Welcome to

The Digital Front

Project Brief

Our Mission:

Win the propaganda war that Putin is waging against Ukraine and the West.

Background

> *We're in the middle of an information war. In this context, social media is not a public square - it's a battlefield. We need good fighters on the digital front.*

While the world holds its breath to see how the Russian invasion of Ukraine escalates militarily, a propaganda war rages online. Putin's had the upper hand on social media for the last decade – deploying bots and trolls on all platforms to sell the Kremlin's lies and destabilize democracies, poisoning minds across the globe.

We have a real opportunity to overtake Putin's narrative by intentionally spreading truth and directly rebutting his lies about the pretext for war and the carnage he's inflicting.

To do that, we need thousands of people working together to boost truthful information and disrupt false narratives in real time. (This bottom-up messaging approach has helped right wing authoritarians dominate social media for years.) We should have been doing this since 2014.

DemCast began recruiting social media users on February 26th, vetting and organizing volunteers into groups on social media platforms. Simultaneously, DemCast began drafting volunteers to monitor disinformation, fact check, and create graphics/sample social posts.

Our team has already achieved over a billion social media impressions since launch, and we're just getting warmed up.

We will continue to expand this team and create an even more supportive infrastructure to supercharge our collective results.

Narrative Priorities: What We Will Do Online

- Proactively refute and tactically rebut Russian disinformation.

- Where possible, "pre-bunk" expected future disinformation narratives, to inoculate the public before the lies start flowing in earnest.

- Repeatedly highlight the true motivations and the geopolitical context that drove Putin to invade Ukraine.

- Assertively share stories of Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invasion force: heroes, martyrs, leaders.

- Highlight Ukrainian tactical victories, after they've been vetted as real.

- Humanize the Ukrainian people at every opportunity. Tug at the heartstrings of the world.

- Share content - even content that graphically depicts violence (with appropriate warnings) - to ensure the world sees Putin's brutality.

- Highlight with every opportunity the unified response of the NATO alliance and the global community against Vladimir Putin.

- Lift up stories of Russian resistance.

- Keep reminding people that Putin has been waging an advanced digital propaganda war aimed at dividing the West since at least 2014.

- Call out domestic and international groups / individuals that align with Putin and/or push his war propaganda.

What We Won't Focus On

Keep in mind that as we get going, our hashtags, posts and the accounts/groups posting them will be seen increasingly as sources for truth. We don't want to litter the effort with off-mission content. Your personal accounts are yours and we won't tell you what to do with them. But when you're posting in connection with *The Digital Front*, here are some examples of themes to stay away from:

US/NATO Policy Approaches/Decisions:

Biden and NATO will make decisions about how and when to help Ukraine regardless of what the chatter is online. Arguing about policy in online spaces when unity is essential will only serve Putin's ends (remember, his goal is to divide the global resistance and weaken Biden domestically).

It's smart to save your concerns re: policy for private chat groups. Organize behind the scenes if you feel strongly about military/diplomatic strategy. Reach out to your elected representatives. Call the White House. But resist getting into policy in online forums - it's simply not helpful at this point.

Throw-Away Hate Posts About the GOP

Hate-posting about America's GOP may be cathartic, but its' not necessarily strategic. As noted above, to the extent that Republicans are actively running interference for Putin and boosting his narratives, we should call them out. But we shouldn't be focusing here unless there's an explicit event that happens.

In the background, our research team will be digging up specific instances where members of Congress and the GOP have praised Putin. When we have clips to share, we will get them out to everybody.

Midterm/Election Advocacy

We will use the collective reach of the Digital Front team to spotlight Putin apologists - but not to campaign for their political opponents. DemCast has another entire amplification team dedicated to US electoral advocacy. Anyone is welcome to join that group.

Overview: How We Fight On *The Digital Front*

1. Organize: Recruit, connect, empower and build a supportive community of people who are dedicated to *The Digital Front's* mission.

2. Curate: Search for and curate content, messaging, resources and social media posts that should be amplified.

3. Validate: Fact-check curated content, uncover patterns in Russian disinformation, and conduct research about claims found on social media.

