

Looking Back ... and Forward

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If 2008 were forced to choose, Obama's campaign and his victory would be the single memory of that year to remain. The success of his campaign was based on a clear message and a grassroots movement made possible by technology. In two years, it will be a different playing ground. To understand best how to run a campaign in 2012 we must first look at Obama's success and then into the future. We will open the hood of the campaign engine to find technology not only rallies the base, but is key to having a successful grassroots movement.

Let us begin by examining the past. Starting with the question, "What were the fundamental differences between how the Obama and Dean campaigns were run?" We must keep in mind Obama was running on a stronger platform than Dean in 2003-4. The poor performance of the Bush presidency over 8 years, the mess in Iraq and economic troubles had taken their toll on the public's confidence in the Republican party. However, had the economy not tanked, Obama may not have been able to pick up enough votes to capture this election; some may say that in 2008 economics trumped racism.

Obama undeniably motivated voters who were disposed toward him, but was also able to reach those who normally would not venture out to vote. I think Clay does an excellent job of summarizing why in his article for the Daily Beast, "Where the Dean campaign adopted social media as part of their tactics, the Obama campaign made it a core part of their strategy. They have two dozen programmers working for the campaign, writing code to do everything from helping them ask for money to helping users of My.BarackObama.com get out the vote. If I had to describe the Obama online strategy in a few words, I'd say it's this: 'Support the supporters.'" [1]. Obama was able to turn supporters into voters who would venture out to the polls, while Dean merely inspired.

There was an excellent 60 Minutes piece interviewing Obama's inner campaign circle after the election [2]. In it the reason for Obama's success was stated as having started on day one: "Knowing what you want to say from the beginning." Having a clear message is essential. Other reasons, which technology enabled, were: "agility, risk taking, and building the grassroots campaign".

Technology was the other key in Obama's campaign; not necessarily its direct use by the campaign, so much as the existence and fan use of youtube, Facebook, Meetup, and so on. I believe most of the benefit reaped from the internet served to boost the base enough to amplify their voice outside of the internet, to create a critical mass under tags such as "change" that come November 4th when people found themselves in the voting booth the final thought on their minds before voting was, "Why not try a change? I guess that means Obama."

Several videos also served to rally the base. will.i.am's *Yes We Can* [3] was the first, then came *Obama Girl* [4], and later a redone version of *wassup*. The most successful amateur produced videos tended to have a professional look and speak in memes. will.i.am used the

music video format masterfully. *Obama Girl* used music, sex appeal and humor. *Wassup 2008* [5] played on a humorous meme many Americans are already familiar with. They weren't radical. They were professionally produced, and this was the coating that made their medicine easy to swallow, even tasty enough to recommend to your friend. The wider the variety of videos, the wider the audience you'll be able to reach.

Obama did not exist so much as a person as he did an ideal, a concept. He had very good control of his image, and he stuck to the truth. He also presented himself as someone you could "know" and so the NY Times wrote, "Reid Johnson, 31, a volunteer at the Obama office in Wilson, N.C., agreed. 'You get the feeling that you're becoming friends with him in that casual way,' he said. 'I think everyone takes ownership of it because you feel like you know who he is.'" [6]

Along this vein, it is essential a candidate creates a character his constituents love, and feel they know personally. Taking a step back, part of acceptance is related to age. My guess is that the Republican candidate in 2012 will be much younger and in touch with technology than McCain. The persona must be one that the arbiters of the internet, those with time, youth in many cases, can sink their idealistic and active minds into.

Once you have a character, how do you evoke and protect it? I have already mentioned how Obama was promoted, but let us also know how he was protected: fightthesmears.com [7]. When proponents felt Obama was under an unfair attack, such as being called a Muslim, they could register the offense at [fightthesmears](http://fightthesmears.com), and include data such as the date, link, photograph or video and finally, the truth. Providing this outlet for amateur Obama supporters, those not necessarily officially part of the campaign, decreased the amount of time the campaign needed to devote to scanning for trash, while getting a broader and better result by using amateurs time. Such centralization and mobilization of amateur support is essential for any future campaign.

Future campaigns will undoubtedly study the Obama campaign closely. In essence, I believe being successful means emphasizing three key points: creating a character conducive to content creation, a clear message and skillful use of ALL available technology.

This leads us to questions about the future: how will the technological landscape differ in three years, and how can campaigners take advantage of it? I believe a major difference will be the utilization of mobile technology. The Obama campaign built an iPhone app [8], and both campaigns leveraged text messaging. Sending audio, images, and especially movies via cellphones is still prohibitively difficult, either because of the platform or network. This will change. The way mobile media is captured and transmitted, leading to a dramatic increase in its volume and quality, change in the way it is distributed, and the creation of sites that will gather this media and provide it for remix will bloom in the next few years. The 2012 campaign will be based on effectively using mobile media to gather pro and inflammatory content which will then be remixed and used in various ways.

Providing incentives for supporters to increase their involvement and the effect of that involvement will also bloom. Scarcity is central to incentive, an example being exclusive tickets to a national convention, dinner with the candidate, or more generally, your rank versus other supporters. Scoring will become more specific. While in the Obama

campaign the desktop was largely the medium used to relay data, the cellphone will increase in importance. Having a million live "windows" via cellphones walking around the United States paints a fascinating picture. For example, I could download Jane's GPS data which shows the neighborhoods she's visited and gives extra points for her going out of her way. Add another hundred points for the three interviews she conducted with undecided voters and the accompanying audio she also uploaded. The magic will be in getting volunteers to filter through this deluge of new media.

Imagine the power of a massive campaign brain in the form of organized volunteer centers, virtualized online, filtering through this data, finding the most common reasons undecided voters are hesitant to express support and the best responses to counter those second thoughts, customizable all the way down to zip code. That sort of database utilization and organization was one of the key tools of the Obama campaign. It will be even more important in the future.

Campaigns and society are becoming increasingly hybrid. Lawrence Lessig describes the hybridization of corporations and society. Flickr is an excellent example. A site started by amateurs for amateurs that was bought and used by Yahoo as a vehicle to expand their empire, while still continuing to support amateurs. In the same vein, the transfer of communal services between campaign, supporter, volunteer and amateur will only continue to increase. Media created by amateurs will be increasingly hoisted onto campaign platforms. Creating technologies built on this premise, utilizing mobile tech, and providing a clear message for a wide swath of society will describe the successful campaign of 2012.

References

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Obama campaign iphone app

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