

How Google Won Washington: Using Money and Lobbyists to Gain Influence

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Google's informal but famous motto is "don't be evil." That philosophy has served the corporation well, as it constantly seeks to distinguish itself from the "evil" conglomerates dominating American business. In recent years, however, Google has learned that gaining influence and protecting its corporate interests means adopting some of the shadier back-room dealings popular with other business giants – namely, engaging in aggressive lobbying and political-donation strategies in Washington.

On Saturday, *The Washington Post* published a lengthy exposé on how Google has embraced Washington's pay-to-play culture. In 2004, Google ranked 213th among companies spending money on lobbying. In 2012, it was second only to General Electric for the amount it spent on lobbying, over \$18 million. This is to say nothing of the nearly \$1 million that Google also shelled out in 2012 to various political action committees and the nearly \$3 million spent on political candidates.

Google's native lobbying enterprises here in Washington have also exploded during a similar time frame. Google opened its first lobbying presence in Washington in 2005, with Alan Davidson working more or less by himself to secure the company's interests on Capitol Hill. At that time, net neutrality and copyright issues were the biggest concerns of the rapidly growing company.

Now, Google has plans to expand its D.C. offices to 55,000 square feet, while doubling its in-house lobbying team.

"Technology issues are a big — and growing — part of policy debates in Washington, and it is important for us to be part of that discussion," former Republican congresswoman and Google's top lobbyist Susan Molinari, told *The Washington Post*. "We aim to help policymakers understand Google's business and the work we do to keep the Internet open and spur economic opportunity. We support associations and third parties across the political spectrum who help us get the word out — even if we don't agree with them on 100 percent of issues."

But it's not just through lobbying and campaign contributions that Google is using to win over Washington. Its "Google for Nonprofits" program also partners with many D.C. organizations to provide tailored apps, grants, and YouTube partnerships. Google also hosts a fellowship

program, paying young academics to promote the company's policy positions at think-tanks like the Cato Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the New America Foundation.

Of course, Google has had its fair share of policy problems in recent years, explaining its expanded emphasis on building influence in Washington. The 19-month-long antitrust investigation brought against Google by the Federal Trade Commission was only partially resolved in a January 2013 settlement. In a separate case around the same time, Google had to dole out \$17 million to 37 states for illegally circumventing Apple Safari's privacy ban eliminating cookie tracking in order to keep tally on consumer habits. Even more recently, Google appealed to the Supreme Court in the beginning of April after getting in some hot water for collecting data while filming for the "street view" feature on Google maps.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Google may have thought it could never grow up to become an evil corporation. But, at this point, it should just embrace the fact that not only is it completely immersed in the influence game in Washington – it's pretty damn good at it, too.