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The Marketing of Political Candidates: Current Tactics and Future Strategies

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The Marketing of Political Candidates

Current Tactics and Future Strategies

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Alexander Haig, Jr., a 1988 presidential hopeful, remarked, concerning campaign politics: "I have learned the secret of life—it's in marketing" (1986). The emergence of marketing in nonbusiness organizations, so well documented in recent writings, is accented by its ascendancy in politics (Laczniak and Caywood 1987; "Four More Years" 1985; Mauser 1983; Rothschild 1978). Any campaign manager interested in applying orthodox marketing principles to his or her craft will find the use of marketing techniques in the political sphere particularly instructive.

The area of modern campaign management that introduced marketing tools into the political process was probably public relations (PR). In the early 1950s, PR professionals began to manage various political campaigns, including the much-discussed California election that launched the political career of Richard Nixon (Kelly 1956). Twenty years later, the "selling of the presidency" received wide public attention in the popular book on the 1968 Nixon campaign by a young journalist, Joe McGinnis (1969). But even in that first twenty-year period, marketing had not really reached its full potential in national or local campaigns. Now, despite an additional two decades, the capabilities of marketing as a political campaign management strategy have still not been realized.

In the past few years, marketing academics and practitioners have become interested in applying marketing concepts and tools to political campaigns. Researchers, including Caywood and Preston (1989), Newton and Sheth (1985), Caywood (1985), Merritt (1984), Rust, Baja, and Haley (1984), Mauser (1983), Rothschild (1978) and others, have analyzed the applicability of various communications, advertising, and marketing concepts to political marketing. They have analyzed political marketing from the standpoint of information processing, consumer behavior, law, ethics, and voter choice; however, a unified theory about political marketing does not exist.

At the pragmatic level of actual campaign management, marketing techniques are widely used. As one political expert has noted, "Today choosing policy advisors is insignificant compared to lining up the right pollster, media advisor, direct mail operator, fund-raiser and make-up artist" (Sorenson 1984). There are a number of books on how to run a campaign as well as numerous chronicles of campaign anecdotes (see Trafton 1984; Napolitan 1972; Goldenberg and Traugott 1984; Parkinson 1970; Kelley 1956). However, none of these manuals is grounded in a thorough knowledge of marketing theory and strategic management.

The fact that marketing theory has not made a greater contribution to political campaigns is understandable. The typical focus of academic marketing research is business. The diffusion of marketing knowledge into nonbusiness sectors, including nonprofit organizations, is recent enough that only some use has been made of marketing strategies. The diffusion of insights from one field to another often begins with tactical knowledge, which is more convenient and understandable than the more complex and challenging strategic approaches. Many large businesses are still attempting to integrate the insights of strategic management theory into their operations (Aaker 1984; Henderson 1983; Ansoff 1957).

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL MARKETING

Although political marketing is still evolving, it is "big business," and significant economic stakes are involved. Expenditures for congressional campaigns in 1985 and 1986 alone were in the neighborhood of \$480 million, an increase of 20 percent over the previous record (Gaunt 1987). Recent U.S. Senate races consumed a record \$211 million. This included the Zschau versus Cranston race in California in which each candidate spent in excess of \$11 million. Every Senate candidate spent *at least* \$1.3 million in 1986. Actual marketing expenditures at all political levels are unknown, but printing costs for brochures, campaign buttons, consul-

tants, outdoor advertising, and all other forms of promotion would certainly add up to billions of dollars.

In addition, traditional business marketers have become increasingly involved with politics through the rise of the political action committee (PAC) (Sabato 1984). The PAC is the main avenue corporations can use to influence the political process, and thus has called for a higher degree of management in campaigns. Corporations and related business, labor, and professional organizations, reportedly contributed \$132.2 million through PACs, or 28 percent of total contributions to congressional political campaigns in the 1986 elections (Gaunt 1987).

In general, such increased financial and volunteer support by business executives for sundry political candidates would suggest that marketing knowledge will continue to trickle into the political campaign arena at an increasing rate. It is useful, therefore, to examine the marketing tools and concepts that have already been adapted to politics and those that may be used more and more in the future. The objective of this chapter is to explore where tactical and strategic elements of marketing have contributed to modern political campaign management to date and to speculate about the elements of marketing that have not been fully utilized.

CURRENT APPLICATIONS OF MARKETING IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

What kinds of marketing techniques are used most often in current political campaigns? Some of the more common methods used are as follows:

- Advertising
- Survey research
- Publicity
- Focus groups
- Direct mail
- Telemarketing
- Sales promotions.

In general, the integrated application of marketing and related techniques to political campaigns has been relatively minor, although individual techniques have been used skillfully. For example, although some tools of marketing research have been employed (e.g., survey research), the strategic connections between research, candidate development, and subsequent voter cultivation have not been as effective as possible. In ad-

dition, political consultants using marketing have not fully understood the value of exploratory research methods (e.g., focus groups, elite interviewing) in developing ongoing research programs for longer-term strategic decisionmaking in the campaign and beyond.

Nonetheless, candidates, political consultants, and occasional bona fide marketing managers with corporate backgrounds have successfully employed some marketing methods in politics. Marketing elements such as advertising, direct mail, publicity, and sales promotion are currently used in political campaigns throughout the United States.

ADVERTISING

Media advertising techniques, including both electronic and print, are commonplace and have been well integrated into political campaigns for some time. Early use of print, outdoor, and eventually radio and television advertising as applied to politics have been well documented (e.g., Jamieson 1984; Diamond and Bates 1984). Significantly, some advertising agencies have been reluctant to work with political campaigns. Advertising legend David Ogilvy (1983) has criticized television commercials for candidates in presidential elections as flagrantly dishonest (1983). And John O'Toole (1981), chairman of Foote, Cone and Belding, has been somewhat critical of the inherently misleading nature of such advertising. Other academic and journalistic researchers have shown that television is particularly vulnerable to criticism (Laczniak and Caywood 1987; Spero 1980).

