

Delivering Your Message

6

- 98 Benefits of free (or “earned”) media.
- 99 Free media strategies.
- 109 Making debates central to the campaign.
- 109 Participating in town hall meetings and community events.
- 111 Paid media strategies.
- 125 Developing a media plan.
- 125 Five things to know about delivering your message.

Finding the right message is only part of the process of convincing voters to vote for you. To win, you will need to deliver your message effectively using free and paid media and opportunities to speak in public venues. You cannot speak to every voter. Take advantage of community resources that allow you to speak to large crowds and broadcast your message across your constituency.

The Benefits of Free (or “Earned”) Media

Successful candidates know how to use the media to amplify their message without spending all of their resources on advertising. “Free media” is a term used to indicate media coverage of your campaign that is not purchased, such as appearances on radio or television or an article in the newspaper. These appearances typically arise in the course of news coverage about the campaign. In contrast to the old adage “all publicity is good publicity,” candidates must be attentive to their news coverage and act to mold it in a way that is informative to voters and helpful to the campaign’s goal of getting its message out.

Free media is often called “earned media” by professionals to emphasize that despite its lack of a price tag, it does not come easy. The media typically give sparse coverage to local politics and that coverage is divided among candidates. The coverage that they do provide is often “horse-race” analysis: they tell who is likely to win but do not provide information that voters can use to decide who they should support. When members of the news media do cover the candidates’ qualifications and issue positions, they often cover “he said—she said” disputes among the candidates or mention that one candidate is accused in a scandal.

To get the kind of coverage you want, be proactive in your solicitation of media coverage. When reporters do cover you, be prepared to make statements that will appear in the news and bring your message to voters. This requires strategic action, persistence, and preparedness. Working with the media is a central task of a campaign.

Free Media Strategies

The first rule of gaining free media is to make it easy for local media outlets to reach you. You should identify all of the local media outlets that might cover your race and make sure that they have the campaign's telephone number and email address and that someone is assigned to respond promptly to their requests. If a reporter wants to speak to you, respond as quickly as possible and volunteer to sit down for a face-to-face or telephone interview. If you develop a reputation as someone who is easily accessible, reporters may want to do stories on your campaign and may call you for comment when they are covering other political stories.

To generate media coverage, however, you will need to do more than sit back and wait for the phone to ring. Act to create news. Put yourself in a reporter's position and ask what might be newsworthy about your campaign. The media are generally interested in whatever might interest a large number of voters, but they usually only cover events—things that they can say happened today—rather than ongoing policy discussions. When you hold events or issue public statements, try to think of the media angle or “hook.” Ask yourself these questions: What kind of story might be written about the event? Why is it interesting and who might cover it?

Be inventive about creating news. You will not always get an opportunity to deliver your complete and unedited message in the news but you may find ways to highlight your issue stances or the support you have received by piggybacking on other news events. When you are planning events, know the news cycle and take advantage of slow news days to attract coverage.

■ **ADVICE FROM PROFESSIONALS: “Earned Media: Guidelines and Proven Techniques for First-Time Managers and Candidates,” by Bob Wickers**

You're about to manage your first campaign—a relatively small to mid-size race, possibly for county supervisor or city council. It's going to be competitive, and you're fortunate to have the kind of budget to afford

a general consultant to handle message, overall strategy, and the paid media effort. But the budget is not quite big enough to afford a press secretary—that job falls to you.

In addition to coordinating day-to-day operations you're now also responsible for generating “earned” or “free” media—favorable press coverage that augments the campaign's overall message, bolsters the “paid” media, positions your opponent(s), and advances the goal of moving votes into your boss's column.

By following the few steps outlined below, your first foray into the world of shaping how the press covers a candidate and a campaign should be a successful one.

Media List & Relationships

First, assemble a comprehensive media list, which includes the name and contact information of every reporter who will cover your campaign—for every type of media outlet. For smaller races (particularly in rural and suburban areas) these outlets likely include one or two weekly newspapers, one or two local radio stations, and possibly one independent television station. In this environment, competition for news is relatively light, making it easier to obtain coverage for your candidate. If the campaign is set in an urban area within a large media market, your list will include several broadcast television stations and at least one major daily newspaper—making your job that much tougher in a highly competitive news market.

With your media list in hand, it's important to establish relationships right away. Visit with each reporter, political editor, and publisher of the weekly papers—as well as the reporters and news directors of local radio and television stations. These initial meetings should be informal and “off-the-record.” The goal is to introduce yourself, so limit your discussion to a broad overview of the candidates and issues.

If you're hesitant about talking with the press, take heart in two important facts:

- **Many reporters working for small weekly papers and radio stations are rookies as well—young, generally inexperienced journalists covering politics for the first time.**

- They will be looking to you to provide them with news and compelling angles that will help them write the kind of stories that will earn them praise from their editors/publishers.

This is a mutually beneficial relationship you will be establishing. Members of the press have a job to do, and so do you. You need to remain in constant touch with these newly acquired contacts. Never be afraid to praise them for good work, and point out errors in their coverage when necessary—from day one to election night.

Write an Earned Media Plan

The most important parts of any political campaign are the beginning and the end. How a campaign is initially organized—how research data is integrated into message development, how target voter groups are identified, how budgets are created, etc.—is absolutely critical to its success. Just as a talented general consultant begins each race with a written campaign plan, a good press secretary begins with a comprehensive earned media plan of his or her own.

