast are three cause-based social networks that are worth checking out. And, much like Facebook Causes, MySpace has recently launched MySpace IMPACT, which is focused on politics, social advocacy and fundraising.

Online advocacy

Tracking, bookmarking and posting news to social networking sites is only the tip of the melting iceberg – advocacy takes root when you respond directly. Online news organizations track how many times an article is opened, forwarded and commented on. The more popular a news article is, the more apt that news organization will write about the subject in the future. Therefore, when you comment on or forward a news item, you are advocating in a meaningful way and building momentum for the animal protection movement.

You can take your online advocacy efforts one step further by creating your own **Blog** or **Podcast**. The advent of blogging and podcasting enables anyone to become a self-published writer or commentator. Blogs range from personal essays, vegan recipes and news analysis to virtual real-time posting at important events via Blackberry, enabling citizens to become journalists and tell the animals' side of the story with words and pictures. Podcasts

allow you to own your own airways and broadcast your voice for the animals in any way you see fit. And once you've launched a blog or podcast, you can syndicate it through social networks. This year, Farm Sanctuary launched two blogs: **Gene Baur's Bloggings** and the **Midwest Flood Pig Rescue Blog**. If you haven't added us to your **blogroll**, please do so and we will return the favor!

If you subscribe to Farm Sanctuary's e-mail list, then you already know that you can take instantaneous action for animals at the touch of a button. In early 2008, Farm Sanctuary implemented new e-alert services that allow you to connect seamlessly with lawmakers and corporations to let them know how you feel about important animal issues. Never before has voicing your concerns been so easy! If you haven't signed up yet for our e-alert list, visit **farmsanctuary.org** today to get started. You can then post these alerts to your blog, social networking sites, or listservs to broaden the reach of the alert and get more people to take action.

Photo and video sharing

What once was viewed as worth a thousand words, can now be worth far more. Whether you're an artist, photographer or aspiring filmmaker, or you simply own a digital camera, you can post photos and videos online for the whole world to view, comment on and distribute. Farm Sanctuary has numerous videos available on our very own YouTube Channel, **youtube.com/farmsanctuary1** for instant viewing and posting to your favorite social network. When you visit, don't forget to subscribe! You'll be notified whenever we post new videos and you can help get these videos viral.

Photo sharing sites, like user-friendly Flickr allow you to post photos of potlucks, protests, your visit to Farm Sanctuary, and pretty much anything else you want to share. When these images are tagged, they can easily be searched, and that's an important advocacy aid. Farm Sanctuary has several Flickr galleries posted from past events, as well as images from inside factory farms that advocates can download and print for any educational use. You can access these Flickr galleries through **factoryfarming.com**.

Sell your wares to benefit animals

There are many online stores nowadays where you can buy animal-friendly products, from non-leather shoes to tasty vegan treats (see our Corporate Partners for Compassion ads in our Vegan Marketplace), and supporting these companies helps them promote animal-friendly consumerism, but why stop there? If you've got some business acumen, consider opening your own **e-commerce** venture to sell vegan wares or services, or raise funds for animals by selling anything under the sun. Members Todd Denlinger and Denise Goodman have used Missionfish and eBay Giving Works to sell used ski equipment, raising more than \$80,000 in 2007 alone to benefit Farm Sanctuary.

If you're a crafter, you've probably heard of Etsy. This year, the Vegan Etsy team was formed and many of the crafters on this team donate a percentage of their sales to animal charities. If you're an artist, you can show and sell your artwork on Veganica, an online gallery where vegan artists commune.

The Internet has played a significant role in raising public awareness about farm animal abuse, creating an interactive community of like-minded compassionate citizens, and contributing immensely to the success of Farm Sanctuary's campaigns. The democratizing influence of Internet technology allows anyone to express themselves, and we wholeheartedly encourage you to use your talents and creativity on behalf of the animals. We'll see you in cyberspace!

Online Resources

For those inspired to become part of the Web 2.0 revolution for animals, here are some resources to get you started, most of which are completely free of charge.

RSS readers

AmphetaDesk
Bloglines
NetNewsWire
NewsGator
Radio UserLand
SharpReader

Video sharing

Google Video
MetaCafe
MySpace Video
Revver
Yahoo! Video
YouTube

Social networks

Care2
Causecast
Facebook
Friendster
LinkedIn
Myspace
Think MTV
Windows Live Spaces

Blogs

Blogger
Blogster
LiveJournal
TypePad
Wordpress

Podcasts

Mypodcast
Podbean

Social bookmarking

Del.icio.us
Digg
Fark
Mixx
Newsvine
Reddit
Stumbleupon

e-Commerce

Ebay Giving Works
Vegan Etsy
Veganica
Volusion
Whisolutions

Photo sharing

Flickr
Photobucket
Shutterfly
Snapfish
Webshots



Photo by Connie Pugh