

Acknowledgments

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THE MARKETING REVOLUTION IN POLITICS

Introduction

In both runs for the presidency, the Obama campaign determined early on that by using data to pinpoint voters with greater specificity, it could run its organization with better precision and efficiency. Instead of relying on the more traditional political and socio-demographic categories of voters, such as those who called themselves Democrats or liberals, Obama's marketing gurus instead relied on voter analytics to target political commercials and appeals to carefully defined segments of voters. This resulted in a promotional campaign that used big databases to cull information from voters' television viewing patterns to develop advertising appeals that they were confident would resonate with the desired audience. This same technology was used throughout the campaign to send requests for funds and volunteer support to social media sites that were frequented by voters who were most likely to support Obama. The revolution that took place during the Obama campaigns was the most advanced use of micro-targeting techniques that had ever been witnessed in a political campaign.

Who can forget the infamous Daisy commercial used by the incumbent Lyndon B. Johnson during the 1964 U.S. presidential campaign to sway voters away from his opponent? After the death of John F. Kennedy in 1963, Johnson took over as president and commander-in-chief, finding himself in a presidential campaign in 1964 against the Republican nominee, Barry Goldwater. Mr. Goldwater represented a hawkish view of the world, and the Johnson strategists decided to run a commercial with the intent of scaring voters into thinking that the United States would wind up in a nuclear war if Goldwater were elected. The commercial, which aired only once, used a little girl, who is seen picking petals from a flower, one by one, until she gets to the last petal, when a voice is heard counting down to a missile launch that ends in a nuclear explosion. The tactic convinced voters that Goldwater was a threat to the country and helped to win the election for Johnson in a landslide victory. This was a critical turning point in the history of political campaigns in the United States. Such a use of extreme, negative advertising to create fear in voters had never before been seen in any presidential campaign. At that time, television advertising was the "state of the art" in politics.

Fifty Years Later

Fifty years after the country watched in shock as the Daisy commercial used by Lyndon Johnson brought about one of the greatest landslide victories in the United States, American citizens would get another shock with the landslide victories of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. With only 270 Electoral College votes necessary to win the election, in 2008 Obama had 365 votes, and in 2012 he had 332. Further evidence of the power of the new marketing tools used in the campaigns is the fact that Obama won in 2012 with only slightly over 50 percent of the popular vote, a testament to his use of carefully targeted marketing efforts. By relying on the use of micro-targeting technology, and only focusing on the states where he knew he had a chance of winning by a small margin, in 2012 Obama was able to use his advertising dollars more effectively and efficiently than his opponent, Mitt Romney.

During the 2008 campaign, through the analysis of massive amounts of information that appeared on social media websites, the Obama strategists determined that millennials were attracted to Obama because of his fresh approach to politics and his promise to bridge the differences between Democrats and Republicans. The same type of research drove the thinking of Obama's strategists in 2012, as they

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worked to pull together a new coalition of voters that included younger people, Hispanics, single women, and African-Americans, all of whom may have voted for Obama because of policies he advocated, personality traits he possessed, or promises that resonated differently with each of the various segments of voters. For example, in an effort to target Hispanic voters, the Obama team in 2012 used nontraditional media outlets to reach them, relying on Spanish-speaking radio stations and sports radio shows. Obama also went out of his way to communicate with voters by using less politically oriented responses to radio journalists and speaking more about cultural issues that resonated with this audience. There are numerous other examples in the following chapters that demonstrate the sophisticated and creative use of marketing by campaign strategists.

Marketing in a Political Context

This book will report on a paradigm shift taking place in politics today that is affecting the business world. It will include case studies that analyze the successful application and execution of marketing innovations and strategies in the political marketplace, examples from which other sectors in society can learn. The book will rely on the analysis of recent U.S. presidential campaigns, with an emphasis on the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012, and, in some cases, will make reference to other classic campaigns of the past few decades. Political campaigns at the presidential level in the United States have become full-blown marketing campaigns with a reliance on and refinement of techniques found on the commercial side, all of which are used to better understand voters in an effort to strengthen the relationship between a candidate and citizens.