A winning earned media plan must consider:

- The overall message of the campaign. What is the theme? What are the issues this campaign will be decided on?
- Key voter groups. Who are the targets? What voter groups need to be moved in order to win?
- The general pace and timing of the campaign. Does the campaign have message “stages”? For example, does the campaign need to (1) introduce the candidate and bolster his or her image first, then (2) set up contrasts and draw issue comparisons with the opponent(s), and finally (3) attack? Is this the kind of race where the campaign can remain positive and simply work to attract favorable coverage throughout the race—coverage that augments the overall positive themes found in the campaign’s “paid” media? Or, is this a challenge race that requires issue contrasts and attacks on an incumbent’s record from day one?

Write your plan, and follow it.

Discipline, Creativity, News

Effective earned media efforts possess three basic, but essential, elements: message discipline, creativity, and the ability to make news.

For a press secretary, message discipline requires a deep understanding of what moves target voter groups; an ability to work closely, and in concert, with the general consultant and others involved in the paid media effort; a talent for keeping the candidate focused; and being able to recognize and correct message “drift.”

Creativity is essential. Your candidate is the greatest asset to elicit positive coverage. Use him or her. At all times develop press availabilities, photo opportunities, sit-down visits with key reporters, editors, and publishers. Present or “sell” angles and story packages that are unique and further your message. For television, remember that backdrops matter. Where your candidate is standing is as important as what he or she is saying. Use the Internet and your campaign’s Web site effectively—it’s a tremendous tool to communicate to voters, campaign supporters, opinion leaders, donors, and members of the press.

Make news. Have something to say. Papering reporters with daily press releases is ineffective. Acquire and practice good judgment in the timing of releases, press conferences, and candidate availabilities. Staying in constant touch with reporters should provide you with a keen sense of when to move on a story and when to hold off.

Be advised: much of what you put out early in a campaign will not end up on the front page—or even the back page. Don’t get frustrated by the lack of initial coverage. This is a campaign to be waged “over time.” Much of your early work will be viewed as “background”—the process of educating individual reporters on issues, contrasts, and candidate attributes. Executed effectively, this early work will pay off to great benefit at the end of the campaign when reporters write candidate profiles and summaries, and when editorial endorsements are published.

Finally, every campaign is different; therefore no two earned media efforts are alike. The size and budget of a race, the number of media markets within the district, the presence of a competitive press, and the will-

ingness of a candidate to aggressively court the media are just a few of the elements that will dictate the scope and direction of an earned media campaign. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach; but there does exist a few general concepts, rooted in common sense, that are worth mentioning here: Do your homework. Be prepared. Anticipate the press’s need for additional information, source citations, and contacts. Do your best to anticipate your opponent’s earned media effort and attacks as well. Don’t hide your candidate. Never say “no comment.” Return your phone calls and be available at all times. Admit your mistakes immediately and never be afraid to apologize. . . . Rules to live by.

One last thing: don’t call it “free” media. You earn it!

Bob Wickers is a national Republican campaign strategist and media consultant, whose clients include members of the U.S. Senate, governors, and major trade organizations. His firm is headquartered in San Francisco.

Developing a Press Kit

In order to make it easy for the press to contact you and to make yourself better known to key local reporters, send a press kit to all local media outlets at the beginning of your campaign. It should include the names and contact information of your staff, an indication that you will be available for comment, a list of local political issues that you are qualified to speak about, information on the campaign office and Web site, your campaign logo, pictures of you, your biography, your campaign literature, and any previous press coverage that you have received.

All of this information should be made available on the campaign Web site in a section for the media and should be available by request at the campaign office. Send a press kit to the news director at all local media outlets and any specific reporters you are targeting for coverage. Ask your staff to make follow up phone calls to these reporters and offer to set up an interview with you.

Sending Press Releases

Designate someone on the campaign staff who will regularly send updates to members of the media about major events in your campaign. If your press releases resemble newsletters, it is unlikely they will make

it directly into print. Instead, provide information for a news story that you hope will be written. This means writing a strong headline and lead paragraph that will grab the reader's attention. You should emphasize the candidate's strengths, of course, but make your story about the candidate relevant to a local event or news item.

Press releases should be designed to make the reporter's job easier. A press release should include prewritten quotes from multiple sources, all of the critical information necessary to write a story (answer these

questions: who, what, when, where, and why?), a statement about the relevance to readers of the information provided and its likely impact, and contact information for the candidate and campaign staff.

You do not have to send the same releases everywhere. If you become familiar with the stories covered by specific reporters at major news outlets, you may learn that they like a particular kind of story. If so, send them a release that fits with their preferred type of story or pitch them the story over the phone.

If you want reporters to attend an event, send them an invitation a week in advance in addition to a day-of-event press release. If you think a story has a

chance to make it on the local news, your press release should emphasize the visuals of the event. After an event, you can make your own pictures and video available to local television as well.

■ TAKE NOTE:

A press release should be designed to make the reporter's job easier. It should include a strong headline and lead paragraph that grabs the reader's attention.

■ LEARN MORE ON THE WEB:

Find sample press releases that you can download and modify at campaigns.berkeley.edu.

Generating Letters to the Editor and Talk Radio Phone Calls

Not all media coverage of the candidate will come directly from your campaign. Encourage supporters to write letters to the editor and make phone calls to local radio stations. Organize a writing event or provide sample letters to the editor, although they will usually not be printed unless they seem personal. Make a list of local call-in radio programs available to your supporters and encourage them to call in with information about your campaign.

Interviews with the News Media

Once you have lined up interviews with journalists, be sure to make the most of them. Do not enter an interview without having prepared for it in advance. You should know something about the person who is interviewing you, especially what kind of stories he or she likes to write. Learn about the media outlet that the reporter works for and its likely audience. Preferably, you should know something about the story that the journalist is working on and its deadline. As you prepare for the interview, decide what your central message will be and how you will respond to obvious questions.

