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Understanding the political mobile campaign

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Political campaigns are usually slower to adopt advanced techniques of brand marketers, and mobile is no exception. Though mobile marketing is a staple for many marketers in the private sector, it is a relatively new entrant on the political scene.

Mobile advertising

SMS campaigns have traditionally represented the lion's share of political mobile outreach and, in many cases, this still rings true. However, many campaigns, particular those on the national level, are expanding mobile advertising to include other means of reaching voters within mobile applications and via the mobile Web.

Both President Barack Obama's reelection campaign and the Mitt Romney campaign are making effective use of targeted mobile ads. Mr. Romney's campaign has taken advantage of a Google AdWords click-to-call feature that allows the mobile user to call the campaign directly from the ad.

Some of the GOP dropouts also took advantage of the unique benefits of mobile advertising.

In the run-up to the Iowa straw poll, which Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann won, her

campaign made an aggressive mobile push featuring click-to-call ads.

Texas governor Rick Perry's digital strategist, Vincent Harris, used the advanced targeting capabilities of mobile advertising to serve mobile ads within five-mile radii of several Christian colleges in South Carolina, with the hope of driving turnout for the South Carolina primary.

Geotargeted mobile ads are the most effective last touch for campaigns hoping to get out the vote on Election Day.

As the campaign season progresses, we can expect to see increased use of geotargeted mobile ads as campaigns and advocacy groups urge their bases to head to the polls.

Sending a text the morning of Election Day to supporters who have opted in has also proven to be a highly effective way to get out the vote.

Mobile Web

Email is a tried-and-true method of campaign outreach, and many email marketers have begun optimizing their campaigns for mobile.

According to a Pew study, 36 percent of all mobile phone users check their email on their phone and 87 percent of all smartphone users check email on their phone.

Armed with this knowledge, campaigns are now operating under the assumption that any email sent to a supporter is likely to be read on a mobile device.

There are important implications with regards to donations.

Since email messages fuel most campaign contributions, campaigns are realizing the importance of making mobile donations as seamless as possible.

According to recent comScore data, 38 percent of smartphone users have made a purchase from their phone.

While this number applies to consumer purchases, the implication is that many supporters will be comfortable using their mobile device for a financial transaction.

Donation forms are becoming simpler and frictionless, and supporters who might like to donate via mobile are being given the opportunity.

Text message advertising is also becoming integrated with the mobile Web.

For example, President Obama's texts frequently link to the Obama mobile Web store, where users can buy Obama-branded items or make donations.

Mobile fundraising

Campaign fundraising has come a long way in the last few election cycles.

While online fundraising is considered a well-established staple of political campaigns in 2012, mobile is the next frontier.

Square has recently landed on the political scene.

To court political candidates, Square has specifically adapted its interface for accepting political donations, allowing field staffers and volunteers to collect data such as ZIP code and employer information, as mandated by the Federal Election Commission.

So far, both Obama for America and the Romney campaign have adopted Square.

The Obama campaign has said that it may even create a custom fundraising app that would be available for download from the Apple App Store.

The app would allow any Obama supporter who has downloaded the app to fundraise for Mr. Obama using Square on her own iPhone or iPad, with funds going directly to the Obama campaign.

The Romney campaign has said it is looking into developing a similar custom app that would allow anyone to make donations, no matter where they are.

Working with PayPal, location-based mobile advertiser Where offers a political product called Donate Now which incorporates donate buttons within mobile ad units and allows supporters to click through directly and make a donation.

While mobile fundraising is not going to overtake online fundraising in this election cycle, it could play a crucial role, and its importance will only continue to grow in importance.

How advocacy groups use mobile

Rock the Vote, a non-partisan, nonprofit voter mobilization organization, uses mobile in many of its outreach efforts.

When staffers and volunteers are out in the field, they always make sure to ask if people who sign up for more information are also interested in receiving mobile updates.

Using an entirely permission-based system, Rock the Vote builds their community by using live mobile polls to get feedback on relevant topics, list build, incentivize supporters with giveaways to keep them loyal and employ event activations to mobilize their base while they are on the go. They also use targeted messaging to send reminders such as asking people to go out and vote.

As many marketers understand, mobile is too important to ignore – and in this election cycle, mobile will play a more significant role than ever before.

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