The movement toward building a stronger relationship with an organization's customers is an ongoing process for all business sectors. Take the Jewel-Osco chain of grocery stores, for example, where loyalty cards were eliminated in 2013 with the promise to customers that everyone would receive the same low prices. In an effort to maintain their contact with customers, Jewel created a new app for any shoppers who signed up for it and were willing to provide information about themselves. This reflected the company's attempt to build a one-to-one relationship with its customers through the popular and cost-effective use of digital coupons. In a similar vein, business organizations know well that it is more advantageous to target customers of cable television shows that attract niche viewers than to use traditional television outlets that charge as much as 100 times more to run the same thirty-second commercial.

Political operatives have borrowed these same techniques as a cheaper and more efficient way to identify and convince voters "sitting on the fence" to shift allegiance to their candidate. But because of the condensed nature of a presidential campaign, and the necessity to effectively create a start-up organization for every election, the political marketplace offers an example of the creative use of marketing strategies not found in any other sector.

For example, the 24/7 oversight of a presidential candidate's every word and action forces the campaign to be in crisis mode with a frequency not found in any other marketplace. The necessity to raise millions of dollars from so many diverse segments of contributors in such a short period puts pressure on a campaign to utilize the most sophisticated technological tools available to generate the donations that a nonprofit organization relies on to exist. For the first time in a U.S. presidential campaign, the use of data-mining techniques that merged databases containing voters' shopping patterns, television habits, and other voter characteristics enabled the Obama campaigns to more effectively target their advertising appeals and to alter them in real time to match the apparent preferences of the person navigating the web.

This book reports on a marketing revolution that has raised the bar on the use of standard marketing techniques – from following the marketing concept, to branding, advertising, and building relationships with customers – that continue to be used in business but are now part of a paradigm shift that has changed the way presidential campaigns are run. In doing so, the book also puts forward a blueprint for other organizations to follow, outlining seven marketing lessons, with a chapter devoted to each one, and with a focus on the Obama Model, analyzing how his campaign relied on creative marketing solutions to win in each of his two runs for the presidency. Each chapter then extrapolates the lesson to both for-profit and nonprofit organizations that rely on the same methods to succeed in their respective marketplaces, while highlighting the differences among these contexts.

The book shows how the methods used by corporations like Disney, Google, IBM, and Procter & Gamble are also used by entities like the U.S. government and the Pope. The book will be of great interest to marketing managers, MBA students, and general readers wishing to learn more about how President Obama was able to mastermind Electoral College victories in two presidential campaigns by winning by the smallest of margins in battleground states. The book highlights both the actors and their strategies in each of the 2008 and 2012 campaigns. Every organization is constantly trying not only to maintain relationships with existing customers and attract competitors' customers in an effort to maintain and increase their market share, but also to understand how to attract customers who may have very different reasons for using the same product or service. Ultimately, this challenge calls for the use of innovative marketing strategies to arrive at one central theme that appeals to very different segments of customers. The genius of the Obama Model lies in its use of the most innovative and cost-effective marketing tactics to accomplish these goals.

So What Is Political Marketing?

Politicians are effectively service providers, promising to offer benefits to citizens and voters in all political parties. They are engaged in a constant struggle to hang onto the voters who put them into office and to find ways of attracting new voters as one campaign cycle leads to another. The need to constantly innovate is an imperative for any successful organization; it must constantly search for more effective and efficient ways of understanding customers' needs and wants and for better approaches to maintaining a relationship with them.

These imperatives are equally applicable to any manager who sells products. Whereas a service is offered by a person, a product is a tangible item. It can be marketed in different ways through standardization and production technologies that are used to communicate with and deliver goods to people. Just as Obama learned to use marketing to establish his image as a consistent and steady leader, so product-oriented companies can learn to use marketing to establish the image of their products in the marketplace by emphasizing particular attributes.