At your interviews, use short statements with simple language that gets to the point quickly. Come up with memorable quotations and important facts to incorporate into your answers. Use elements of your biography to emphasize your points. Use every opportunity to deliver your message but remember that reporters are unlikely to interview you again if you do not give them information that is relevant to the story they are writing. Whatever you do, do not lie or stretch the truth with reporters. If they find out, it will be detrimental to your campaign. Avoid saying anything that you do not want to be printed or broadcast, even if you are talking off the record.

In an interview, you should sound upbeat and positive. Do not get defensive if you are challenged. Admit any problems and describe how you are addressing them. If you are on television, make the most of the visual format by emphasizing your points with gestures and movement. Feel free to make the interview a conversation; ask the reporter questions and expand on points you made earlier.

If an interview is not going as well as you had planned, do not be resentful, continue to be polite. Remember that you will likely be interviewed again. Try not to get frustrated if you don't receive the access to the media that you want or if the interviews you give do not result in news coverage. It is very difficult to land interviews on television unless you are the hot news story of the moment; use other media when you are given the chance.

■ **ADVICE FROM THE FRONT LINES: “Tips for Candidates: Generating Fair and Favorable Media Coverage,” by Valerie Hyman**

Facing the media is intimidating and it’s difficult. This is true even under the best of circumstances because you know you have little or no control over what journalists do with your words and image. Still, there are a number of actions you can take to increase the chances coverage of you will be fair and perhaps even favorable.

To begin with, understand that citizens appreciate politicians who are confident and articulate, even when they disagree with their positions. They know clear thinking when they hear it. They smell deception and obfuscation a mile away.

You are most convincing when you speak off the cuff, rather than reading or reciting. You can do that when you have done your homework. The more prepared you are, the more confidence you exude. Knowing your material enables you to relax and speak fluently.

That said, it is fine to carry a few note cards with talking points on a variety of issues. Just be sure to use them as a quick reference rather than a crutch. Here are some other tips to use in facing the media:

1. Have your own agenda for every media encounter, from radio talk shows to neighborhood newsletters. Do you want to discuss mandatory testing for third graders? Or dredging the lake? Make sure you get your basic message across early in the encounter; you can expand on it later.
2. Get to your point quickly; do not beat around the bush. Say what you know and then stop. Sometimes the correct answer to a question is “I don’t know.” When appropriate, say you’ll do some research and provide an answer later; then keep your promise.
3. Rehearse out loud. Speak to family or friends and encourage their honest feedback. Have someone videotape you as you articulate your ideas. Critique yourself: How interesting is the video? What questions have I left unanswered?

4. Find a focus for every news release, speech, major position, and weekly theme. Then reduce that focus to just three words—actor, action, subject of the action—in that order. For the third grade testing, for example: “Measurement improves teaching.” Having a sharp focus clarifies your message and makes it easier for voters to understand. Articulating a laser sharp focus in three words takes lots of practice. Once you and your staff get the hang of it, you’ll be thrilled with the results.
5. When you or someone on your staff make a mistake, take responsibility for it immediately and publicly as soon as you become aware of the problem. Apologize if appropriate. Nothing defuses anger like “I’m sorry.” This goes for scandals as well as misstatements of fact.
6. Be prepared with clear and convincing evidence to substantiate your positions: history, precedent, photos, statistics, and survey information. Nothing persuades like “Just the facts, Ma’am.”
7. Be conscious of your verbal and nonverbal habits. Learn to avoid the sounds, “Um” and “Uh,” especially when beginning responses. Sit or stand still; avoid swaying and rocking whether you’re on camera or on the phone. Consider hiring a coach; local theatrical directors and faculty at university speech therapy departments will be thrilled to work with you and charge reasonable rates for their services. Controlled, purposeful body language and speech communicate credibility and authority.
8. Be accessible. Make sure journalists can reach you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Consider having a cell phone number just for journalists and keep that phone on and within earshot. The faster it is to get in touch with you, the sooner you prevent molehills from becoming mountains. Being easy to reach leads journalists to feel more comfortable with you, more willing to listen longer, and, surprisingly, less likely to call.
9. Journalists usually try hard to get their facts straight and to understand the issues they cover. Sometimes they are overworked

and underpaid. So when one of them does an especially good job of explaining a complicated issue or representing you fairly, give them a call or zap them an email to let them know you appreciate their effort.

Finally, keep in mind that the media are part of the bedrock of American democracy. The press is the only profession protected in the Constitution. That's because our founders knew this experiment in participatory democracy would not endure without the kind of dispassionate examination a free press can provide.

■ **BEST PRACTICE: Make yourself as accessible as possible to the news media.**

The job of the media is to give voice to the voiceless and hold the powerful accountable. Practice and preparation will ensure you are the first to hold yourself accountable to the people you serve.

Valerie Hyman has thirty years of experience working as a television reporter, newsroom manager, and corporate news executive. She is now president of The Management Coach and provides coaching and consultation for networks, station groups and their news directors.

Be a Guest on Talk Radio

Talk radio gives you the opportunity to fully present your positions and interact directly with voters. You can also plug events and generate volunteers for your effort. Making regular appearances on news, commentary, and call-in programs should be a priority.

Scheduling an appearance on these programs typically takes multiple phone calls and is never a guarantee. Identify every (relevant) radio program in your area and get to know the people at the stations. Keep records of the people you have contacted and your scheduled appearances. Have background materials ready to deliver to the station for their early use in promoting the program. Finally, let your supporters know when you will be on the radio and ask people to call in with supportive questions and comments.

Making Debates Central to the Campaign

When asked to name things that they like in campaigns, many voters have trouble but debates are usually mentioned. When asked what would improve campaigns, many voters say they would like to see more debates. Debates provide candidates with opportunities to speak directly to voters, and they serve as news events that generate free media for campaigns.

