



Helping to Better Understand MicroTargeting

Last year *The Hotline* declared that MicroTargeting stories were “over served” – that is, too many media outlets doing too many stories about how the car you drive or the coffee you drink determine how you vote. But beyond a fairly shallow pass at the methodology, there has been little substantive understanding of what MicroTargeting is and how it all works.

So now, let’s move on to the most obvious question....

What is MicroTargeting?

Since President Bush’s campaign used this technique to great effect in 2004, many people, organizations and methods have adopted the term “microtargeting” to mean almost anything. For purposes of this document, we are going to discuss MicroTargeting that is used to better focus direct contact efforts (mail, phone, email, door-knocks, et al) as opposed to methods that look to better target TV, radio or internet buys.

MicroTargeting is a tool for candidates and campaigns that helps to answer their most fundamental questions: Who supports my candidate? Where do I find them? How do I persuade others to support my candidate? When should I talk to them? Who should my messenger be? When done right, MicroTargeting answers each of these questions and does it in ways traditional targeting cannot.

The process works at the crossroads of three related disciplines: customer relationship management, advanced marketing techniques and traditional political targeting. By merging together the best practices of the fields, MicroTargeting sequences each individual voter’s unique political DNA to identify their likely political attitudes and behaviors. Ultimately, MicroTargeting informs, sharpens, and increases the efficiency of a campaign’s direct voter contact plans, allowing them to send individually targeted messages delivered by the proper messengers

For example, a group of “Health Care Concerned Moderates” might receive literature from local doctors on GOP alternatives to nationalized medicine, while “Anti-Tax Tea Party Goers” might get an automated call from Grover Norquist and Americans for Tax Reform; while the “Liberal Leaning Post-Graduate Singles” would get no contact at all even if they lived right next door to each other.

The MicroTargeting Philosophy

Yes, the car you drive and the coffee you drink may have something to do with how you vote, but what if that SUV you drive is hybrid? What if the driver is a married man living in Sioux Falls? What if that Starbucks drinker is sipping in an evangelical coffee house? What if this bible-reader also belongs to Greenpeace? How does the aggregate effect of each data point increase or decrease the likelihood a voter will support your side?

MicroTargeting begins with this basic assumption: that no single data point can tell you the whole story. Survey research that focuses on crosstabs such as income, gender, race and other demographics only provide a fraction of the story. Looking at the interaction between the various data provides a far more detailed look at your voters.

By using hundreds of data points, comprised of voter information, life cycle information, life style information, financial data, consumer behavior, geographic data, and political attitudes and preferences, MicroTargeting can be used to segment each of your voters into one of a number of mutually exclusive groups, each defined by a unique combination of data points. In the end there is no one “killer” piece of data that explains our political preferences, but looking at the sum total of our lifelong data trail gets us extremely close.

Combining all this information into a coherent direct contact then answers these fundamental questions...

- Who should my GOTV efforts be focused on...and what issue(s) best MOTIVATE them to vote? Who is so likely or so unlikely to show up that I don't need to spend valuable resources communicating with them?
- Who should my PERSUASION efforts be focused on...and what issue(s) best CONVINCED them to vote for me?
- When should I talk to voters...who is going to vote early, who do I want to encourage vote early, who needs a final push in the final hours?
- Which messengers will be the most effective in communicating my message?

Real Life Examples of What MicroTargeting Can Help You Accomplish

It sometimes helps to see a few real-life examples of what MicroTargeting has done for others, in order to better imagine how it might help your campaign. The following three examples focus on recent gubernatorial races.

Governor Sonny Perdue successfully used MicroTargeting to identify the best targets for outreach efforts within the African-American community. The Governor was committed to improving his election results among the large African-American voting bloc, but knew talking to every African American voter would be too costly. MicroTargeting allowed him to find

several small but receptive groups of voters within this community most willing to listen to his message. As a result of his commitment to effective outreach, Governor Perdue improved his share of the African American vote by nearly 40% over President Bush's performance in 2004.

Governor Linda Lingle needed to put together perhaps the most diverse coalition in America in order to be successful in her re-election efforts. Governor Lingle needed to go far beyond the traditional Republican "customer" and expand her voter base into independents and traditional Democrats. First, MicroTargeting helped her to find dispirited Republicans in 2006 on which she focused her GOTV efforts. Secondly, she finely honed her message to the various ethnic and racial groups spread across Hawai'i talking about the issues that mattered most to them – focusing especially on the traditional Republican message of crime and punishment, but also including non-traditional messaging on the environment, affordable housing, and education.