On the other hand, the business of political advertising is well accepted and is a significant economic force in advertising. Rothschild (1987, p. 765) notes that if one extrapolates the compressed two-month \$40 million expenditures for the presidential election in 1984, it would translate into a \$240 million campaign—which would be greater than the expenditures for all but five national brand name products.

Madison Avenue's involvement, although substantial, is perhaps not as great as that of smaller "main street" advertising agencies in local and state campaigns. Also, since most mass media offer the campaign committee itself traditional agency discounts of 15 percent, an agency may be of no obvious economic benefit to some campaign managers. However, most state candidates for federal or state office opt for a local agency. In addition, federal rules require broadcast media to offer available radio and television time to candidates at the lowest commercial rates. This has encouraged the use of mass media. Thus, advertising plays a visible and arguably influential role in modern politics (Laczniak and Caywood 1987). Rothschild (1987, p. 745) notes that the intensity of

political advertising signals one objective: "When a short message of little substance is repeated that often, it is clear that the goal is not to inform, but rather to persuade." However, advertising may have a more significant role for voter information than traditional news coverage because it provides a shorthand mechanism for diffusing potentially salient information (Clarke and Evans 1983).

If politics has failed to recognize the full value of advertising—which, *is* indeed, used profusely—it may be because political advisers see advertising as an isolated element of the campaign rather than an integrated component of promotional strategy.

SURVEY RESEARCH

Polling, or survey research, has also been used in politics for many years. The technique has been refined in recent times as political advisers have become more aware of appropriate social science methods (Mauser 1983; Honomichl 1984). Some years ago, pollsters proposed that surveys of voter intention for presidential candidate Hubert H. Humphrey should be administered in the second weeks of September, October, and November (Napolitan 1972), forgetting that the third survey of voter opinion would be unnecessary since the election would have been held the prior week. Things have improved since then.

In recent years the concept of a "bus," that is, appended questions, to a scheduled opinion survey has been offered to political managers. In addition, a number of national firms, including Market Opinion Research and Lance Terrance and Associates, have offered to conduct multiple wave panel studies for candidates. Although the complexity of the research used in political campaigns has increased, many of the questions asked in such polls elicit essentially descriptive information. Attitude, opinion, and behavioral intention questions regarding public issues, voting preferences, and candidate name recognition are the most typical ones. Contributing to the melange of political surveys are periodic reports from Gallup, Yankelovich, Harris, and others, as well as the national networks and even local media.

Although the quality of research has improved (for instance, sample size and statistical error range are now routinely reported), voters and candidates are often confronted with widely disparate statistics on how one candidate is doing over another. This stems partly from the different questions being asked, the different ways that the same questions are asked, the timing of the survey, the variation in sample composition, and a host of other factors. In addition, each candidate will selectively re-

port his or her commissioned research. Other more objective sources may report conflicting results.

In a recent Wisconsin race, various polls showed the challenger supported by either 50 percent or 41 percent and the incumbent supported by either 29 percent or 48 percent. The challenger and eventual victor, obviously seizing on the most optimistic numbers, was "elated" according to his aide ("Poll" 1986). Although conflicting information is not unusual even in more traditional marketing areas (e.g., comparative advertising), political opinion polls are often used as campaign cannon fodder rather than as dispassionate sources of information for decision-making. For example, in an Ohio gubernatorial race in 1982, a survey question about the opposition candidate's sexual activities became the subject of an advertising rebuttal on television ("Candidate Tells" 1982). Again, political campaign managers may use a tool of marketing, but the chaotic decision environment during a political campaign distorts the value of the tool in making substantive, issue-focused decisions.

PUBLICITY

Publicity, which gives candidates free coverage in the press, is an element of both public relations and marketing (Kotler and Mindak 1978). It is found to be necessary in most political campaigns. Owing to the public nature and potential impact of election campaigns, they are more or less inherently newsworthy. Major campaigns, such as those for statewide or federal offices, would not normally be able to afford to communicate the amount of information necessary to create general awareness of the candidate's position on major issues without publicity or the so-called free media.

In one campaign for a statewide office in Wisconsin, a candidate conducted a "fly-in" to each of the state's seven major television markets with advance notice to the press concerning an airport announcement of his candidacy and platform. Media representatives not present at the event were sent preproduced taped spots of the announcement. The estimated cost of the news coverage for this tactic was greater than the budget for all paid broadcast media during the entire campaign. Throughout the campaign, this particular candidate continued to successfully use free media with a series of so-called workdays. The candidate worked for part of a day in various jobs around the state, including an assembly line, road crew, drycleaners, and so on. He continued to receive an amazing amount of publicity for these somewhat trivial activities. Attempts to connect serious economic policy issues to the jobs were

not used by the media as much as the unusual photo opportunity of a politician working at something meaningful.

Free media can also have a negative effect. Despite the old campaign cliché, "I don't care what they say about me as long as they spell my name right," the press coverage the *Miami Herald* gave Gary Hart in 1987 was damaging, and certainly was not part of his campaign plan ("Hart Campaign" 1987). Since a newsworthy story can be favorable as well as unfavorable to the candidate, publicity must be managed as carefully as possible.

However, publicity is only one aspect of public relations. Marketers must recognize that public relations is a two-way form of communications (Cutlip, Center, and Broom 1986) if they are to avoid severe errors in campaign management. For example, a clear understanding of the role of the press under the First Amendment is necessary to avoid conflict. Some negative commentary from the press should be expected. Campaign managers should look at these instances as an opportunity to provide an appropriate rebuttal. Thus, the reinforcement of positive messages or the rebuttal of contradictory messages from the press must be integrated into a fully strategic marketing plan.

FOCUS GROUPS

Another tool of marketing that political campaign consultants have discovered is the focus group (Patton 1980). Such groups are regularly used by commercial marketing and advertising firms to systematically gather information from small samples of likely product users or service clients. The technique is thought to be more time-efficient and as cost-effective as collecting information through in-depth interviews (Calder 1977).