Scheduling debates and appearing at joint forums with your opponent(s) should be a priority of your campaign. If you get invitations to appear in debates, try to put them on the schedule early. Simply responding to requests, however, is not enough. You should offer to debate your fellow candidate(s) at different locations within the jurisdiction as part of your regular campaign schedule. Let the press know of your offer and ask them to sponsor one or more debates. Community organizations are another option for sponsoring debates; sponsored debates will result in higher attendance and news coverage.

If your opponent(s) will not participate in debates, you should make that an issue in the campaign. Tell voters why you think that the candidate does not want to debate and emphasize that debates are necessary to draw out relevant differences between the candidates. Ask organizations and the press to continue to request that the other candidates participate in debates. This will help bring attention to the openness of your campaign.

If you do schedule debates, research who the likely attendees will be and the level of news coverage the debates are likely to receive, as well as the format and topics that will be addressed. Prepare for the debates by having mock debates where your supporters stand in as your opponents and others ask you questions that you do not know in advance.

Participating in Town Hall Meetings and Community Events

Debates are not the only means by which candidates can interact with voters. Local organizations frequently sponsor question-and-answer sessions with candidates or invite candidates to address their members. Try to attend as many of these events as possible. If you are invited to

speak to a group, make sure you set aside time before or after the event to meet voters and respond to their questions one-on-one.

Set up your own town hall meetings during the campaign. Many public venues, including schools and libraries, will make space available for your events. If you schedule a series of open meetings and heavily promote them on your campaign materials and at each of your events, you will be able to connect with many voters in person by the end of the campaign.

Many of the events will be sparsely attended, but this should not deter you from attending. If you establish yourself as an accessible candidate who is interested in meeting the voters—even in small numbers

■ WHAT DO VOTERS WANT?: More Candidate Debates

In our survey, we asked voters to list the “top two ways that you prefer to hear candidates communicate their messages to you—through speeches, debates, mailers, radio or TV call in shows, door-to-door, town hall meetings, or some other way?” Respondents expressed a strong preference for debates over any other mode of communication. Thirty-eight percent gave debates as their first choice and twenty-six percent mentioned debates as their second choice. Debates were the most popular second choice if respondents picked something other than debates as their first choice.

Focus group participants were equally supportive of debates. Some qualified their support for debates by making a distinction between “canned” or “orchestrated” debates and “real” or “meaningful” debates. Participants asserted that scripted debates, where the candidates are given the questions in advance, are mostly stagecraft, while unscripted debates and town hall meetings hold both substantive and symbolic value. Indeed, the focus group discussions suggested that debates serve different purposes for different voters:

- Debates provide cues to help voters with decision making. For Jeff, debates allow viewers to see how candidates respond under pressure, without a script, “That’s how you can best get a handle on someone . . . there are no Tele-prompters, you know, it’s on the spot. All of a sudden, they’re hit with something and [we get to] see how they react to it.”
- Debates are a means to learn about and assess a candidate’s issue positions.
- Debates give voters a way to assess a candidate’s truthfulness.
- A candidate’s decision to participate (or not) in a debate holds symbolic value. Donald explains, “If there were three candidates and only two would debate that would make a big difference in my life. I would say, ‘Why wouldn’t they [debate]?’ I’d be suspicious of it.”

—voters will be more likely to believe that you will be an accessible officeholder. You will learn from these experiences and be able to incorporate feedback from voters into the campaign.

Create events that coincide with your campaign’s door-to-door canvassing and phone banking. If you are targeting particular neighborhoods, identify facilities or houses in these neighborhoods where you can hold “meet and greets”—small gatherings where neighbors gather to meet you. Holding these types of events helps demonstrate to voters that you share their concerns. If you organize neighborhood events before your volunteers go door-to-door distributing your literature or make targeted phone calls, you can promote the events more easily.

■ **BEST PRACTICE: Promote debates.**

Do more than participate when asked. Make scheduling debates a priority of your campaign.

Paid Media Strategies

Getting your message out often comes at a cost. Because reporters are not likely to give you the coverage you need and because it is difficult to talk to every voter before an election, your campaign will require some paid media to get your message out to voters.

The cost of paid media ranges from very little (constructing a simple Web site) to tens of thousands of dollars (television advertising). Your campaign budget and the size and scope of your race will dictate how much you can spend. No matter what your resources, develop a media strategy that is diverse enough to reach voters who prefer different news and entertainment outlets.

Developing a Web Site

A candidate Web site is an inexpensive way to give voters more of what they want: information about candidates—their backgrounds, qualifications, issue positions, key supporters, and what they hope to do when in office.

Web sites are great ways to:

- **Include a relatively large amount of information that allows voters to compare candidates and learn more about the issues that they care most about.**
- **Keep in regular communication with supporters about the progress of the campaign.**
- **Provide voters with opportunities to interact with the campaign (which signals your willingness to listen).**

Your Web site should look professional and, because the Web requires individuals to take action to visit your site, it must be attractive and well publicized. Produce at least a simple version of your site that can be up and running when you announce your candidacy and start

■ **BEST PRACTICE: Develop a campaign Web site.**

Provide voters with an easy way to learn more about your candidacy. Post your biography, issue positions, calendar of events, recent press releases, and a list of endorsements on your campaign Web site. Encourage voter participation by including ways for voters to interact with the campaign, such as a sign-up form for volunteer activities, an online donation form, and a way for voters to email you with comments or questions.

distributing information about it. You can buy a domain name (such as joeformayor.com) for a small fee and typically pay about \$20 per month for hosting. Some campaigns hire a professional Web developer but in most communities, you should be able to find a responsible student to develop and update the Web site for you for a nominal fee or even for free. Make sure that you secure a commitment to stay through the end of your campaign from whoever will act as your Webmaster. Once your site is up, put its address on all of your materials, including signs.