There is a common consensus that political marketing is extremely important to various functions of democracies. These include but are not limited to: elections, referenda, governing, lobbying, and public services management. Political marketing represents the triumph of an approach that first originated in business and then transformed the nature of modern politics. So, any company, individual, or organization engaged in trying to win over customers (all corporations); influence the thinking of government officials (lobbyists); or simply influence public opinion (political action committees, interest groups, nonprofit organizations) will be interested in the lessons put forward in this book.

The use of marketing in politics today is omnipresent, a part of every campaign, from local school board elections all the way up to presidential campaigns. The level of sophistication and amount of

money spent will naturally be greater in presidential elections, which also represent the most interesting and complex application of marketing. This book focuses on the presidential level in an effort to highlight examples that will have the most meaning to organizations that operate in other sectors in society, including those in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. Anecdotes about incidents and events in each of the Obama campaigns will be highlighted to make the case for the innovative use of marketing.

For example, looking back at the 2012 campaign, who could forget the incident at the Republican National Convention when Clint Eastwood addressed an empty chair that was meant to represent President Obama? In what many would identify as a mini-crisis moment for the Obama team, there was a hi-tech response by the President; he sent out a tweet on an account set up immediately, and within minutes destroyed the impact of the whole affair with an online picture of the President in a chair at the White House, accompanied by a clever quip (“This seat’s taken ...”), making light of the gesture by Mr. Eastwood. Unlike other marketplaces that can operate without a constant 24/7 laser beam on every move made by the CEO, the political marketplace is one in which strategists must be ready with tactical responses to negative advertising attacks that can take place at any time. In addition to highlighting the use of marketing as a campaign tool, I will also examine how it is used by a sitting president to try to drive public opinion in a desired direction – what has been referred to as the permanent campaign.¹

Politics Today

For many years now, marketing techniques and strategies have been imported into politics to help candidates win office and create an opportunity for political organizations, both inside and outside government, to influence the decision-making political elite (in this book, in Washington, D.C.).² In the past few decades, politicians and their advisors have become ever more sophisticated in using management and marketing strategies to influence a marketplace that is much more highly regulated and scrutinized than most commercial arenas. Politicians today must be ready to react to a wide range of competition, including but not limited to other candidates, political action committees, special interest groups, and a whole host of organizations and individuals who seek to drive public opinion on certain issues and for certain causes. During the course of a presidential campaign, this sometimes takes place instantaneously, which is very much the result of a “horse-race” mentality that develops as the campaign goes forward. Furthermore, the role of negative advertising has become a fixture in contemporary politics, exacerbating the crisis mentality that already exists in most election campaigns.³

Political organizations now face problems similar to those found on the commercial side, and vice-versa. Simultaneous with the running of the marketing campaign is the financial campaign. The latter may possibly usurp and take over the political campaign as political organizations report fund-raising levels that reflect the popularity of a candidate; in some cases it may doom a campaign, when there seems to be no interest, or it may be used to intimidate candidates who do not think they can match the funds raised by the leading contender in a race. Political organizations must rely on sophisticated marketing strategies to stay financially viable over the course of a campaign cycle. In an interesting twist, the notion of the vigilante citizen, a scourge of politicians who support issues that upset citizens organized in political action committees and issues groups, has now made its way into the commercial marketplace, where consumers not happy with a company’s actions are able to voice their concerns through social media in a manner resembling political protest. To put it another way, the commercial marketplace is becoming very political.