How do campaigns utilize the popular focus group? Starting with a sample of seven to twelve individuals (e.g., voters from a certain ward or first-time voters), two or three hours of structured group discussion may eventually pinpoint key questions or other discussion points thought to be particular strengths or weaknesses of a candidate. For example, during one 1986 gubernatorial campaign, a small advertising agency was commissioned to conduct regional focus groups for a candidate. Proposed video and audio tapes about the candidate were reviewed by campaign leaders to identify promotional message themes and speech ideas, and to confirm that this information reflected the themes developed from other qualitative and quantitative research. However, such exploratory research methods were not extended to more valid follow-up activities such as voter opinion surveys and platform refinement. Again, a tool of marketing was used, but not in the context of a more pervasive

marketing plan. This is a common failing of political marketers, who often overlook the benefits of combining research with other marketing devices.

DIRECT MAIL

Perhaps the most visible application of purely tactical marketing methods to politics is direct mail. This practice has grown so rapidly that a separate division has been created within the Direct Marketing and Mail Association to handle it. Candidate committees and PACs have used direct mail primarily for fund-raising. One irony of the current process—at least for presidential campaigns—is that the candidate can spend \$100,000 to send out a direct mail to voters, get back only \$90,000 in small contributions, and then have the government match it with \$90,000—which means a net gain of \$80,000 rather than a loss of \$10,000 (O'Leary 1987).

A statewide campaign or congressional election may send as many as five separate mailings to names on a past donors list. Improved computer capability, direct mail software, job shops specializing in the generation of voter lists, and past contributor lists have made direct mail the fastest-growing promotional area of political marketing. One political consultant has reported that 1988 presidential contender and television evangelist Pat Robertson had "a donor list which numbered about 2.5 million. . . . In comparison, Ronald Reagan went into the 1980 race with only a 200,000 donor file, while Bush, Baker, Kemp and Dole have substantially smaller files, all of which are in the 30,000 to 75,000 donor range" (O'Leary 1987, p. 24). Today political consulting newsletters boast that management software such as D-Base has been adapted to political campaigns and made it possible to manage lists containing a million names (Below, Tobe, and Associates 1987).

Many of the professional elements of commercial direct mail have been adopted in politics. Personal salutations, individualized names in the body of the letter, targeted inserts to various lists, prepaid return mail envelopes, and other elements have all been utilized. However, as with other marketing techniques, the procurement of the more sophisticated aspects of direct mail generally has not reached politics. For example, research testing of copy and response rate management, as well as key dimensions of commercial direct mail management programs, have not usually been fully implemented. Advanced direct mail research and testing programs like *Direct Test* (available from Foote, Cone and Belding and Direct Marketing Systems of Chicago) have not yet been used in political campaigns. Such software makes it possible to system-

atically cull names according to the level and timing of previous donations. At present, candidate egos may enter into decisions to leave non-productive names on the lists, usually based on dubious arguments having to do with the value of "getting-out-the-vote." Because of the hurried nature of the campaign process, "list management" during most preelection periods is much more slipshod than the improved techniques of the more efficient commercial, direct mail, organizations. In addition, a case can be made that direct mail techniques may have also become overused in political marketing. The vast number of local, state, and national candidates—both conservative and liberal—has created a storm of often unwelcome mail for the general public.

In addition, ethical and legal issues emanating from direct mail abuse have given the tactic a bad name. For example, an election watchdog committee in California reported that outside envelopes would carry messages like "court summons," "official document," "county sheriffs' office," and "important Social Security information" to encourage recipients to open the envelope (Fair Campaign Practices Commission 1982).

TELEMARKETING

Political campaigns have also been using telemarketing for a wide range of activities. Not only are survey and opinion polls often conducted by telephone (Honomichl 1984), but a host of other activities—including initial voter identification, get-out-the-vote drives, and ticket sales for political events—are being orchestrated over the telephone.

Unlike commercial marketers, political campaigners generally use volunteers to implement their telemarketing programs rather than professional telephone operators. These volunteers often use home phones rather than more expensive "telephone banks." Some say that this has reduced the efficiency of such efforts. One political consultant developed a comprehensive organizational scheme to recruit, train, and use volunteers in telephone-based campaigns. Armed with job descriptions, training manuals, and task simulations, most political campaign managers are developing an army of inexpensive telephone volunteers to "reach out and touch someone"—hopefully someone who would vote for, or contribute to their candidate's cause. On election day, only the voters who express support for the candidate are called to remind them to vote.

Although telemarketing is now widely used, the political application of telephone technology could be expanded if it was hooked up to computer screens and terminals, computer-generated dialing, professional scripting of prerecorded messages, and leveraged response rates. Fortunately, it takes only a short time to learn new methods in this area

and political marketers have been quick to integrate them into their overall marketing strategy.

SALES PROMOTION

Campaigns for political office have also used buttons, posters, yard signs, banners, hats, bumper stickers, matchbooks, and other such devices associated with sales promotion. Although some state laws regulate the value of any item given away in a campaign, to safeguard against bribery, campaign collectibles (for example, the button) were traditionally de rigueur in politics. Also, although there is no empirical evidence that items such as replica wooden nickels or glassware figures of donkeys and elephants create the desired results, campaigns continue to purchase an amazing variety of items for the purpose of fund-raising and hopefully stimulating voter name recognition. Several catalogues specialize in providing sundry doorknob hangers, emery boards, matchbooks, pens, combs, rulers, bookmarks, sun visors, feathered headbands, fans, and buttons in all shapes and colors.

Again, the practice should be part of a comprehensive marketing strategy. Campaign colors and the script utilized in printing the candidate's name on placards are too often the product of long strategy sessions in otherwise issueless campaigns. Nonetheless, a certain amount of sales promotion is part of the tradition and is to be expected, even as expenditures drop as a percentage of the total spent on advertising (Royko 1984).