Make the Web site part of your broader communication strategy. Mention the Web site often as a source for more information about you and your campaign in speeches, advertisements, and conversations with voters. Encourage the press and volunteers to regularly check your Web site.

Use the site as a tool for your event planning, outreach to constituency groups, and volunteer organization. When you make claims about yourself or other candidates, make the Web site an extension of those claims by posting documentation for all to see. When you make policy speeches, encourage listeners who are interested in learning more to read the comprehensive position papers that you have posted on your Web

site. Most will not read all of this information, but providing it establishes your reputation as an open and responsible potential officeholder.

At the very least, use your Web site to post information about your positions and your qualifications, press releases, a biography, a list of endorsements, a calendar of events, an email list sign-up form, a privacy policy for what you will do with personal information that the site collects, a form for donating money, and several options for how people can get involved in the campaign.

Better Web sites will include sections devoted to the central policy issues of the campaign, interactive tools voters can use to correspond with the candidate, extensive contrasts between the candidate and his or her opponent(s), a blog (web log) or diary, links to examples of the candidate's involvement with the community, and pages with the candidate's message to targeted constituencies.

The Web is an excellent medium for drawing contrasts because you can present visual aides (charts and tables) comparing your positions with those of other candidates and then link to documentation of those claims. You can even link to information from other candidates framed within your own commentary on their positions.

The Web is a valuable interactive medium because voters can send you information and select information they want to see. Keep track of pages voters visit to see what kinds of materials are of greatest interest to your visitors. Provide opportunities for feedback by incorporating a method to email the candidate and to provide feedback on the campaign or the Web site.

If you get many questions, you can post the questions and answers and allow people to browse through them. Many Web companies allow you to add bulletin boards and chat rooms to your site at no extra cost if you agree to show their advertisements. These interactive elements are fun for visitors but require more work from you or your staff to moderate the discussions.

Ideally, a Web site will deliver the candidate's message to undecided voters, but most visitors to the site will already be supporters. Communicating with these supporters and the press is another critical role for the Web site. Include news and site updates for people who visit regularly.

Update visitors on the latest from the campaign trail, including the activities of the candidate. A regularly updated blog by the candidate can keep visitors interested. You can include comments by supporters,

the volunteer coordinator, or the campaign manager in the blog. Make sure that your directory of campaign staff and event calendar are updated regularly and include information reporters or supporters might need to contact the right person or find an event.

Prominently display several options for becoming more involved in the campaign. Your financial contribution form should be easily found from a link on the front page. Within one click, supporters should be able to access information on the latest volunteer opportunities and events. Use the Web site to build your organization. Post a request for precinct captains and liaisons for particular organizations or communities and have kits ready to send to those who seem most interested in building an organization of volunteers in their neighborhoods.

Using Email Lists

Display an email sign-up form on your Web site for people who want to be updated about the campaign. Collect email addresses of supporters at your events and from those who call the office offering to help. You should always ask permission to send them information using email. Keep a complete list and a subdivided list for those who want different kinds of information and internal communication.

Allow members to sign up for your list or unsubscribe easily. Subscription information, including instructions for how to unsubscribe, should be included at the bottom of each message that you send. Always ask supporters to forward your messages and ask their friends to sign up for the list.

Use your email list to send information about upcoming events, major endorsements, news coverage and appearances, volunteer activities, and responses to your opponent(s). If you can create humorous ways to get your message across, you can use the power of forwarding to get your message out to all of your supporters' friends. Keep everyone updated regularly, but remember that every email you send may make people less likely to pay attention to your next email.

Signs, Door Hangers, and Other Campaign Materials

Distributing and posting printed materials are a major part of local political campaigning. These signs and materials improve your name recognition, generate buzz about your candidacy in local conversations,

establish your momentum, and make voters more likely to pay attention to your other advertising efforts.

Use the same logo on all your materials and make your materials distinct from those of other candidates. Use simple and visible color schemes and stay away from colors of sports rivalries. For your signs, use simple text including your name and the office you are running for. Include your slogan and Web address if they are central to the campaign but do not clutter your signs with text. It is best not to change your logo, colors, or slogans midstream, so pretest your materials with voters and make sure that you are satisfied with them at the start of your campaign.

Shop around for low-cost printers or try to find a supporter who can donate in-kind printing. Keep track of your inventory and order as you go rather than buy everything you think you will need in advance. When you get the materials, keep them tidy so that you can easily find the materials you need.

Plan your sign strategy geographically. You should have at least two sizes of signs—large signs for major intersections and roads and small signs for the yards of your supporters. Use a large road map of your district or the jurisdiction where you are running when planning where to place your signs. You can often get average daily traffic counts from the county department of transportation.

Use the information in your database of voters to find the neighborhoods where support for you is most critical. Look up owners of the properties you are most interested in and ask them to post your signs. Identify the spots where other candidates have placed signs or ask candidates who have run for your office in the past for their lists of sign locations.

Check with the local regulatory authorities for any sign regulations and be sure to follow them. Never put signs in the public rights of way or in environmentally sensitive areas. Do not nail signs to trees and do not take other candidates' signs down. These activities will get you in trouble without bringing any benefit to your campaign.

■ BRIGHT IDEA: Question and Answer

Keep in touch with your supporters using email and by adding an interactive component to your Web site that allows questions and answers or chats with the candidate.

