

## Micro-Targeting and Direct Contact: The Other Half of the Story



As micro-targeting moves further into the lexicon of the campaign canon, it is worth noting that with greater ability to target on the household level, the focus on direct contact communications has seen a major resurgence. As impressive as many of the large scale micro-targeting efforts have been in recent years, it is only half the picture. What often goes overlooked is that it is telephone, mail, and email, working in concert, delivering the tailored message to the voter. Direct contact communications, telephone and mail in particular, are now the tactics of choice to execute a micro-targeting strategy. Repetitive direct contact, as old school as it sounds, is making a comeback.

Today competition for voters' attention is the biggest obstacle facing modern campaigns. Not long ago a network TV buy coupled with a basic GOTV plan pretty much got the job done. TV still occupies the largest link in the campaign food chain, but it is not enough to completely disseminate a message to a household. The proliferation of cable channels and the development of other mediums – most notably the Internet – have diminished the effectiveness of a paid media campaign. The strategy for delivering information in the most effective manner is how campaigns must now be won. Direct contact has turned back the clock on campaign strategy for 2008. There are several reasons for this:



### Accountability:

Although TV ratings give an indication of what voters watch, you can accurately track a canvassing and telephone program to know who the campaign has spoken with and who it has not, and adjust messages and redeploy resources accordingly

### Cost:

Targeting telephone and mail provides good bang for the buck on a per vote basis. The better the targeting, the more efficient the program and the unit costs for each communication to a voter are less expensive

### Quick Deployment:

Telephone programs can be up and running in a matter of hours

After the 2004 presidential election, the Bush campaign was lauded for its ability to identify and communicate with undecided voters in swing states. Using a combination of commercial data, identification calls, and scaled voter models, the campaign had come up with a series of groups to whom very specific messages were given. They did not just assume that because a voter lived in a particular geographic area they liked certain things. The Bush team obtained all the information it could about an individual, asked a series of questions to a large sample of the persuadable universe, and then tested which messages resonated best.

When reporters and political observers wrote about this effort, only one or two sentences were then devoted to the campaign sending targeted mail, telephone, and canvassers to those voters, even though the micro-targeting was, in reality, only half the story.

***When all is said and done, you still have to talk to the voters and give them a reason to choose you.***

Micro-targeting is the offspring of commercial marketing strategies that have been in place in the business world for a long time. Its application to politics is not new, but the most recent incarnations are very innovative and technologically savvy. That is worth writing about. And that is why we have heard so much made of not only the Bush effort, but the Democratic response and how micro-targeting affected the 2006 mid-term elections. To further this point, Alexander Gage, Bush's micro-targeting guru, estimates that successful micro-targeting can bring congressional campaigns an additional 5-10,000 votes.

For campaign professionals, a good micro, or for that matter, any targeting effort will only be as good as the communications that carry the message to the voter. Campaigns must think as much about how they choose to deliver their message as what that message will be. How do you know a voter received your message? What assurances do you have that you've penetrated the wall of media that each American constructs around them?

- A mix of contacts is the best strategy – nothing new here, but when a campaign gets rolling, a maxim like this is often ignored
- The more personal contact the better – studies by Yale University and other academics have gone a long way to proving this
- The cheapest contact is usually not the most effective
- Dialogue is a two way street – talk *and* listen
- Get on the ground early – test, test, test, analyze, and adjust

What complicates matters is that as information has become more accessible, so have the means of obtaining and sharing information. Voters can ignore TV, throw away mail, delete email, and not answer their telephones. As earlier alluded, a brilliant TV spot probably won't carry the day any more. Campaigns must plan for the delivery of effective direct contact efforts comprised of targeted, repetitive, and salient messages if they expect to engage the TiVO and YouTube voter.

Voters will often tell you when something is working and when it is not. An early start and the ability to take in information from direct communications can hone message and make a campaign much more efficient as that first Tuesday in November draws near. (Telephone is particularly suited to this type of feedback – both in live outbound and inbound campaigns, and is very effective when used early.) Take this into account and it will serve any campaign well.

We now have access to much better information about each voter before contacting them and have developed the delivery mechanisms for messages that are specific for almost everyone. Accountability, cost, and rapid response should make these communications a priority in 2008 and beyond.

*“In Florida, the [Bush] campaign used micro-targeting to make contact with 84% of eventual Bush voters, up from 33% in 2000. In Iowa, the campaign reached 92% of his eventual voters, up from 50% in 2000.”*

*-Wall Street Journal – October 31, 2006*