SELECTED STRATEGIC AREAS OF MARKETING APPLICABLE TO POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

Just because campaigners apply marketing tools does not necessarily mean that they fully understand the marketing function. To illustrate the potential for coordinated marketing practice, one must consider the strategic dimensions of marketing that have *not* been as widely adopted by political campaign professionals, notably,

- Promotional strategy
- Improved marketing research
- Personal selling and sales management
- Segmentation and target marketing

The next section provides a basic agenda for campaign managers and marketing consultants who might wish to apply their knowledge and skills in the political campaign setting. On the other hand, the strategic approach, while uniformly praised, is not always rewarded, even in the business world. As Gale Haymen (creator of the successful Georgio scent) has noted, "When I created the Georgio scent, everyone asked where was my marketing study, my demographic plan? I told them to forget all that. I know what I want by my nose" (*Elle* 1986). Still, in most cases, comprehensive planning produces better results than serendipity. Thus, the following paragraphs suggest several areas of marketing from which political strategists could fruitfully borrow.

PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY

In general, one of the greatest failings of those who try to apply marketing communications theory to political campaigns is that they neglect to formulate a well-coordinated promotional strategy. Each element of marketing communications—including publicity, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and re-seller support (Rothschild 1987; Engel, Warshaw, and Kinnear 1987)—needs to be used in an integrated fashion. Utilized independently, the component elements may succeed, but will lack the synergistic effect they would have if used in conjunction with each other.

For example, a hypothetical political campaign that uses television spots (advertising); direct mail, billboards, posters, and buttons (sales promotion); door-to-door vote solicitation by the candidate and telemarketing volunteers (personal selling); publicity and press conferences (public relations); plus party leadership training and endorsements (re-seller support) has incorporated all the critical elements of a strategic marketing communications plan. However, if these elements are not systematically coordinated in terms of timing, message development, reinforcement, audience analysis, involvement level, audience reach/overlap, and other factors, then the communications program may have little synergistic value. The most common pitfall here is not specifying the global communications objective to which each aspect of the communications campaign should contribute.

Where a political campaign is driven by the actions of the opponent, the outcome is often disastrous. For instance, the campaign leaders may decide that they need to respond to the competitor's radio ads with radio ads of their own. Although such immediate response tactics may be both tempting and *sometimes* useful (the increased direct mail and opportunistic public visibility of other Democratic challengers after the

Gary Hart–Donna Rice debacle comes to mind), such knee-jerk responses may undermine the major communication themes that a well-conceived campaign should strive to present and reinforce.

Ideally, a campaign should integrate all elements of the promotional mix—including direct mail, telemarketing, advertising, and publicity—in an objective manner. Perhaps it is the hurried nature of political campaigns, limited budgets, and the temptation to respond to the opposition candidate that prevent campaigners from fully planning and coordinating their overall marketing communication efforts. Indeed, isolated tactics may be counterproductive. As a general principle, budgets for each dimension of promotion should be based on the nature of its contribution to the communications objectives of the campaign.

IMPROVED MARKETING RESEARCH

In the scientific approach to management, decisions are based on solid research, where possible. In the business world, this ideal is not always attained as time pressures force managers to base decisions on less complete information than they would like. This is especially true in the “hip-shooting” context of a political campaign. Nevertheless, most political campaigns do use some research in formulating their strategy. What is done in the political marketplace varies widely in methodology, objectives, utility level, time frame, and expenditures. Like other marketing tactics, political campaigns have latched onto the most obvious tools—opinion polls, for instance—and have overlooked other options appropriate to a systematic ongoing and formative research program.

Although the validity of public opinion polling for political candidates has improved with the increased usage of voter panels, scientific sampling, and the reporting of confidence statistics, the polls are often not well integrated into a structured research program. Even focus groups are sometimes used without any concern for strategic orientation and may concentrate on such narrow issues as the candidate’s physical appearance or a single platform item.

In general, corporate marketing researchers seem to recognize the value of programmatic research. They know that different problems call for different types of solutions—exploratory, descriptive or “cause and effect” designs. Similarly, statistical methods must be matched to the stage of research and the questions being investigated.

For example, a political campaign might begin with in-depth interviews, focus groups, or secondary research with voters to gain a *qualitative* understanding of the key variables involved in a forthcoming election. From a preliminary understanding of how voters view the i

sues, the candidate's campaign style, and other factors, researchers can then develop a more descriptive and *quantitative* research effort. Such second-stage investigation might involve mail or telephone surveys or personal interviews. The point of such research would be to measure the intensity of individual attitudes and the relative importance of opinions that have bearing on the campaign, and to see how differences break down demographically among voter segments.

The next level of research could extend such descriptive research longitudinally or attempt to establish "cause and effect" via laboratory research. Such efforts would be intended to take descriptive research to a plateau of (qualified) prediction. By subjecting such longitudinal information to statistical analysis, researchers can help campaign managers better understand the shifting motivations of voters and the dynamics of a particular election. Ongoing research, that is, longitudinal studies, offers the obvious advantage of overcoming sometimes misleading pictures generated by taking a poll only at one point in time. As political researchers have discovered, voters come to a decision as the election nears and a series of opinion polls of the same group of voters permits the decisionmakers to both follow voter shifts and anticipate trends (McCombs 1972). Another advantage of using laboratory studies is that they help one isolate specific variables without the intrusion of other uncontrollable factors that might affect voters. For example, laboratory methods are ideal to study specific questions such as whether a particular TV spot evokes too much anxiety in voters because of its hard-hitting message or whether a candidate's smile appears "sneaky" on a proposed campaign poster. Although such approaches have been more commonly used in academic and commercial research, their wide-scale application to campaign decisionmaking may only be a matter of time. At present, however, except for national elections, widely accepted scientific methods such as pretesting, alternative sampling schemes, and multivariate statistics have not typically been adopted by campaign professionals. Thus, even in research, marketing tools remain tactical in their purpose and isolated from broader strategic considerations.