Every political campaign must also rely on the effective use of public relations. However, unlike in a public relations campaign for a commercial product or service, political public relations people have to

work harder because there are so many different constituencies to be contacted. As the American public ages, the average age of the evening news watcher is rising; it becomes more of a challenge for political operatives to get out their message to age cohorts that may not get their information from old-line media outlets.⁴

A revolution of sorts has taken place in politics, with political parties and individual political candidates realizing that they cannot succeed in politics without the use of marketing. There is a continual reliance on the use of money to fuel marketing campaigns to put out the constant barrage of commercials required to brand and rebrand the images and platforms of candidates and their opponents. It has become very apparent that politics in the United States is dependent on marketing campaigns that do not even remotely resemble Harry Truman's whistle-stop campaign in 1948, in which he delivered stump speeches to voters at selected stops around the country.

A Unique Case Study

The application of marketing to politics, especially at the presidential level, offers a unique research opportunity. Several challenges exist with the marketing of a president. First of all, in a presidential campaign, there is the need to reach out to many different segments of voters, each of whom may prefer a particular candidate but for very different reasons. Some voters cast a ballot for a candidate because of the issues and policies the candidate stands for; others because of the candidate's promise to change things if elected; others because of their association with different groups of supporters; and still others because they are convinced that the candidate will make their lives better. All share a belief that it makes sense to vote for this person based on a hope that the candidate will keep his or her promises. Compare this decision-making process with that of typical BMW automobile owners, who probably know exactly what they are getting when they buy a car – a luxurious vehicle that offers them high performance and projects an image of success. The point here is that there will not likely be any surprises when they drive the car home. This is very different from casting a ballot for a candidate because of a strong movement of popular support, as happened with Barack Obama in 2008, where a momentum built up that swept voters off their feet with an emotional high that is unique to politics.

Second, the preferences of voters are constantly changing as new issues and circumstances present new challenges to the candidate trying to market a campaign platform based on the status-quo thinking of a political party rather than the thinking of a maverick candidate who sees things differently. The pressure of constantly shifting events – whether the threat of a foreign enemy who is bent on bringing about havoc in the United States, or an economy on the brink of collapse – heightens voter volatility and makes the marketing of a presidential candidate very difficult. In short, there is a world of difference between the voter and the typical BMW automobile owner; in all likelihood, the latter has a very firm understanding of the product characteristics, and when one aggregates this across all BMW owners, there is probably a very consistent set of attributes that buyers look for in this car, even as new models are brought out from year to year.

Third, a range of forces impinge on and make it very difficult to operate in the political marketplace with any sense of control. In effect, a presidential campaign is in a constant state of crisis from the moment it begins, without resolution until the election is over. The forces may come from within or outside the country, but the one constant is that they are often unknown until they hit the news. This requires politicians to constantly reposition their image and appeals in an effort to keep their poll numbers high. This constant repositioning is not going to be as drastic for the BMW corporation, as its position as a premier automobile company is a constant. Further complicating the political marketplace is

the use of these same methods after a candidate wins office in an effort to keep his or her poll numbers high while running the country. A sitting president may need to make one or two critical decisions daily, as compared to a CEO of a corporation who likely needs to make one or two critical decisions once a month.⁵

Fourth, media campaigns in a presidential contest can be very vicious and full of negativity, raising issues that constantly put candidates on the defensive, and, if the negative attack is effective, preventing them from putting out a positive message. This is not the case for BMW, which may only find itself on the receiving end of a negative media campaign if there is a problem with a new model or some manufacturing defect that calls for a public relations campaign to quell the media frenzy.

Perhaps one of the most interesting characteristics of a U.S. presidential campaign is the fact that there are two major political parties, whose adherents tend to stay loyal to their respective nominees, contending for the support of the relatively few voters who are sitting on the fence, not sure whom they want to vote for. The major effort that needs to be made strategically and tactically, then, is keeping the party loyalists happy while responding to the issues that the fence-sitters are looking to hear candidates talk about. This is a very different challenge than the one BMW faces, where the level of loyalty may not be as great as one finds in politics, with many car buyers looking to buy a new model every five to seven years. By contrast, candidates who represent a party will find it very difficult to get voters to switch their party allegiance, mainly due to the strong ideological differences that exist between the two parties.

