Data-Driven Political Empowerment

Quorum Democratizes Influence in the Legislative Process

Quorum was created by Harvard roommates Alex Wirth and Jonathan Marks. The idea came from Alex's work campaigning for a Presidential Youth Council on Capitol Hill the summer before his junior year. Though his initiative garnered support from many legislators, Wirth struggled to identify who those legislators worked with most frequently in order to build a coalition. He returned to Harvard that fall and shared his frustrations with his roommate, Jonathan, a biology and computer science major, who suggested they apply the technique of mapping relationships between DNA and proteins to mapping members of Congress and their relationships. By combining big data and unique analytics, the roommates developed a series of software tools that laid the foundation for Quorum. Wirth and Marks would go on to publicly launch the company in January 2015.

Quorum offers a suite of products at the federal, state, local, and grassroots levels that empower anyone (legislative workers, advocacy professionals, companies, non-profits, citizens, start-ups, and others) to influence the legislative process. Their tool suite provides the ability to search, message, track, and connect with public policy and the people who influence those policies. That's a lot of sophisticated functionality for a still-young product. Co-founder Jonathan Marks says a great team of developers—and the fact that they are able to provide one central set of services using the same tech stack—allows the lean start-up to operate efficiently.

INNOVATION AND EMAIL SHINE LIGHT ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Which members of Congress Tweet the most about cyber security? Quorum can tell you. They can break down data via legislation or dialogue and are able to track bills being introduced in all 50 state legislatures.

Email is an important aspect of how Quorum delivers up-to-date information like this to its subscribers. That means that Quorum relies on a sophisticated email infrastructure that includes the SparkPost email delivery service. Privacy matters with services like these, and Quorum has confidence that they can assure their customers that they, along with SparkPost, have the security controls in place to make sure that their brands, email domains and DKIM keys won't be used improperly.

With their legislative and dialogue-tracking feature Quorum needs to be able to alert their customers whenever something happens in their database their customers care about. "We rely on SparkPost to send these email alerts to our customers when and as things are happening," says Ty Rocca, lead software engineer at Quorum. For example, if a client's company was mentioned in an email that a state legislator sent out to their constituents in California, or if an issue they care about suddenly becomes a popular thing people are talking about in Georgia, Quorum needs to alert their clients in real-time.

"One of the reasons we use SparkPost is we rely on the fact that SparkPost's delivery mechanism is robust and fast. The messages actually get delivered, hit the inbox, and are authenticated properly. SparkPost also helps us deal with all of the massive corporate IT and spam filters, to make sure that the people that really need the information are receiving it in real-time or within minutes of our alerts going out, such as, in a campaign rally or a committee meeting. It's incredibly important that these messages don't go to spam," says Rocca.

Quorum enables anyone to influence the legislative process with modern tracking, targeting, and outreach tools. The online platform tracks legislation and dialogue in Washington and all 50 states, leverages quantitative analytics to help users identify potential champions, and enables advocates to easily contact legislators and their staff.

Learn more at **quorum.us**.

PERSONALIZING CONSTITUENTS' EMAILS TO OFFICIALS

By leveraging SparkPost's template-driven content personalization capabilities, Quorum enables their users to communicate with elected and appointed officials about issues they care about in a personalized, yet high-speed and low-latency manner, so they can send personalized messages to every staffer on the Hill. Because of SparkPost's reputation and the ability to deliver these personalized messages in high volume while simultaneously authenticating many domains at once (each client gets their own authenticated domain), Quorum is able to send emails on behalf of some of the largest corporations in the world.

Quorum uses the SparkPost Relay Webhooks and SMTP services to receive and forward the replies on behalf of their clients so they end up in the right inbox at the end of the day. They also rely heavily on the ability to tailor the SMTP service to appropriately change the CC: and To: headers so that the replies they are forwarding look as similar as possible to what the replies would have looked like in the first place.

"Scale becomes more of a concern in this instance," says Rocca, "but what we like is that we can use the same infrastructure and grow, allowing communication to advocates throughout the entire country."

EMAIL AT SCALE AND DETAILED MESSAGE ACTIVITY

Another element of their outreach is taking the infrastructure that allows their clients to communicate with elected and appointed officials and scale that to allow their clients to communicate with their thousands of constituents, supporters, and employees. For example, Quorum enables alerts such as "Write Your Representative about [X Topic] Today."

For big transmissions they send on behalf of their clients, Quorum uses SparkPost's RESTful API and Python client library. Utilizing the Webhooks service allows their clients to see at a global view who is responding to their email in real-time, and SparkPost's message events capability also allows Quorum to archive and process detailed information about message activity and engagement.

"The fact that we can take the same infrastructure we built as a start-up sending a small volume of email, and now scale it up to millions of emails sent per client is pretty incredible. It's one of the many reasons why what we do with SparkPost is so valuable," say Rocca.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Quorum's latest development is extending their service into the form of a mobile application: a grassroots action center on your mobile device. They are working to pull in more datasets to enrich their offering even further. One example is partnering with ESRI, a geospatial mapping provider, to aid in pulling in demographic data.

With recent political changes and the start of a new session of Congress, Quorum is expecting a larger number of organizations to see a need to be better engaged in the political process—and to leverage their supporters to make a bigger difference. Quorum is there to help and will continue to build out their technology to meet the demands of their clients using SparkPost to help them scale as they grow.

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