

Written by Claire Perkins

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We live in a bumper sticker society- complaining and campaigning on our Facebook profiles, to our friends and on our cars. But few of us talk to the representatives who can actually do something with our opinions and information.

Enter PurpleLetter.org, a new nonpartisan Web site that allows users to send real-life First-Class paper letters to any US governmental official, social awareness leader or media contact for as little as .99 cents, taking care of the troublesome tasks of stationery, stamps, searching for the correct addresses and dropping the letter at the post office. Users can also post letters to the Web site's Letter Gallery, creating a flurry of discussions and adding another element of transparency. The purple letters (cleverly a blend of political red and blue) put pressure on those who can make changes and implement ideas- wouldn't you take action if you saw CNN, FOX (Glenn Beck) and MSNBC (Chris Matthews) copied on a letter to you?

We had the opportunity to interview Paige Wheeler, founder of PurpleLetter, about her brilliant idea, how the project works and why letter writing is important.

How did the Idea for Purple Letter come to you?

Many months ago I found myself disappointed with a piece of legislation that our government had recently passed. For weeks I wrestled with the disappointment about the legislation that had passed, and how disconnected I felt from the process. Then one evening, while watching the news with my children, I was explaining the impact the new bill would have on America's children, when my son asked me what I could do about it. As parents normally do, I laid out the story of how one should contact their elected representatives with a written letter expressing discontent. My son's next question is what the catalyst became for PurpleLetter.org:

"Did you write a letter?" he asked.

In all reality, I hadn't written to anyone. I was embarrassed. How were the people who represented me supposed to know how I felt about the issue if I had not made it known? And it was at that moment PurpleLetter.org was born. I quickly went to my friends and family and asked them for their take on various topics regarding our country. Here is what struck me: Every person had a passion to talk about at least one given topic, but less than 5% of my friends had actually taken any steps to make their voices heard in the offices of an elected official. I was not even in that 5%.

It was these conversations with my children, family, and friends that led me to start PurpleLetter.org. There are two guarantees in our system:

Those who sit on the sidelines will not be heard, and Those who engage a representative democracy will have a voice.

With communications becoming so digitized, why do you find letter-writing to be important?

My answer is simple. There is no other tool that will allow this level of transparency, efficiency and responsiveness to an individual who would like to have their voice heard.

When corresponding with the government representatives in today's digital times, there is no way for one to hold elected officials or members of the media accountable. Once you hit send, it is off into cyberspace. You may receive a digital response, but you then wonder.....was my voice really heard, who is handling my concern, or was it just swept under the rug? PurpleLetter gives the user a 5 pronged tool:

- 1) Letter goes to recipients of their choice with exact concerns
- 2) The user may use the CC option, so the recipient knows who else has seen this raised concern
- 3) You may post the letter anonymously to the letter gallery for all to see, making your concerns, stories or accolades a part of the Web
- 4) As a receipt at check out, we give the user the recipient's PDF file of the letter, email address and phone number if we have it so they may further their cause.
- 5) Users may continue to resonate their message in a viral atmosphere with the use of our email, Facebook and Twitter share mechanisms.

PurpleLetter looks forward to strengthening the connection between the digital and mail component to enhance communication in whatever way it can. Putting your thoughts out there is just like planting a seed.....and you should only expect your idea to grow and gain support if you have done so.

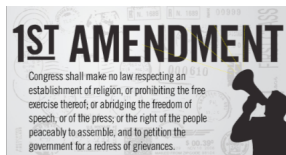
Please share with us the process for writing a letter through Purple Letter.

- 1) Sign up – Registration is free

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- 2) Type your letter in the PurpleLetter text editor
- 3) Select your recipients from our database- we have contact information for 210,000+ government officials and media contacts
- 4) Select who you want to CC
- 5) Decide if you want to post your letter (anonymously or not) to our online Letter Gallery



Can you tell us about one letter you've seen make a difference? What type of response are people seeing to their letters?

We are just at the tip of the iceberg, but what I can tell you is that in our beta testing we had users write letters and they received letter replies back from President Obama, Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, etc. It works like a charm. I think that the efficiency and responsiveness that is created inside of the government because of this tool will soon be apparent. I do believe that the Government will welcome this enhanced communication tool that will allow them to better understand the people's wants and needs.

We will be adding a section to include our user testimonials, where users can scan in any correspondence that was generated because of their PurpleLetter or type in their updates.

I believe that PurpleLetter has leveled the playing field by offering this letter-writing tool to all. It will help ensure that the government gives an individual the same response whether you are a Wall Street CEO or an elderly widow living in poverty in New Orleans.

Our elected officials are in office because the American people put them there. From what I have seen, our elected officials want to represent the people the best they can. It isn't their fault if you aren't making your voice heard. We will continue to facilitate effective communication between the government and the people, and encourage civic responsibility so we can truly be a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

How can businesses and special interest groups use Purple Letter to make a bigger impact than with previous efforts?

Special interest groups' sole existence is to gain the support of the individuals who share the same beliefs. For special interest groups, there is NO better tool than PurpleLetter.

The money special interest groups use to entice their members to write or sway their friends, government officials and members of the media is out of this world. Haven't you ever received a large fancy envelope which contains a special interest group's mission statement, a letter they would like you to forward to your elected officials, and a stamped envelope so you can do so? These types of form letter are costly and lack the personal stories that should go in letters of this nature.

I will use AARP as an example: If AARP wanted all of their supporters show their disappointment with some legislation, [they] could simply go on the PurpleLetter.org website, purchase a bulk amount of letters, link a promo code to these letters, share the promo code with their supporters, and encourage the supporters to write the letter that way. How significant is a form letter anyway?

Q&A with Purple Letter Founder Paige Wheeler

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You don't have to be a special interest to purchase a promo code. You may be an association, university or just an individual who may be passionate about a certain issue.



How many contacts do you have in your database, and how did you choose who to include?

We have 210,000+ contacts government, media, and special interest groups in our database. We will continue to add to and amend our database to provide our users the most comprehensive and relevant list possible. We have some future plans that relate to our database expansion that are very, very exciting.

What is the importance of the Letter Gallery?

The Letter Gallery is optional for all those who choose to craft a letter on our site. Letter can be posted anonymously or not. This component allows for the users' letter content to become part of the Web instantaneously. Our Letter Gallery also serves as living polls as users are encouraged to vote and comment on other letters in the Gallery. So you don't even need to write your own letter to have your voice heard; you can show your support by agreeing or disagreeing with letters in the Gallery.

The Letter Gallery will serve as the first online database of letters sent to our elected officials, members of the media and difference makes. This will surely help facilitate increased accountability and responsiveness.

What are the next steps for you and Purple Letter?

We have plenty in store for PurpleLetter and will continue to add additional components that will further enhance communications between the people, the government and the media.

The ease in which we can globally expand is also very exciting.