Several but not all of the major characteristics that distinguish the political market from other marketplaces have been identified. In the chapters that follow, the uniqueness of this case study will become more apparent, with specific reference to the topic of each chapter. It will become obvious that the challenges faced by a politician often eclipse the challenges faced by a marketing manager in the nonprofit or for-profit sector, or, in some interesting twists that will become clear, there may be challenges in nonpolitical sectors that call for even more creative marketing thinking.

Take the task of having to raise funds for a nonprofit organization that does not have the celebrity status of a Barack Obama or Bill Clinton and that is working hard to get someone to donate in an effort to keep the nonprofit alive. How can other organizations learn from the lessons of the recent Obama campaigns, which were brilliant at getting citizens to contribute millions of dollars? For example, in one very successful campaign, the Obama strategists determined that there was a great interest among some key segments of voters in meeting and having dinner with celebrities like George Clooney and Sarah Jessica Parker. Relying on the use of micro-targeting efforts, the campaign identified voters who fitted a specific demographic profile and contacted them through the Internet. The result was a very successful fund-raising campaign, one of several that will be reported on later in the book.

Obama's two campaigns in particular provide evidence of how marketing can be applied to a nonbusiness setting that incorporates many of the same ingredients one would find in a typical marketplace in which a firm sells various products and services to customers. In fact, his two campaigns closely resemble some of the many start-ups that are popping up in industries around the globe, where entrepreneurs familiar with the latest technological advances are able to target niche markets with their new products and services. With the myriad changes taking place in the world of politics, and specifically in the way campaigns are run, the opportunity exists for students of other markets to borrow and learn from the recent Obama campaigns, applying these insights to a dynamic business setting that is full of uncertainties and crises, and using data-gathering techniques to acquire the necessary intelligence to respond effectively to them.

Political campaigns continue to spend huge amounts of money to market candidates, with hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on political campaigns at the presidential level. The book will highlight

the importance of following the marketing concept to identify the needs and wants of key constituencies in the marketplace, including government, the media, consumers, and other key publics. Just as a political campaign is not an island unto itself, but must operate in a world where public opinion is shaped by many different influences, so must corporations learn to deal with multiple publics and adapt their strategy to the realities of the changing mood of their customers.

Merging the Worlds of Politics and Business

The two successful Obama campaigns (especially the one in 2012) introduced a whole new set of electioneering tactics that can be used to win over customers in any marketplace. For example, Obama redefined how to go about identifying who your potential customers are. Voters who had not cast a ballot previous to the 2012 U.S. presidential election were convinced to do so. At the same time, Obama used innovative methods to encourage repeat voting behavior among supporters from 2008 – some of them reluctant. All types of organizations are always trying to find new customers and at the same time hold onto those they already have. The Obama operatives revealed how they were able to attract millions of dollars using e-mail technology that had been refined through extensive experimentation. For example, when they embarked on fund-raising campaigns, they tried out many different phrases in the subject line of an e-mail to potential donors to determine the exact wording that would attract the greatest response.

Just as unforeseen events shape the commercial marketplace, so do they shape political campaigns, and, in fact, may cause them to turn in an instant. Political campaigns are always subject to the ebb and flow of unforeseen events, including lackluster performances by candidates at critical moments that can play a key role in moving the candidate's poll numbers. If you think back to the 2012 campaign, there were many critical events that seemed to turn the tide both for and against each of the two candidates. Whether it was a verbal gaffe by one of the candidates (Romney's "47 percent" comment) or a poor showing in a debate (Obama in the first debate), each of the respective organizations saw its poll numbers drop very quickly at different points in the campaign. No other marketplace will see its sales figures drop as precipitously as in politics.