Extensive yard signage allows supporters to feel involved and encourages neighbors to take a look at your campaign. You can print new and slightly different signs near the end of your campaign to signal to supporters that Election Day is coming. Some professionals recommend selling personalized signs to your supporters so that neighbors realize the personal nature of the campaign.

Door-hangers and leaflets can be a valuable part of your message delivery system. These materials should contain information about your qualifications, reasons for running, plans for the future, and/or key issue positions, but they should be easy to read so that you get your message across to voters who take only a few seconds to glance at them.

Direct Mail

Direct mail is one of the most common forms of mass advertising in campaigns. It presents a cost-effective way to reach your voters, especially when compared to television and radio advertisements. Unlike other forms of paid media, mailings can be sent to specific target audiences with messages tailored to their concerns.

A direct mailing, however, is only as effective as the mailing list used to deliver it. You should research your intended audience and study your voter rolls to make sure that you are sending information about your candidacy to the people you need to support you. For more targeted mailings, you can use organization lists or subscription lists.

Once the mailing reaches a member of your target audience, the next challenge is getting the recipient to read what you have sent. Research and carefully develop the content of your mailings. Find a way to make the mailing not look like junk mail. Consultants estimate that readers take only a few seconds (the time it takes to walk from the mailbox to the garbage can!) to read campaign mail. Assume that people will scan your mailings and make it possible for them to still get the message. Headlines need to draw the reader into the text; action photos that do not look posed can generate interest and support the written message.

Keep your message simple with graphics and emotionally stirring rhetoric but also document your claims with factual information. Broad claims with no supporting evidence or third-party support are not typically believed. Use humor and references to popular culture or current events to get people interested in what you have to say. Pretest each mailing and make sure that you look at a final proof before it goes to press.

It is less expensive to label and process your own mail than to hire an outside firm, but it's also important to avoid potential headaches. Making an error with regard to the format of the piece or following postal regulations (for example, by not including the bulk mail permit for the right post office) can result in a mailing that will not get sent. The mailing needs to be "red tagged" (to indicate that it is a political mailing that can be sent first class at a third-class rate) and correctly sorted (that is, organized by zip code). For assistance, contact the business center at your central post office.

■ **ADVICE FROM PROFESSIONALS: "Developing a Campaign Mail Piece," by Mitchell Englander**

From mailbox to trashcan, you have only two seconds to grab a voter's attention. Remember, if it's hard to read, they won't! Direct mail is one of the most important tools that campaigns can use to reach voters effectively and affordably. It is worth taking the time to develop campaign mail that will be read and remembered.

There is more to producing effective direct mail than meets the eye. There are many parts that have to come together seamlessly; assembling all of them is crucial for creating effective direct mail. Here are five basic steps to follow when developing your mail:

1. Your list is your life.

One of the most important elements of the mail campaign is a clean and up-to-date voter file. Whatever you do, don't cut costs or corners on your voter file. Remember, garbage in equals garbage out.

The voter file must use the most comprehensive and current data available and should be householded with enhanced information that includes at least the twelve basic information fields:

1. Name
2. Mailing Information (with Carrier Route and Zip+4)
3. Districts (including current precinct numbers)
4. Telephone Numbers

5. Party Affiliation
6. Gender
7. Date of Birth
8. Voter History
9. Voter Registration Date
10. Ethnicity (appended via surname dictionaries)
11. Homeowner or Renter
12. Email Address (or at least a field to append one during the campaign)

Have an experienced campaign computer technician manage your voter files. Although there are many political database companies that offer voter files in a variety of formats and campaign software to manage your mailing lists, you don't want to accidentally send your Jewish Democrat/Soccer Mom "Happy Mother's Day" mailer to 75-year-old Republican Asian men!

2. Plan early and plan ahead.

Once you have your voter file in place, you can start to develop your mail plan. Map out each piece—format and content, targeted universe, budget, and a conservative production timeline. Invariably there will be a hold-up somewhere: a difficult approval process, printing and lettershop problems, a mail house company behind schedule, or a post office that sits on your mail. Build in several extra days to a week to account for the unknown.

3. Choose a format.

There are nine categories of political direct mail that will best communicate your message.

1. Introduction-puff/Biography
2. Issue driven
3. Accomplishments
4. Attack (aka: negative or hit piece)
5. Comparison
6. Third-Party Testimonials (endorsements, groups, organizations)
7. Geography (based on issues affecting the area where you live)

8. Thematic
9. Values/Ideology

Every message in the campaign can be communicated using one of these formats. Each format has a very clear and unique objective. Sometimes you can get away with mixing some of the formats in one piece, just don't make a rule of it. As an example, an attack piece may be negative against the opposition on the front and inside, with a positive third party testimonial about your candidate on the back.

4. Develop your message.

Once you have your voter file, a plan in place, and a format in mind, it's time to develop your message. Designing for political targeted direct mail is a pragmatic endeavor. Concept, copy, and photos should be compelling. Use photos, incorporate themes, and include copy that conveys your overall campaign message.

The text is important, but the critical parts for the voters are the visuals. Use powerful graphics and pictures, including a color scheme that stands out but is easy on the eye. Leave lots of "white space" (the space around your text and visuals that is left blank)—it makes the piece easy to read. Also, don't forget that most high propensity voters are seniors and small type is hard to read for them.

5. Use effective design.

You must catch the voter's eye and intrigue him enough to stop and read a little. If the copy isn't any good then great design can't salvage it. Assuming you have good copy, develop a design that grabs the reader by the throat and doesn't let go until you've gotten your message across.

Shy away from using the "good old fashioned" political colors and logos. If you do, your mail will simply blend in with all the other political mail that the voter receives.