PERSONAL SELLING AND SALES MANAGEMENT

The notion of "selling" a political candidate has strong negative connotations. When McGinnis published his controversial book, *The Selling of the President*, 1968, many social commentators recoiled at the idea that politicians could be packaged and sold like laundry soap (Jamieson 1984). However, certain aspects of personal selling and sales management theory can contribute insight into the political scene.

Sales management can be considered a means of organizing interpersonal communications so that customers will be encouraged to use a sponsor's products or services. Clearly the activities of a political candidate expressed in euphemisms such as "pressing the flesh," "kissing babies," "working the crowds," "ringing doorbells," "door-to-door canvassing," and other personal appearances qualify as interpersonal persuasion. Only in their case, the seller seeks to procure a voter rather than to sell a product or service. Although many politicians have a great deal of experience in the inherent activities of personal selling, they can still benefit from a deeper understanding of how corporations orchestrate personal selling.

First, just as a sales representative cultivates a purchasing agent over time, it is useful for the politician to conceive of the campaign process as a multiple-step model that involves systematically developing and harvesting the votes of the public (Xerox 1983). Some of the critical steps to take would be to *qualify voters* (via voter eligibility and shaping partisan affiliation), to *generate awareness* by personal appearances, and to *enact a particular platform* in exchange for the vote. On the other hand, related elements of the traditional model such as "listening to objections" and "post-sales service" have applicability in the sense that politicians should design mechanisms for soliciting ongoing feedback from their constituency.

Other dimensions of personal selling such as *benefit selling* may also be useful. This involves matching voter concerns with campaign issues. Some presidential candidates have been particularly effective in influencing votes and raising funds when addressing trade associations on issues of special concern to their members. Obviously, it helps if the candidate's platform offers some remedies for the legislative needs of the group being addressed. At present, business firms are putting considerable effort into developing sophisticated scripted or "canned" sales presentations and applying artificial intelligence software to personal selling (Teleconference 1985; Collins 1985). Political volunteers are trained to use scripted telephone messages in voter identification. For face-to-face and door-to-door meetings, both volunteers and candidates may follow scripts that will help them convey their message more efficiently and effectively. Advanced levels of computer-aided learning and software may be used to refine presentations as is being done in sales.

In general, the sales management concepts of planning and control, so central to many business firms, seem unevenly applied in politics. While well-worn campaign anecdotes tell of the ingenious one-page plans devised by President Jimmy Carter's advisers, more elaborate plans used by other candidates seem to quickly fall out of use in the heat of a political campaign. Historically, there has been a strong tendency to rely mainly on summative or postelection analysis of the campaign.

Formative or ongoing evaluations are still largely intuitive. Campaigns, to the extent that they use marketing planning, are most likely to emphasize the scheduling of the day-to-day activities of the campaign and the presentation of media spots.

Some of the more complex models of sales management may also have a great deal to contribute to political campaigning. For example, the well-known (in academic marketing) Churchill, Ford, and Walker model (1985) based on motivation and satisfaction theory probably could be adopted to campaign worker selection, training, and job assignment. Also, although some campaigns have used voter identification efforts (i.e., "walking lists") to target partisan neighborhoods for canvassing, certain sales management techniques are better able to incorporate additional factors such as voting frequency, opinion leadership level of the voter, need for transportation to the polls, and other items. Sales management theory can be mined for new perspectives on how interpersonal communications frameworks may help people manage political campaigns more efficiently.

SEGMENTATION AND TARGET MARKETING

A powerful concept in the application of strategic marketing to political campaigns is "segmentation" and the subsequent selection of the target market and candidate positioning. Since political campaign managers have tended to rely on somewhat roughshod methods of identifying priority blocks of voters (i.e., target markets), the full force of strategic segmentation has not yet been introduced to politics.

Segmentation, as applied to politics, consists of dividing the market of voters into distinct groups that might require separate marketing "mixes." For example, the mix might be varied by message content (e.g., issues of aging versus welfare policy) or message channel (e.g., television ads versus print ads), or even the candidate's qualifications (emphasis on experience or image or accomplishments). In addition, the voters' *perceptions* of the candidate will contribute to the ideal positioning strategy.

In an early attempt to apply segmentation theory to politics, a state Republican political party, under the guidance of an engineering professor, developed a classification system to segment voting districts according to past voting behavior. The computer program identified areas by the degree of past votes for Republicans versus Democrats as well as turnout levels. Candidates were directed not to spend door-to-door time or even media dollars in areas that were clearly Democratic. Similarly, Republican candidates were instructed to spend minimal time in Re-

publican strongholds on the assumption that the candidates should appeal to swing voters for maximum benefit.

In addition, politicians often rely on partisan mailing lists of delegates, party contributors, or persons qualified by telephone as probable party voters. Although some states require voter registration, others do not, so some campaigns may be able to use direct mail in order to contact straight party-line voters. Since most national election voters are becoming more "independent," however, the full value of such party-based segmentation cannot be utilized as effectively as in the past.

Today, a more useful basis for segmentation is voters' positions on popular public issues. For example, a candidate may use public opinion surveys to determine which issues to emphasize, such as economic issues over environmental issues or other public policy subjects. Even though some degree of market segmentation is reflected in such examples, the full market segmentation sequence of (1) segmentation, (2) targeting, and (3) positioning are not yet typically used.

In the initial step, *segmentation* voters are divided into distinct groups according to certain descriptive and behavioral variables such as geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral traits. Each variable may require a different approach. For example, an older voter can be reached through different media channels than a younger voter; a first-time voter may need different information than an experienced voter, and an unemployed person may be reached with a uniquely different message than a two-income family. Often multiple variables can be used. A candidate for Congress might design a message dealing, say, with Social Security or health care specifically for females, over sixty, who are Democrats and regular voters. Here four different bases have been utilized in the targeting effort.