4. Create: Graphic artists create memes, videos, graphics and writers create sample social posts to be incorporated into *The Digital Front's* toolkit.

5. Amplify: The core of our model. Thousands of digital volunteers share from the toolkit and work together on social platforms to push out curated content / boost factual content as it comes out in real-time.

Each of these strategies is broken down in more detail in the following sections.

Strategy: Organize

Building a digital army takes digital organizing. Here are a few key components of the DemCast / Digital Front approach.

- Recruit:

  - We're always on the lookout for people who want to actively use their social media accounts to amplify strategic content.

  - The size of the account matters far less than the person's willingness to keep an eye on the mission of the project. Small accounts working together can steer the social media algorithm (this is what Putin's bots do). Big accounts are helpful for really trumpeting a message, but a truly effective social media army has a diverse mix of accounts of different sizes that fill slightly different roles.

  - Our best recruiters are our members. DemCast will encourage team members to send messages and make posts urging people to join.

  - DemCast will ask for volunteers who are willing to proactively seek out and recruit non-members who are clearly mission-aligned based on posted content.

- Connect:

  - A truly functional and effective social media army is one where people feel a sense of community and connection. DemCast will create on-platform groups, managed by volunteer captains/moderators, to build connectivity and generate a sense of group cohesiveness. Groups will be deployed on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

  - The Digital Front will also hold regular Zoom meetings - sometimes with special guests - to break down silos of on-platform groups and bring the entire community together.

- Train:

  - We want to be sure everyone knows what to do and how to be most effective in fighting disinformation. DemCast will host and/or make training available to group members focused on topics such as the history of the Russia/Ukraine conflict, the basics of disinformation and how it spreads, and effective social post writing, among other subjects.

Strategy: Curate

There is a LOT of content on social media. Some of it is useful to share. Some of it is junk. Some of it can be extremely harmful. Unfortunately, sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference.

Our goal is to build up a giant army of social media users who spread content that is useful/helpful in achieving our mission. One of the best ways we can help our members share quality content on their social feeds is by curating quality content that warrants amplification.

DemCast will recruit team members who want to help curate. These are some of the digital artifacts that we'll be on the lookout for:

- Social Media Posts: Whether on Twitter, TIkTok, Instagram or Facebook - we want on-message, high-quality posts to do well in the algorithm so they get seen more often.

- Videos/GIFs/Graphics/Memes: Social posts are far more successful if they feature or are reinforced by a strong visual. We will curate and help The Digital Front redeploy effective visual content.

- News Articles/OpEds: Posting valid and trusted news links is a fundamental practice for anti-disinformation campaigns. We will sift out unreliable reporting (and opinion pieces that often get shared as "news"), and focus our collective attention on the most well-researched content with verifiable claims.

- Resources: We will seek out and share the best explainers about disinformation, on-demand training content, validated charities that people can donate to, research reports, etc.

Strategy: Validate

With all of the content flowing around out there, we need validators who can help our team understand what's true, what's opinion, and what's mis/disinformation. DemCast will recruit team members who want to help with the following:

- On-Demand Fact-Checking: Seemingly on an hourly basis, somebody on our team has a question about the veracity of a social post, news story, etc. We don't all have time to go and check to see if claims are true. The Digital Front will build a volunteer team of fact checkers to poke around and help us understand what's real.

- Patrolling for Disinformation: Before disinformation narratives hit the mainstream, they usually first percolate in dark corners of the internet. If we are aware of upcoming disinformation narratives, we can try as a team to get ahead of them narratively.

- Research: Sometimes we need a much deeper understanding of what's going on. Team members with a penchant for research will help us dive deep when needed.

- Oppo: Moscow's propaganda war didn't just start. Putin's apologists across the world have been praising him and spreading his narrative for a decade. Many of these people are elected officials up for reelection. This year, we can and must make these people pay at the ballot box for their support of Putin. We will dig in and find key footage, news clips and quotes that can be used to help rid Western governments of Putin apologists.

Strategy: Create

There's a reason social media influencers are often referred to as "creators". This is a creative endeavor. Whether we're posting text, visuals or both, we need content to work with. This team needs creative types to help us produce fresh, strong content.

