



Feature Interview: Alison Loat of Samara on Leadership + Technology

GROUNDFORCE DIGITAL (on medium.com)

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Making space for new technology and voices starts at the top. In this Leadership + Technology interview series, [Groundforce Digital](#) is reaching out to not-for-profit and political executives who are leading practitioners—those creating the future of their sectors by building and adopting technology that will enable a new generation to fundamentally transform their own organizations as well as those they interact with.

What do you see as the top three to five most important digital tools for community organizing? Why are they important?

Effective organizing requires establish trusted relationships that help build real communities that exist both online and in the real life. That's why email is still my favourite digital tool—it's personal and direct. I also like Twitter for its ability to forge new connections, and Facebook for its ability to reach others through the recommendations of friends. Of course, there are also some terrific crowd-funding sites, but they ultimately rely on inspiring an underlying community of interest.

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What are the biggest barriers you see for campaigns or organizations looking to adopt these tools? Do you have suggestions for overcoming these barriers?

The largest barrier is becoming too reliant on them, and forgetting to connect meaningfully with people, taking the time to understand where they're coming from and what's important to them.

In your opinion, what is the single most important thing a senior manager can do to foster young leaders within their campaign or organization?

With any team member — young or old — it's important to provide the right balance of space and support.

Space is the room everyone needs to develop their way to work, test new approaches and come up with better ideas. Too much space, particularly initially, sets people up to fail, and too little stifles their creativity. Support is the need to offer structure and guidance, and once trust is established, the knowledge that your manager has your back.



What advice would you give to a young people who care deeply about an organization and want to help it keep up with the times? How can they help it evolve?

The answer to this will vary greatly depending on the organization's mission, leadership, activities and resources. But in general, if you want to help any organization innovate, you'll need to work with its leadership to do so. Therefore, it's important to establish a mutually-trusting and supportive relationship with your manager. Particularly if you find them resistant, you'll need to put yourself in their shoes—understand what they're dealing with, what motivates and frightens them. If you do, you'll be more likely to tailor your suggestions accordingly, increasing the likelihood that your ideas will be taken seriously.

When you think of organizations or campaigns that are getting it right in terms of leveraging new technology for community organizing, who do you think of? Why?

I'm inspired by [A Better Man](#), a campaign to support ending violence against women, centred on a documentary about the director's powerful personal story of surviving an abusive relationship (disclosure: the director is a friend and I am a donor to this campaign). Fueled initially by an [Indiegogo campaign](#) and supporting social media campaign, it's also harnessed many on-the-ground efforts, including the December 6th

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Fund and other groups working with survivors and community initiatives such as Choir! Choir! Choir!, who recorded a version of the Pearl Jam song for the project.

About Groundforce Digital: *We work at the intersection of politics, technology, business and community. We help organizations grapple with complex community organizing challenges by laying down digital infrastructure designed to allow a new generation of civic leaders to experiment and chart new paths forward. Get in touch! <http://www.groundforcedigital.com>*