In one statewide primary election, voter areas were initially segmented into "highly partisan" versus "nonpartisan" versus "independent" voter strongholds. Campaign expenditures were then allocated only to areas with significant numbers of independent voters in high turnout districts. In this case, target areas were chosen on the basis of nonparty affiliation and voting behavior.

The second step, after segmentation of voters, is to *target priority segments*. Given the limited resources in many political campaigns, the management team must select the most efficient (i.e., least cost per expected vote) and most effective (i.e., consistent with the goal of election success) segments. For example, while the state party may target young voters through an information campaign designed to teach them how to vote and why to vote for a particular party, a specific candidate may not be able to afford to target the same group. Instead, the candidate may spend greater resources on "getting the vote" of high turnout, senior citizens, and merely reinforce the state party effort directed toward young

voters with a few selected appearances at party-organized events. Campaigns that do not have a well-conceptualized segmentation and targeting plan may be whipsawed from one likely segment to another, depending upon random requests, opportunities, and pressures. Since time and other resources are in short supply in the normal three-month campaign, a qualitative and quantitative ranking of priority voter segments is absolutely necessary.

The third step of a fully developed segmentation scheme is *positioning*. Positioning means describing the candidate's image and/or actions in relation to those of other candidates. So-called survey run-offs or straw votes pitting one candidate against another may be a crude form of positioning. However, a fully developed analysis of segmentation variables to predict election outcomes is seldom used. If, for example, the voter correctly or incorrectly sees the role of the (ineffectual) lieutenant governor as an important member of the executive management team, that candidate may well (exploitatively) foster the belief that campaign support from various lobbying groups will influence the governor's issue agenda. Or if voters associate a particular candidate with an issue position in a favorable way, the candidate may well adopt that position, or at least examine how the positive association can be continued in the public's mind. Using marketing research techniques such as perceptual mapping (see Green and Tull 1978), strategists can analyze the candidate's *perceived* experience, the candidate's *perceived* ability to solve problems, and even how the public *thinks* it sees the candidate on specific issues. Positioning then becomes a matter of adjusting campaign themes toward the critical views of the voters while sustaining a positive perception among existing supporters. Needless to say, such shifting of positions in order to strike a responsive chord among voters raises some major ethical questions, which are discussed later in the chapter.

In general, more and more campaigns in the future will use segmented mailing lists and narrowcast cable and radio media with varying messages and format as an intensive form of target marketing. For example, lists of subscribers to popular scientific publications may receive letters from the candidate addressing science policy issues. Such special audience letters might suggest a Machiavellian opportunity to tell voters mostly what they want to hear. However, the public nature of elections will also likely force a candidate to formulate educated stands on a wide variety of complex issues in order to appeal to several targeted voter segments.

In the future, it will be necessary for political strategists to begin campaigns by identifying voter segments more precisely (on the basis of marketing research). Such new marketing strategies will include the coordinated use of marketing tactics such as direct mail, narrowcasting, and the promotion of multiple themes that are designed to reach tar-

geted, priority voters. Finally, future strategies will include the fine tuning of the candidate's image along with a program to match issues and voter opinions. Perceptions about where the candidate stands on an issue have become as important as where the candidate actually stands on the issue. Indeed, for the good of his or her long-term brand loyalty, the candidate might endeavor to match his actual positions with voters' perceptions of his positions.

THINKING STRATEGICALLY IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

In the last analysis, campaign managers must find out what they can do to utilize the strategic aspects of marketing rather than simply apply tactical tools. Before they can do so, they must be aware that strategy orientation should drive the political campaign rather than be appended after the fact. As Machiavelli pointed out long ago: "Men who have any great undertaking in mind must first make all necessary preparations for it, so that, when an opportunity arises, they may be ready to put it in execution according to their design."

Most traditional campaign management texts offer particular interpretations of what constitutes a strategy. Trafton (1984) advises candidates that "solid strategy" means that the candidate must (1) know your message, (2) know the issues, (3) know the voters, and (4) know the limits of your resources. Another handbook suggests that having a "theory" of campaigns means understanding the realities of the current race and knowing that "probabilities of success" are components of a strategic approach to campaigning (Goldenberg and Traugott 1984).

The marketing approach to strategy development is more comprehensive and cost-effective than these bromides. Given the influx of modern marketing tools, a strategic marketing framework is well suited to incorporate the range of marketing tactics into a comprehensive, targeted, and systematic approach. In essence, marketing strategy consists of two elements: (a) decisions concerning what products will be produced for what markets and (b) the articulation and development of *sustainable competitive advantages* that will allow products to succeed in those markets. (For a general discussion of such issues, see Aaker 1984 or Mauser 1983.)

It is imperative to realize that in the context of a political campaign, the product is a given—it is the candidate and the ideas that she or he stand for. The market is also somewhat constrained in that it is circumscribed by the voter constituency being focused on in the campaign, whether it be a district, regional, statewide, or national election. Thus strategic political marketing translates into the development of sustain-

able competitive advantages which the candidate can then communicate and implement through traditional marketing tools and frameworks.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

One such marketing framework would involve *competitive analysis* (Aaker 1984; Henderson 1983; Ansoff 1957). To implement this approach, political candidates must analyze, via marketing research, not only their own strengths and weaknesses but those of their political opponents. These would include such dimensions as name recognition, physical appearance, expertise on the issues, perceived credibility, expected level of financial support, charisma, and related factors. In the traditional business setting, competitive analysis has little meaning except in the context of a particular marketplace. In the case of a political candidate, the marketplace would be the voter constituency that needs to be cultivated. Thus the strengths and weaknesses of a particular candidate and his or her opponents only have pragmatic meaning in relation to the stated preferences of the voter constituency (i.e., consumers) at question. For example, the perception of a candidate as a "conservative" may be an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on the particular voter constituency involved. Even a factor such as "experience," which would normally be considered a positive trait, might be a liability in a political environment where public opinion seems to want a sweeping away of the old guard. Thus, a competitive analysis of the candidate and his or her competition that is matched to the appropriate voter group should occur early in any political campaign.