After the headline, the most read part of the letter is the "P.S."—if you're sending out a letter-type mailing, always put your number-one message in the P.S. People also read the captions on photos—always put informative captions on the photos you use. If a paragraph is particularly important, make it extremely short (2-3 lines) or use a "drop-cap" capital letter to start the paragraph—either one will make it more likely to be

read by people who are just “skimming” your piece. Remember, almost everyone scans first, to see if reading the piece is worth his time. That’s why you must always design for both “scanners” and “studiers.”

There are two types of “scanners.” One “scanner” may simply look at the front on the way to the trashcan, and the other may open your piece and briefly read through it. Prepare for both scenarios.

Make sure that the cover of the mailer includes the candidate’s name in large type, a picture of the candidate, and the campaign slogan—that’s it. This way, if a voter simply looks at your piece before throwing it away (or recycling it, to be politically correct), he will still see the candidate’s name, picture, and message. For those who scan the inside before discarding your literature, include big, bold headlines, picture captions, and emphasis—such as underlines, bolding, and highlighted words where appropriate. Do not use excessive emphasis like mixing highlighting, underlining, and bold in the same piece—it gets too busy and then no one will read it.

Some voters, however, will study your piece in-depth. Include plenty of information for these “studiers” by providing additional information below your headlines and throughout your bio and issues paragraphs.

Some other rules for layout and design:

- ***Use quality photos!*** There is no substitution for professional photography. Even the best designs turn sour with shoddy photography. Dark eyes or a hint of a five-o’clock shadow because of bad lighting overpower the reader with negative thoughts about the candidate or issue. If you must use digital photography, turn up the pixels! If you like grainy and pixilated photos, start writing your concession speech!
- ***Think clean—be clean.*** Graphics are meant to enhance your message and draw the voter to read or respond. Too many graphic images and font types portray a cluttered mind and will garble your message. The graphic on the cover of your mailer will be the main factor in increasing its chances of being read. Since the postal worker places the mail label-side up in the box, be sure to include graphic images and a strong headline on the side to be labeled. First impressions are lasting. They set the tone for your message and must intrigue the recipient to read on.

- **Use color.** Proper use of color adds to the perceived credibility and quality of the candidate and adds realism to the issues and message. Whenever possible, use full color. Many novices avoid using color because they fear being viewed as “slick.” Never equate color with “slickness.” Color works! In every medium the public sees color—color TVs, color billboards, color newspapers. Even *The New York Times* uses color. Color lets the public see your candidate in the flesh and allows them to see him as a real person. Avoid using a barrage of conflicting bright colors. Black and red are usually reserved for negative pieces. Also, stay away from simply red, white, and blue.
- **Punch your words.** Keep your message brief and to the point. Write copy that gets read, not copy that puts voters to bed. Use big headlines and jumbo quotes, with supporting text never smaller than 12-point type. Place text adjacent to photos or graphic images wherever possible. Clever use of folds and text blocking helps break up the clutter if the message is complicated.
- **Do the “flash test.”** Many people read their mail while standing over the kitchen wastebasket. The “flash test” ensures that your mailer, if tossed after the briefest of glances, will leave some impression with the reader. This is your safety catchall test for every mail piece you send. Take your mock up and hold it up to a noncampaign participant for two seconds per side. Then ask . . . did they get the message? What is the candidate’s name?
- **Don’t forget to proof!** Finally, before signing the “approved to print with no changes” form . . . proof, proof, proof—but don’t try this at home alone. Give it to someone who you know and trust outside the campaign to proof for spelling, grammar, content, and readability.

Now you’re ready to go to print!

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Radio and Television Advertisements

If you want to communicate with a mass audience and you have the funds, you should consider using radio and television advertising. Each has different strengths that require different strategies and scripts. Radio ads are more effective than television ads for targeting audiences based on demographics. Television ads can provide a more powerful and memorable visual message.

When developing radio ads, pay attention to the script; take the time to get the wording right. It does not have to look right on the page as long as it sounds good, for example, you do not need to use complete sentences. Do not overuse sound effects or professional announcers. You want real people who do not sound canned rather than furniture salesman and jingles.

You can use radio to draw the listener in with questions or talk directly to your opponent(s) in the ad. Your message should be simple and not excessively political; if you make an ad that sounds political right away, you are likely to lose part of your audience. Radio works better if the message addresses a topic that is a part of regular conversation at the time.

Radio advertisements can be expensive, so placement is critical. Placing ads during drive time gets you the largest audience but you can get cheaper rates by running your ads at less popular times. If advertise during news and talk programs, you may get more attentive listeners but they are also more likely to have made up their minds. Find out about the audience that each station serves and make sure it matches your target voters. For music stations, comic or light-hearted ads might be more effective.

Producing and buying airtime for television advertisements is a complex process that normally requires professional help. If you decide to do it yourself, you will need to set up a shoot with video or film, have the ad edited, and then buy time slots for airing the ad on network and cable television stations.

Creating a political ad requires extensive preproduction planning, a major production phase, and follow-up. You will need to take into account production values like script and lighting, timing, transitions between images, and locations in addition to concept and message. If the candidate looks bad or the advertisement looks low quality, it can have a negative effect on the viewers' opinions of the candidate.

Here are two cheaper formats for television ads that can be effective:

- The candidate talks directly into the camera about why he or she is running for office or responds to an opponent's attack by laying out the facts of a matter and, if appropriate, apologizing for any improprieties.
- Several residents give unscripted testimonials about the candidate's achievements and fitness for office.

Most candidates advertise on network television, especially during the local news, in an attempt to reach a large number of voters. This can be prohibitively expensive, however, and your ads can get caught in the clutter. You can use cable television for cheaper spots and better targeting. The cable company can run ads on specific channels at specific times. Stations with viewers who are likely voters include 24-hour news networks, weather and travel channels, business channels, and movie classics channels. You can also target your spots at men and women, using networks aimed at those audiences. Wherever you run your ads, test them beforehand with focus groups or impromptu sessions with voters to make sure your message is getting across.

