

Mormon leaders probe members' reading habits

by [Tony Semerad](#) in the [November 1, 2011](#) issue

Mormon leaders are surveying members about their readership of key websites and Mormon writers, a move that reflects the faith's growing interest in managing its public image as two Mormon candidates compete for the Republican presidential nomination.

Church officials confirmed that the survey on a range of social, political and doctrinal matters—including the trustworthiness of specific journalists—is partly intended to gauge how and where Mormons get their information.

"This kind of survey is one way church leaders have to hear from members," said church spokesman Scott Trotter, though he declined to say exactly what would be done with the results.

The confidential online poll, sent to at least 1,000 Mormons, asks about access to the church's weekly television and radio broadcasts and the frequency and purpose of visits to Mormon-oriented websites. The survey also seeks members' reasons for using various media outlets and asks if they find seven specific journalists and bloggers "trustworthy, consistent with church positions and teachings, enjoyable, candid and honest [or] thoughtful."

The list of writers includes, among others, conservative radio host Glenn Beck; popular LDS bloggers Joanna Brooks of Religion Dispatches and Jana Riess of Beliefnet; and religion reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack of the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

"Are they trolling for favorites or people to avoid?" asked Al Tompkins, who teaches journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute, a St. Petersburg, Florida-based school for journalists. "It's their right to do both of those, but if I were a member, I would wonder why they are spending resources and energy on it." —*Salt Lake Tribune*