Other subtleties need to be considered in competitive analysis. In a business organization, firms are constantly concerned about the sources of materials and the relative power of the organization with respect to its suppliers. In a political context, such suppliers would translate to the sources of funds likely to underwrite the political campaign as well as the relative level of support from significant party officials who are in a position to lend legitimacy to a particular campaign undertaking. A thorough analysis should clearly enumerate both the number and intensity of sustainable competitive advantages inherent in a particular candidate. For example, all other things equal, the incumbent will have an edge over the nonincumbent with respect to the sustainable advantage of "name recognition." Conversely, the newcomer will be forced to expend resources in order to generate name recognition, as illustrated by the expensive and remarkable campaign of Louis Lehrman when he ran for governor of New York in 1982; Lehrman was relatively unknown at the

outset of his campaign but succeeded in almost defeating Governor Mario Cuomo in part because of the vast amounts spent on advertising.

As a rule, the sustainable competitive advantage of one candidate forces the deficient candidate to cover the existing "advantage gap" with a commitment of resources. Sometimes a competitive advantage may be so strong that it is not only sustainable but insurmountable. Consider the case of a powerful incumbent, such as recently retired House Speaker Tip O'Neil, who had been elected to multiple terms in Congress. Such an individual may be virtually unassailable in his or her own district and may function as a king maker when he endorses other politicians. This situation is not unlike the case of the so-called cash cow product in a business where the dependable profits of the successful product are siphoned off in order to support more tenuous, though promising, ventures (Hedley 1977). In other words, the sustainable competition advantage of some politicians in the marketplace is so strong that their endorsement can create advantages for other less powerful candidates.

The strategic marketing approach also suggests that each of these advantages should be included in a *statement of objectives* that will drive the other tactical decisions made in the campaign. For instance, the strategic competitive advantage of candidate A might be that he is an experienced legislator who has a deep and abiding concern for environmental issues. Or, the sustainable competitive advantages of candidate B might be that she is (a) an unabashed liberal, (b) who has spent a long time cultivating party favor and commitment and (c) has made the reduction of defense spending the central platform of her campaign. Whatever the case, the main concern at this objective setting stage is to ensure that later marketing decisions such as the form of the advertising campaign, the type of personal appearances made, the brochure utilized in direct mail marketing, the campaign placards, the press releases, and so on, will reflect these consistent and research-based campaign visions.

This is not to say that all voters should be targeted in the same fashion. *Market segmentation* is obviously an integral part of the strategy approach to marketing. For example, it is commonplace to divide voters into the "favorable," "unfavorable," and "undecided." It is easiest to design marketing communication messages for those who are already committed to the candidate—which is the equivalent of preaching to the converted. However, competitive analysis may also reveal that the voter profile of the "unfavorables" overlaps with the platform of the candidate. This is an opportunity for strategic exploitation. For instance, suppose candidate X is a traditional conservative Republican with little appeal to the blue-collar, mostly Democratic, middle class. However, as a conservative candidate, X is a pro-family and pro-school player—two themes with particular appeal to this Democrat/union constituency.

Thus, it seems logical that this symmetry should be considered and possibly be utilized as a major campaign theme.

In general, however, the ability to capitalize upon identified segments can only be successful if a candidate is able to communicate a perceived relative advantage over other alternative candidate choices. The number of relative strategic advantages and the degree to which they match various voter segments will establish the ability of a given candidate to retain favorable voters, influence a proportion of the undecided voter group, and persuade some smaller proportion of those initially not in favor. Where relative differences among candidates are small or the significant advantages of any candidate compared with another candidate are minimal, such campaigns will attract a large number of candidates at the primary stage.

Figure 19.1 attempts to capture the notion of sustainable comparative advantage and link it to a contingency framework of campaign strategy. The typology presented there is loosely based on the work of Achrol and Apple (1983) and Miles and Snow (1978). In this particular typology, the sustainable competitive advantages identified in political candidates are categorized according to their *quantity* and *quality*. A particular political candidate may have several quantitative advantages over the other candidates in the race or may have only one or two. Similarly, the assessed quality of those competitive advantages might be characterized as *marginal* or *substantial*.

This broad array of characterizations can be juxtaposed to create the range of possibilities shown in the matrix illustrated in Figure 19.1.

FIGURE 19.1 A Contingency Framework for Relating Sustainable Competitive Advantages to Campaign Strategy

Sustainable Competitive Advantages (Number)	Several	DEFENDERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk-averse • Reactive • Tentative • Traditional 	LEADERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aloof • Innovative • Statesmanlike 	
	One or Two	STRIVERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk-taking • Coalition-seeking • Attacking • Fund-raising 	CRUSADERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visionary • Visible • Vulnerable 	
		Marginal	Substantial	
		Sustainable Competitive Advantages (Quality)		

Possible Bases of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

- Candidate qualities
- Salient issues
- Voter preferences
- Amount of funding

Needless to say, political candidates with *several* and *substantial* sustainable competitive advantages are in the best position. These candidates could be designated *leaders* because they have much going for them. In the course of a political campaign and strategy development, they can often afford to be aloof, as George Bush was in 1987–88, or they can dare to be innovative and seek path-breaking political solutions. Because they hold a substantial edge, they also have the flexibility to remain statesmanlike in the face of controversy and to generally ignore the charges or specific queries of the competition that are put to them. Ronald Reagan, in the 1984 election, held this enviable position as did President Dwight Eisenhower in 1956.