Newspaper and Print Advertising

Most campaigns do not use newspaper advertising because it is not an effective medium for conveying emotion and generating a response. Newspaper readers are likely voters, however, and could be an attractive target audience in some constituencies. Newspaper ads offer an effective way to compare candidates' positions using visual aides (charts, tables) or to supplement the coverage your campaign is receiving by presenting your positions in your own words. Newspaper ads are good for announcing endorsements and telling voters about special elections.

There are other print advertising options as well. Research the local market and what people read in your area. If a publication is read widely or read by an audience that you want to reach, consider placing an ad in it.

■ **BEST PRACTICE:** Document your claims, no matter what medium you use for advertising.

■ WHAT DO VOTERS WANT?: Informative Advertising and Documentation of Negative Claims

Survey respondents were asked whether they found television advertisements helpful for making voting decisions. Predictably, more than two-thirds (68%) said the ads were “not too helpful” or “not at all helpful.” Focus group participants shared this perception of television ads as mostly unhelpful, even though they rejected the idea of longer (two minute) ads.

Asked how candidates might change their ads to make them more helpful, Anna replied, “On those rare occasions when they talk about what they’re for, and they don’t mention their opponent, I try to listen, which is when I feel like the candidate is turning to the camera and just being as honest as politicians can be.” Colleen agreed, “Instead of . . . quoting something about the other person, just have the candidate talk to you. ‘This is what I believe in. This is what I want to do.’”

Other participants were more accepting of candidates including negative statements in their advertisements as long as they supported the claims they were making with facts. Documentation of negative claims can be essential to making an attack appear credible to voters. Donald explains, “If an attack brings out information, and can be validated, it can be useful, but if it is just a general statement, then you don’t have the credibility.”

Internet Advertising

Internet advertising can be used for highly specific targeting or cheaper message delivery, but it is difficult to reach all the voters in your constituency using this medium. You can often get good deals on banner advertising with local newspapers or publications and you can contract with large Internet Service Providers or Portals to deliver banner ads only to people who live in your district or local jurisdiction. You can expect higher click-through rates by placing general ads on news sites and targeted messages on special interest sites.

Use banner ads to broadcast a message and to drive people to your site. Ads can be effective at encouraging new visitors to come back to the site and sign up for email from the campaign. They can also be used to promote a particular online feature such as a tax calculator that allows voters to compare the benefits of a candidate’s tax plan with her opponent’s, or to announce a chat with the candidate. Most people (at least 99.5%) will not click on your ad, so make sure they can absorb the message within the banner.

Steer clear of sending unsolicited email. Recipients are quite sensitive about their email and candidates that have used “spam” are likely to generate many more complaints than new supporters. Sending unsolicited emails is likely to generate negative news stories and irate recipients who may call the office and

jeopardize your computer security.

Developing a Media Plan

Rather than make decisions in an ad hoc fashion, develop a media plan at the beginning of your campaign. It should include the kinds of outlets you will use, the kinds of advertising you will engage in, the kinds of messages you will communicate to the voters, and how much you will spend. Even though advertising usually requires advance work, plan for contingencies and be prepared to adapt your plan to the concerns of the moment.

When evaluating how much paid media to purchase, consider the cost-effectiveness of various kinds of paid media in terms of the number of target voters reached, the cost of producing and placing the advertisement, and the likely impact of the ad. Consultants claim that voters must be exposed to a paid message ten times before they remember it. So purchase enough spots to ensure that the ad gets the voters' attention. Set aside some funds for the final weeks of the campaign, so you have the resources to counter any last-minute negative attacks that might be launched against you.

Whether you choose direct mail, radio ads, television ads, or another form of paid advertising to get your message out, make sure your advertising works together and that messages in different venues reinforce one another. Some professionals recommend that you develop themes for your paid and free media that reinforce your message of the month, the week, or the day.

Finally, if you combine multiple advertising methods with direct voter contact, you are likely to reach all of your target audience multiple times. Ideally, by the time your paid messages reach your audience, voters will already have developed positive views of you from hearing about you in other venues (for example, free media, direct voter contact), and thus will be more receptive to your message.

Conclusion: Five Things to Know about Delivering Your Message

1. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Repeating your message is just as important as being clear, concise, and compelling. Remember that you are competing for people's scarce

attention. At any given time, your communication is likely to reach different audiences. Typically it takes several exposures to a message for it to reach the recipient. Although it may seem tedious, consistently delivering your key campaign message will increase the likelihood that your target voters will hear it.

2. Earn free media.

Make yourself available to reporters and actively promote news stories and news events. Deal with the media professionally and make their job easier. Be prepared for interviews and make your appearances count.

3. Make debates and public events central to your campaign.

Make a commitment to participate in public forums and debates with your fellow candidate(s) and organize your own series of town-hall meetings to talk directly to voters. Use your willingness to debate and talk to voters to develop a reputation as an accessible candidate.

4. Complement your grassroots campaign work with an effective Web site and good campaign materials.

Even if you plan to run an on-the-ground campaign, you need to produce an effective Web site and email list to coordinate your organization. You need good campaign literature to distribute and quality signs in visible locations to demonstrate your widespread support.

5. Use a diverse and cost-effective advertising strategy.

There are many options for campaign advertising, some more expensive than others. You can use direct mail and the Web to target your key constituencies and, if you have the resources, radio and television to reach mass audiences with professional messages. Develop a media plan to make all your advertising work together to deliver your message effectively.