



Four Marketing Lessons from the Presidential Campaign

This year's presidential campaign has been an interesting one to watch from a marketing standpoint. There are several good marketing lessons to take from this year's candidates to use in your daily marketing efforts whether you're a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or a Bull Moose...

Lesson #1

The Internet is changing/has changed the way we market

The best example of this is something that you've seen but probably haven't noticed. Every time you see the candidate behind a podium, there's an URL sticking on the front of it. Voters can go to a website that can showcase a lot of the information and voter-specific topics that would be impossible (and somewhat boring) to do otherwise. And it's not just the candidates who can use the Internet for political marketing. Groups like MoveOn.org have effectively used the power of the web to further their causes.

The best use of the Internet was by the Dean Campaign in the primaries. Dean and his staff used the power of viral marketing to mobilize and energize the "Deaniacs" as well as to raise money. However, Howard Dean's absence in the general election also shows that a great Internet strategy is PART of a great marketing campaign. You must have a total marketing focus. Dean is also a good example of how viral marketing can work against you as evidenced by the infamous "Dean Scream" being spread and adapted online.

Both how to use the power of a blog effectively and how to alienate people are being demonstrated in this election cycle as well. Blogs that are just a mouthpiece for a corporation or a candidate will not work. Savvy Internet consumers can tell the difference. Free speech must rule a blog; which is nicely American in and of itself.

Whether you're marketing a candidate or your product on the internet, the basic idea to remember is that never before in history have marketers been able to promote specific key items by providing targeted content to a specific person like we can now on the net. If you are doing this, how can you do it better and if not, why are you not doing it?

Lesson #2

The best brand always wins

My branding mantra holds that on a fundamental level, all brands are personal. The consumer takes them personally so they must be developed on a personal level by the marketer.

In a political context, it seems that this would be even easier since the product itself (the candidate) is a person. In branding, we call it "brand positioning". In politics, it's called "spin". The whole political candidate package must convey a single brand concept. The voter had the brand image in their mind and any deviation from that will cause market (or electoral) loss.

Lesson #3

The Best Defense is a Good Offense

We all love negative campaigns, right? Almost every contested election from the President to the Dogcatcher will have one of those horrible ads with the grainy picture of the competition, some newspaper headline clippings, and a dark brooding voiceover that says something like "John Doe likes to kick puppies. Shame on you, John Doe" This is always followed up with an ad from John

Doe holding a puppy and telling everyone how he loves it so much. And it goes back and forth like this right up until Election Day with each person reacting to the other.

One of my basic marketing tenets is to act with your marketing and don't react with it. If you're reacting, it's already too late. You've been beaten. The competition has gotten a message to your customers and the rest of the market before you did. If you reactively market, you are, in effect, reinforcing the competition's message.

In the "puppy campaign" above, what if John Doe had made puppies part of his platform from the start? His campaign must have known that he voted for the Cruella DeVille Act back in 1992. If you don't take control of your PR/Marketing image, your competition or the public will.

A recent prime example of how reactive marketing can hurt a company (and one that fits nicely in this political theme) is the Miller President of Beers campaign. The small and scrappy Miller decided to take the fight directly to the Budweiser 500lb gorilla market leader by challenging Bud's long-standing "King of Beers" positioning statement. Bud reacts by bringing out every marketing concept (or ferret) they've used in the past 10 years. Both camps lose. Miller loses for actually reacting first (don't start a fight) and promoting Bud. Miller basically tells the consumer, "Hey! Just in case you didn't know, we're not the market leader! We know we're Number 2!" Bud loses for acknowledging that Miller even exists and stepping off their high horse (a Clydesdale, of course).

Lesson #4

All marketing is local

Former Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neil, said that "All Politics are Local" meaning that people really only care about what affects them directly. People are concerned about topics like national defense and the economy because on a more basic level, they care if they are safe and they have money and a job.

Too many times marketers start macro-marketing their business. They talk about features and services without answering the Number One question that all people have about all things: "What's in it for me?"

If you can answer that one question for people in your marketing, you will win every time.

At the end, there's just one winner

There are several more ways to stretch the politics / marketing analogy, but I feel these are the four most obvious. When viewed holistically, the entire political process is like one big sales presentation. The consumer (voter) has the funds (a vote) to buy (elect). They're just comparison-shopping during the campaign. Watch the rest of this year's campaign with a marketing eye. You may find that you might get a good idea to use in your marketing efforts.

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