Rebranding a product or service, or even an entire organization that finds itself viewed in an unfavorable light in the media, is not a simple marketing challenge, and calls for new and different ways to communicate with customers from varied backgrounds. At the heart of a communication strategy for any organization is a brand identity that enables it to rise above any claims that seek to redefine the company in a negative light. During both of his victorious campaigns, Obama was able to create a brand strategy that had equity with voters from very different backgrounds. This was accomplished through the innovative use of carefully crafted logos, consistent use of the same colors and designs on all campaign posters and in all campaign commercials, and the use of media for different purposes.

The definition of a candidate's brand very much ties into the logo that is developed to provide a visual representation of the future direction in which the leader will take the country. This is no different than the use of the "golden arches" by McDonald's to define its brand. During the 2008 campaign, Obama promised to bring a new culture to Washington. This was accomplished with a picture that represented the sun rising over the horizon, signifying the promise of hope to the citizens, and using the colors of red, white, and blue to suggest that his campaign was built on a patriotic foundation. In 2012, although there were elements of the 2008 logo used, especially as they tied into the issues of the campaign, the tagline in 2012 was "For Leadership We Can Believe In," an echo of the tagline in 2008, "Change We Can Believe In." Obama relied on similar versions of his 2008 logo, as it was clearly a successful visual of his message for hope and new horizons.

Another facet of the political marketplace that will resonate with all organizations is the way in which employees of a political organization are made to feel part of a movement. For example, all organizations will be in a better position to educate employees by indoctrinating them with an ideology that they agree with and are able to advance themselves; similarly, a big factor in political success is having a philosophy that is shared by all members of a party. Yes, all organizations have members, too, called employees, with a connection that may bond them in a different way because of the use of money to pay for their services, but it will become apparent that the use of nonmonetary methods to motivate team members is often even more effective because it relies on the use of emotion to drive people's behavior.

In some cases, the development of a movement (such as the Tea Party on the Republican side) creates an almost cult-like following that makes persuasive messages even more effective when they are couched in the language of the movement's leader. This is part of the branding process in politics, and it is not uncommon in some cases to see the same on the commercial side, when consumers are so strongly connected to the products they use that it plays out in a similar fashion – examples include those professionals who meet on Sundays in the summer months to ride their Harley-Davidson motorcycles as part of a movement of bikers, or users of Android smartphones who favor the same technology for the watches they put on their wrist or the glasses they put on their face.

With the necessity of attracting voters from both major political parties in any run for the presidency, a presidential candidate needs to rely on the marketing lessons reported in this book to identify new and creative ways to appeal to voters beyond the party faithful. Perhaps the most significant challenge for a political organization is the necessity of attracting voters from the opposing party. A political party cannot rely solely on voters in one party to win an election. Similarly, the marketers of any product or service need to constantly attract customers from their competitors as it becomes harder to hold onto existing customers. In effect, political campaigns need to reach out to a wide spectrum of voters in the same way that some organizations seek to attract customers who use their product or services for very different reasons. Smart marketers find ways to sell their offerings to diverse customers – what is referred to in the marketing discipline as market segmentation. The imperative in a presidential political campaign is to carry out this tactic to a degree that is beyond the scope of most organizations by finding new and different ways to accomplish the goal.

Politics Rises to a New Level of Technological Sophistication

For many years, politics has relied on the use of commercial marketing methods to “sell” politicians to voters; recently, however, these methods have reached a new level of sophistication because of the use of the latest technological advances in political campaigns. For example, one of the most fundamental axioms in the field of marketing is that organizations must first identify the needs and wants of their customers before they can successfully sell their products and services to them. What has happened over the past several years is the introduction of micro-targeting by organizations to pinpoint the needs and wants of individual customers through the sophisticated use of Big Data. The Obama campaigns engaged in a significant amount of data-mining by integrating different databases to identify profiles of critical voter segments. This was accomplished in part by integrating the television habits of voters, along with their shopping habits, and any other characteristics that could help to profile them, and using that information to help the campaign's advertising strategists more effectively target voters with attractive and meaningful appeals.

It has become a common practice in organizations across many different industries to develop