

Voter-Contact & The Future of the GOP

Attention: Candidates, Party Leaders & Campaign Strategists

Written by:

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There is no shortage of analysis regarding the GOP defeats in 2012; the “WHY” is well documented. Future GOP victories will require action plans focused on “HOW” to win moving forward.

These postmortem reports reveal the GOP problems in 2012:

- The Winston Group’s, “Analysis of the 2012 Presidential Elections.”
<http://winstongroup.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/2012-Post-Election-Analysis.pdf>
- The RNC’s, “Growth & Opportunity Project”
<http://growthopp.gop.com/default.aspx>
- The College Republican National Committee’s, “Grand Old Party for a Brand New Generation” <http://goo.gl/KcMb1x>

The GOP failed to connect with women, minorities and young voters. The GOP also failed to motivate the conservative base (turnout). Combined, these factors resulted in defeat. The formula for future success includes major improvements in:

- Messaging
- Data management
- Use of social media
- Voter-contact

GOP strategists are tasked with devising the “message.” Technical gurus must find the data and social media solutions. Ground game veterans must devise creative voter-contact solutions . . . Because if we don’t communicate effectively we cannot change hearts and minds, nor can we motivate turnout.

The telephone is still a cost effective voter communication tool. The GOP’s failure in 2012 was not due to lack of effort. The RNC and Mitt Romney spent nearly \$40 million on telephone programs; however, the ideas/methods were stale. Team Romney rolled out the same old playbook. Telephone voter-contact was not the problem; tired ideas were to blame.

Moving forward GOP campaigns must establish a new mindset regarding telephone voter-contact. As stated in the RNC's Growth & Opportunity Project (page 25):

- *With respect to campaign mechanics, the GOP must be open and ready to rebuild our entire playbook, and we must take advice from outside our comfort zone. We must test "paid phone" methods and messages to determine which efforts are most effective in converting contacts to votes.*

On page 36, the task force recommends . . .

- *Telephone tests should be conducted on not only advocacy but on actual voter interaction.*

GOP strategists must also adopt a new mindset regarding the value/cost of telephone voter-contact. The trend over the last 15 years has been to drive the cost "per contact" down, thus commoditizing the product. When campaign consultants refuse to pay more than \$0.50 cents for a live agent advocacy call, the voter-contact vendor is under tremendous pressure to maximize completes per hour. Price pressure and increased hourly yield demands undermine program objectives. The primary emphasis should be "MEANINGFUL VOTER COMMUNICATION ON EVERY CALL," . . . not maximum completes per hour.

The Growth & Opportunity Project's recommendation to shift focus to telephone "VOTER INTERACTION" is a game-changer. When highly trained call center agents actually engage voters and talk "with" them (not "at" them), extraordinary results are inevitable. Engaging voters in meaningful conversation takes time, . . . and time is money. Completes per hour will go down, but conversion of "contacts-to-votes" will go up. Consultants must view their telephone budgeting in terms of "net" ROI not list penetration and lowest cost per contact. ***The cost PER VOTE is the only truly relevant metric.***

In recent years GOP campaigns have predominantly used the telephone for short duration voter-ID, short message advocacy, and Election Day GOTV. The telephone is still effective; however, program deployments have become predictable, unimaginative and stale; as a result enthusiasm has waned. The sentiment shared by some that the telephone has become less effective is purely anecdotal; however, the belief is based on the lack of creativity and innovation. Heading into 2014 GOP campaign strategists must think outside the box.

It's time to abandon the old playbook. It's time for new telephone voter-contact ideas and innovative methodologies. For example . . .

- Live-agent persuasion calls to minority voters, inviting them to visit an informational website, or view a short YouTube video. Calls can originate from a voter list, or from targeted geographical areas using a reverse-directory.
- Robo-calls to minorities, women and young voters can be used for advocacy or to prompt feedback. The press-1 feature can trigger a "patch-through," and a live agent can answer questions and track feedback.
- Effective Communication with minorities will require community-specific strategies based on geography and ethnicity. A multi-phase approach is recommended:
 - Phase-1, Conduct a live-agent telephone poll. Ask minority voters (community specific) to name their top-5 concerns and/or challenges.
 - Phase-2, Cross-tabulate the data, and use contingency tables to orchestrate a follow-up live-agent advocacy call (addressing the associated specific concerns).
 - Phase-3, Close the loop with a final call. Confirm the previously identified issues, restate the proposed (GOP) solution, and confirm understanding and buy-in.
- Use data mining to compile lists based on "voting history." For example, identify voters who cast a ballot in 2008, but did not in 2012. Create another file of voters who voted in 2004, but did not in 2008 or 2012. Multiple voting profiles can be created, and then unique polling and/or advocacy scripts drafted for each group. If we can identify the reason(s) a constituent failed to vote, we can offer motivation or reasons to vote in the upcoming election (perhaps offer absentee or early voting options).
- Identify "low-information" voters, and test multiple educational/advocacy scripts. Call objectives can include invitations to local events, invitations to visit a Facebook page, or invitations to join a webinar or podcast.
- Live-Agent calling campaigns that include "email address capture," and EUT (email upon termination). Upon terminating the call, the agent pushes an email to the constituent. The email can be informational, or produce action

(like voter-registration, event attendance, etc.)

- Live-Agent calling campaigns for “cell phone number capture,” which include text-message opt-in permission, which in-turn leads to text message broadcasts. [And/Or “push” a Tweet upon call termination]
- When conducting Voter-ID live-agent calls, identify “ardent” supporters, and recruit them for precinct door knocking.
- When conducting live-agent advocacy calls, identify “ardent” supporters, and request they post a favorable pro-candidate message on their Facebook wall and/or send a Tweet. Various scripts could be tested, but the goal is to turn one contact into many. Also, ask voters to visit the candidate’s Facebook page and click “Like.”
- When conducting Voter-ID live-agent calls, identify “ardent” supporters, and seek approval to post a yard sign on their lawn. Coordinate all requests with local campaign offices for sign delivery or pick-up.
- Typically voter-contact phone efforts consist of isolated calls. Occasionally a campaigns will deploy a 2-step effort, using a follow-up advocacy call after initial Voter-ID yields a group of “undecided;” however, phone efforts are typically one call and done. TCSG can archive agent-specific call records so the same agent can make calls to the same voter multiple times. Different scripts and call sequences can be tested. “Message continuity” and agent familiarity may yield groundbreaking results.
- Phone campaigns to promote voter-registration, absentee ballots and/or early voting.

The GOP faces many challenges and difficult battles ahead. The recent trend of declining victories can be reversed, but it will require bold decisions and a commitment to new strategies and new methodologies.

The old way of doing things must be abandoned. Fresh ideas must be used to create new action plans, including innovative and creative use of telephone voter-contact.

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