- Videos/GIFs/Graphics/Memes: Sometimes you just need a fresh graphic or meme that's reflective of the news cycle. We will work with creatives on our team to create graphic content in real time to help drive the narrative.

- Sample Social Media Posts: DemCast will deploy digital toolkits packed with sample social media posts that utilize the best of the curated, vetted content our team has uncovered. Volunteer writers and DemCast leaders will work to populate that toolkit with consistent, fresh sample posts for the digital army to share via their own feeds.

Strategy: Amplify

Coordinated, strategic amplification is the core of the DemCast model and is key to achieving the Digital Front's mission of defeating Putin on the digital battlefield.

Please read this section as a menu of strategies - not a to-do list for every member of our team. The Digital Front is a 'choose your own adventure' - we only ask people to engage in ways that they feel comfortable.

Here are amplification strategies you can use to bring down Russia's propaganda efforts:

- Participate in Social Media Storms: Sometimes it's best to ambush social media platforms with mass messaging, all at once. Social storms are a tested and effective way to break through the noise by having the entire team post key messages in a confined time period. Storms can be pre-scheduled or impromptu (depending on circumstances). Either way, we'll give you a heads up when they're coming!

- Create Posts from Our Toolkit: As noted above, social media toolkits provide a quick way to push out content and messaging for our busy team members. DemCast uses smart toolkit technology that makes sharing easy to do in one or two clicks across multiple platforms. We will keep the toolkit packed with strategic, validated content.

- Create Unique Posts: Many of our team members have very strong social media instincts, and we both encourage everyone to create native social media posts rooted in our Narrative Priorities, and ask that everyone stays open to feedback. Together we can enhance our effectiveness as a team.

- Amplify Existing Posts: There is a LOT of content out there. We don't have to recreate the wheel. We should all boost posts that align with our mission by *sharing, liking & adding positive comments*. For team members who are a part of our Facebook, Twitter or Instagram groups, we can also share strong posts into groups to encourage others to amplify them as well.

- Search for & Amplify Campaign Hashtag Content: Adding one of our campaign hashtags to each post - especially on Twitter - will help us find the team's content online. Using our unique team hashtags also helps us track our reach and impact. As opposed to using such a single hashtag, we are using a family of campaign hashtags.

  - #DemocracyNotAutocracy (for posts focused on fighting authoritarianism)

  - #UkraineUnderSiege (for posts focused on Russia's attack and Ukraine's defense of their country)

  - #LongLiveUkraine (for posts focused on the global response and that highlight the sacrifices of the Ukrainian people)

We may add or change up the hashtags as conditions change, and we will let everybody know if we do. We really appreciate everyone using (just one) of these hashtags in posts when you have space, but it is not a requirement.

We also ask everyone to click on our campaign hashtags as often as possible to find and amplify team members' posts.

- Downvote: Some social media platforms have the ability to "downvote" comments. We encourage team members to downvote posts and comments from propagandists and chaos agents - especially on posts that are getting a lot of traction. By downvoting unhelpful comments and interacting with helpful/truthful comments, we can help bury disinformation that would otherwise appear closer to the top of comment sections.

- Engage in the Comments of the Opposition (Trench Warfare): Though the conventional wisdom has long told us to stay away from interacting with posts that spout disinformation, recent research has shown that there are times when it can be strategic to disrupt groupthink within the opposition. We can do this by strategically diving into right wing comment sections with facts, videos & memes that challenge their narratives. We will work with the team to identify when and where it is strategic to utilize trench warfare, and will ask for volunteers.

- Mass Report: Social media companies do a terrible job keeping their platforms free of propagandists. It's often up to us to report the posts and users who are pushing Putin's lies so that platforms will take action and shut them down.

- Take Over Right Wing / Pro-Putin Hashtags: You may have heard about the 'TikTok kids' who take over right wing hashtags. On select occasions, this can be a deft strategy - to bury disinformation under a pile of truth, especially on Twitter. We will deploy this strategy selectively - asking people to share content under the opposition's already-trending hashtag in a burst of posts over a short period of time - to disrupt their narrative and disarm their rhetoric.