

Clearly, the Internet is beginning to have a strong impact in the world of political advocacy. The Internet offers proven opportunities today to generate results and influence voters more quickly, efficiently and cost effectively.

**BY ROGER STONE**

## Case Studies: Using the Internet to Build Citizen Armies

**H**AVING THE ABILITY to reach voters that are pre-sorted by congressional district, with names, mailing addresses and e-mail addresses, is critical to the building of a modern grassroots organization for public issue fights and public affairs campaigns. Here are three case studies that provide examples of how it can be done:

### **US Chamber of Commerce: Taking GOTV to the Next Level**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce had a unique perspective on the recent election, and they wanted to help ensure we ended up with the most business-friendly Congress and President possible. So the Chamber engaged in an all-out effort to identify, educate and turn out pro-business voters. For this they ran one of the most sophisticated and complete GOTV programs the Internet has ever seen.

In areas where they had targeted a specific race, they sent out an online survey to Juno Advocacy Network subscribers already likely to be pro-business voters – e.g. people who owned stock, were CEOs or presidents of companies, or read business publications and had high incomes. The Chamber asked six questions: five that identified hot button issues and, finally, one that asked whether the subscriber was registered to vote. With the individual subscriber's permission, the Chamber was allowed to obtain their contact information along with their survey responses – which were dropped directly into the databases.

The Chamber then used the survey results to tailor individualized e-mail follow-ups: direction to a voter registration site if they were unregistered, issue positions of their local candidates based on the issues about which they were most in synch with the Chamber and, finally, absentee ballot information and encouragement to vote on election day. The e-mails also provided the seeds for a viral marketing campaign, as they urged the recipient to pass them along to like-minded friends.

A GOTV program is only as good as the number of people you can run through it. The Chamber was able to get a 24 percent response to their survey. Almost one in four people who saw the survey filled it out and participated in this program. That response has actually been typical of our survey ads – where a call to action will get 5-12 percent, a survey will typically get a 15-30 percent response.

“With our GOTV program it was important for us to reach beyond our traditional membership to motivate potential pro-business voters. Unlike traditional campaign recruitment approaches, the Internet gave us the opportunity to have a true dialog with our audience, it also allowed our message to spread virally to others. The added demographic targeting that we could do boosted our recruitment rate beyond our expectations. In direct mail we would expect a 1-3 percent response rate when we try to activate nonbusiness owners. We had a phenomenal 22 percent response rate, and we were able to refine our recruits by issues ‘on-the-fly’ using Juno’s survey” said Brian Wilde, Executive Director of the Office of Grassroots and Advocacy Programs, U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Now that they have built up this database of supporters, they are treating it as a permanent “capital” asset and will go back to it, over and over again, as relevant issues come up.

### **American Heart Association's "Take Heart Campaign": Putting Your Issue on the Agenda**

The American Heart Association (AHA) sponsored its Take Heart 2000 initiative to educate presidential and congressional candidates about key heart and stroke issues and to encourage the campaigns to adopt a health policy agenda focused on fighting these devastating diseases.

At the start of the initiative, the AHA ran banner and pop-up ads on Juno targeting subscribers who previously indicated an interest in health. When the subscribers clicked on the ad, they could obtain more information about the initiative and add their names to the candidate petition. Over 40,000 Juno subscribers chose to electronically sign the AHA's petition.

The petition was delivered to each of the presidential campaigns, and helped the AHA secure letters from Vice President Al Gore and President-elect George W. Bush outlining their strategies for fighting heart disease and stroke. In the end, both the Democratic and Republican party platform contained elements of the Take Heart 2000 issues, and many congressional candidates addressed these important issues as well.

Now the AHA is recruiting subscribers who signed their petition to join in other grassroots net-

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work activities. "Take Heart 2000 was a great success for us in many ways," said American Heart Association Director of Government Relations Richard Hamburg. "The use of new technologies helped us get through to an audience we may never have reached. This initiative allowed us to bring attention to critical heart and stroke issues, build and cultivate relationships with hundreds of candidates and elected officials, and engage new volunteers in advocacy. The new relationships created through Take Heart 2000 will help ensure that heart and stroke issues remain high on the agenda of the new Congress."

### **Defenders of Wildlife: Building a List 300,000 Supporters Long**

Long known for its leadership on endangered species issues, Defenders of Wildlife has become a leader in using the Internet as a tool for environmental activism. Defenders wanted to see if we might provide them with a way to recruit new people into their organization and the environmental movement. They already had a sophisticated e-mail ac-

tivist program – Defenders Electronic Network (DEN) – that sent regular updates on environmental and wildlife issues to supporters and called them to action. What they needed was a way to recruit more people into this program. Their initial campaign went out to 500,000 active Juno subscribers. Given the size of this target, Defenders of Wildlife tested two different messages, one on endangered species generally and one specifically on Yellowstone wolves. We delivered two ads and sent each to a test audience of 50,000.

Within two days we saw that the Endangered Species ad was doing quite well – almost a 9 percent response – but the wolves ad was doing even better, with an 11 percent response rate. Based on that information, we rolled the wolves ad out to the rest of the 500,000. Since that time, Defenders has sent various ads to subscribers over 18 years of age and is currently running a campaign targeted to new subscribers. In all, they have recruited over 300,000 new people into their DEN program. "The wonderful thing about the people we have recently recruited through our programs is that even though they come from outside our traditional direct-mail mar-

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ket, they are just as passionate about saving wildlife and wild lands as the people who have supported us for decades," Defenders' President Rodger Schickeisen said.

### **You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet**

The Chamber of Commerce, Heart Association and Defenders of Wildlife are reaping the benefits of these innovative programs. The Internet is having an impact worldwide, changing how people communicate, are en-

tertained and get information. Clearly, the Internet is beginning to have a similar impact in the world of political advocacy. The Internet offers proven opportunities today to generate results and influence voters more quickly, efficiently and cost effectively.

But longer term, advocacy groups that take the lead in this area will have a significant head start as the arena of cyberspace continues to expand. This will help them to reap long-term rewards in the competitive race for the loyalties of the American public. ■

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