The next category of political candidates—*crusaders*—hold a sustainable competitive advantage over the field, although the number of these advantages is few. To the extent that they can build a campaign around their sustainable advantage, such a campaign may well be focused and visionary since it is based upon this single or at most dual competitive advantage. Thus, as the crusader candidate builds a campaign theme around these selected issues, the candidate is likely to gain high visibility because of his or her association with specific policy positions. However, such candidates are also extremely vulnerable to a changing external environment, particularly one that shifts voter concerns away from the issues where this candidate holds superiority. For example, one candidate may be more experienced in foreign affairs than all other potential candidates. This becomes his or her singular strategic advantage. Nevertheless, if the domestic economy is in a state of turmoil and voter constituencies are concerned with domestic economic performance, this competitive advantage would be canceled out. Thus, crusader candidates are likely to pin their futures on the one or two issues where they hold clear advantages. They are truly crusaders because they will become strongly identified with a point of view embodied in their sustainable competitive advantage. Pat Robertson, the religious broadcaster and candidate for president in 1988, held this position. Representative Jack Kemp, because of his association with conservative supply-side economics, might fall into this category. Some would contend that Rev. Jesse Jackson, because he is a black and a social activist, could also be in it.

In contrast to crusaders, there seems to be a category of politicians who have several sustainable competitive advantages, but they would be classified as marginal. In our scheme such politicians are categorized as *defenders*. In some cases, they might have a “lead”—as defined by an opinion poll—over the field of other potential candidates, but such a lead is likely to be extremely shaky. Most of the time the campaign of such a candidate would be rather risky and tentative. Marketing strategies would probably be rather traditional so as not to upset the status quo.

Campaigns of defenders tend to consist of a series of reactions to what other candidates are doing because the candidates and/or their managers fear they will lose their (at best) tenuous competitive advantages. A number of the Democrats in the 1988 presidential sweepstakes, including Richard Gephardt, Paul Simon, and Bruce Babbitt, fit this description—members of the so-called seven dwarfs.

Needless to say, *strivers* are in the most difficult position. This category of political candidates would include those who have only one or two sustainable competitive advantages that are of a marginal nature. These candidates would necessarily be taking a risk because they are probably behind in the polls. They would also be seeking a coalition because they need endorsements from the help of significant others who can play a part in the campaign. They probably would be tempted to attack other political candidates on their shortcomings because their own accomplishments are limited. Finally, they would be more desperate to raising funds and might gamble that the sheer magnitude of their expenditures might overcome other potential political liabilities. "Pete" DuPont, another candidate who hoped to qualify for the GOP ticket in 1988, seemed to qualify as a striver.

Admittedly, the ideas presented in the above paragraphs are highly speculative, but it illustrates how a marketing-based method of analysis can be used to identify campaign themes. That is to say, political campaigns should be driven by clearly defined objectives that are rooted in sustainable competitive advantages. The wisdom or folly of the more tactical aspects of marketing—such as advertising campaigns, political rallies, sales promotion, and managed publicity—are only valuable in the context of strategically developed issues and themes.

ETHICS AND THE MARKETING OF POLITICAL CANDIDATES

Any discussion of the marketing of political candidates would be incomplete without some formal mention of the topic of ethics. Legions of social critics and newspaper editorialists have rightly questioned the ongoing application of marketing techniques to political campaigns. Many have questioned whether (a) political marketing pressures candidates to substitute image and style for substantive campaign issues, (b) political marketing has accentuated the trend toward negative campaigning (i.e., practice of denigrating one's opponent rather than specifying one's beliefs), (c) political marketing has made voters skeptical and has contributed to increasingly lower voter turnout, and (d) political marketing techniques lend themselves to, and sometimes pressure candidates to adopt emotional and single-issue positions since these are

more easily managed in a mass communications campaign. Our purpose here is not to comment on the merits of these charges (see Laczniak and Caywood 1987). Rather, it is merely to emphasize a prevailing feeling that there are substantial ethical questions to consider when marketing tools and techniques are adapted to political campaigns. We believe that political marketing enables candidates to exercise their right to free speech and that it is protected under the First Amendment (Caywood and Preston 1989). As the U.S. Supreme Court noted in its famous *Mills v. Alabama* (1966) decision, "Whatever differences may exist about the interpretations of the First Amendment, there is practically universal agreement that a major purpose of that amendment was to protect the free discussion of governmental affairs. This, of course, includes discussion of candidates . . . and all such matters relating to political processes."

Thus, from the judicial standpoint, political marketing is sacrosanct at present. But the marketing of political candidates also raises ethical questions that citizens, academic researchers, and policy analysts interested in social issues must ponder. Clearly, some aspects of political marketing are arguably deceptive, misleading, or unfair. Presumably, such promotional techniques will influence a particular group of voters in selecting a particular candidate. In the business sector, remedies are available when marketing abuses occur. For instance, what marketers can or cannot say about a can of hair spray, a package of gum, or other consumer products is strictly regulated by agencies of the government such as the Federal Trade Commission, the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of the Treasury, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and so forth. In contrast, the rules of political campaigning remain almost devoid of constraints. There are numerous protections to minimize the probability of a consumer purchasing a defective vegetable slicer or other consumer product. Yet there are no restrictions on a category of advertising that could lead a voter to choose an incompetent senator (or other politician), who could serve up to six years in office without review.

There are some voluntary efforts afoot. The American Association of Advertising Agencies has produced a "code of fair campaign practices," which they ask candidates for political office to sign. In it, candidates promise to refrain from the harshest kinds of mud slinging, racial and ethnic stereotyping, and various voter manipulation schemes. Nevertheless, the strictures remain totally voluntary. In general, ethical controls on political marketing practices emanate from the personal values of the candidates themselves and seem inadequate to prevent future abuses. It appears that some voluntary effective mechanisms short of government regulation must be found. As the search unfolds, the marketing of political candidates seems destined to create much public discussion and a

few spectacular cases of questionable behavior, and will remain ripe for serious research and debate.

SUMMARY

The numerous articles and books on political marketing indicate that marketers are going to become more and more involved in political campaigns. The opportunity to contribute to the democratic election process would seem a naturally important application of the discipline of marketing. In the end however, its ethical and strategically correct application should be the foremost concern of marketing scholars and practitioners.