

Election 2012

by Alexander Reeder

for Election 2008 @ ITP

comments to alexr@e-sa.org

If the collective American consciousness were forced to choose, Obama's campaign and his victory would be the most important historic event of 2008, seconded by the economic downturn. The success of his campaign was based on a clear message and a grassroots movement made possible by skillful use of 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]. 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 from start to finish was essential. Other reasons, which technology enabled, were: "agility, risk taking, and building the grassroots campaign".

Technology's use in Obama's campaign was exercised and ambient; ambient in the echo chamber known as youtube, Facebook, Meetup, and so on. In my opinion these sites did not impact the minds of undecided voters so much as rally 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 voting booths the final thought on their minds before voting was, "Why not try a change? I guess that means Obama."

will.i.am's *Yes We Can* [3] was the first, then came *Obama Girl* [4], and later a redone version of *wassup* are examples which served to rally the base. 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", quoting the NY Times, "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] Conveying this sense of participation was also rooted in campaign financing strategies, involving individuals idealistically and fiscally.

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 a false 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: a clear and consistent message, control of your character and skillful use of technology.

This leads us to questions about the future: how can existing technologies be more efficiently utilized, and what new technological paradigms will emerge? The beauty of sites like youtube lies in the freedom and variety to choose whatever content you desire. Masses of people with shared interest are combing through this material, selecting the good and pushing aside the bad. Campaigns also need to process an incredible volume of media, and utilizing the collaborative nature of the internet to distribute this work amongst volunteers would be an excellent juxtaposition of the Open Source Software model onto political campaigning. More importantly would be the targeting of filtered media. Younger versus older or conservative versus liberal leaning groups will typically consume different media. A video which may interest one group could offend another. Making sure the right media is seen by the right people is an excellent use of a distributed network of diverse volunteers, and something we should increasingly observe.

Another future paradigm shift lies in 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 mobile 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. Future campaigners best be ready. 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 compared to other supporters. Scoring will become more specific. Having a million live "windows" via cellphones walking around the United States paints a fascinating picture. For example, as a campaign manager I could download Jane's GPS data which shows the neighborhoods she's visited and give extra points for 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.

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