Governor Mitch Daniels faced a strong headwind in 2008 and MicroTargeting helped play a role in keeping him ahead in a bad Republican year. Governor Daniels faced a unique set of problems that MicroTargeting helped to solve. For instance, he knew there were several thousand loyal Republicans upset with how quickly he had moved on a number of items, most symbolically on the issue of Day Light Savings Time. MicroTargeting was able to find for him those small but important pockets of Republicans that needed extra messaging - reminding them of the things they did like; balanced budgets, tax cuts; fiscal discipline. He also was able to find moderates and independents to message on his agenda not just of fiscal conservatism but issues such as green energy which they found appealing and ran against the "generic" Republican stereotype.

Why Now?

In a word: technology. Campaigns have always collected data on their voters, and there have always been mounds of census data, polling crosstabs and voter registration files. Unfortunately, that data was in most cases wholly insufficient to get the job done, or too large and complex for anything more than rough approximations, oversimplified target lists, and statistically insignificant intuition. Technological developments have brought desperately needed depth and clarity to our formerly flat and hazy perception of individual voters.

So while blogs, podcasts and YouTube have taken center stage in the poli-tech revolution, other more radical technology has allowed MicroTargeting to become the force that it is today: 1) the ability to digitally store and archive massive amounts of raw data, 2) the growth in the quantity and quality of multi-sourced consumer information, 3) the ability to link multiple data islands such as voter files, geographic data, etc., and 4) the analytical power to search and discover new, meaningful patterns and relationships of strategic and tactical value.

MicroTargeting erases the data inefficiencies of the past, giving candidates, campaign managers and other political professionals the precision, accuracy and statistical validity they need to win.

And as technology continues to progress, the speed, efficiency and cost effectiveness of MicroTargeting will improve – we have only seen the simple beginnings of something that promises to be a potent tool.

The Advantages to Going Beyond Traditional Targeting

Traditional targeting can still play an important role in elections and plays an important role in any MicroTargeting program. Whether using MicroTargeting or more traditional means, tacticians need to understand the unique geographic, partisan, and turnout profiles that can help sharpen direct contact programs. However, these techniques can be improved on. No longer do we need to depend solely on a strategy that say “Precincts that voted more than 65% Republican would be blanketed with door knocks.” or “All registered Democrats will get mail about the candidate’s education program because they care more about education.” or “We are going to focus all of our GOTV efforts on presidential not gubernatorial year voters”. MicroTargeting enhances those good ideas and makes our efforts geometrically more powerful.

When relying solely on geography, party registration or electoral turnout we leave some of our best voters stranded and untouched. Think of that blue-collar Independent that sat out the last election and lives in an overwhelmingly Democratic precinct – traditional targeting most likely leaves that voter untouched. MicroTargeting allows you to look at that voter and see that he also drives a truck, owns a gun, has three kids and is very angry about illegal immigration. MicroTargeting not only adds him and others just like him to your pool of potential voters, but it also allows you to communicate with them more effectively. It is the difference between shouting to a group and speaking intimately with each individual voter.

MicroTargeting becomes the campaign’s search and rescue mission, connecting the campaign with supporters that would have remained untouched under traditional targeting programs. It gets votes that traditional targeting didn’t even know were there. And removes many of the voters we don’t want to be talking to because their support likelihood is so low.

The Changing Consumer Landscape

This search and rescue methodology couldn’t have come at a better time. The world is changing and so is the way you run political campaigns. Simple broadcast messaging is a thing of yesterday, when three television networks commanded 80% of Americans’ attention – replaced today by the narrow-casting of hundreds of channels, thousands of radio stations and millions upon millions of websites and blogs. This fragmentation of media and information sources has placed an even greater premium on one-on-one direct marketing of candidates and campaign themes.

Electoral tactics must therefore return to their roots of peer-to-peer communications, mail, phones, emails and door knocks to deliver their message – and the MicroTargeting process is

useless without the direct voter contact plan and budget to back it up. These mass appeals arrive customized to each individual voter's attitudes and preferences, providing a campaign mailer fitted directly to the issues, themes, messages and messengers that resonate the most with each voter in your contact universe.

The Reality of MicroTargeting

MicroTargeting has undoubtedly changed the face of political campaigning and regardless of its critics, it is here to stay. Indeed, independent validation studies of its predictive power have consistently confirmed its accuracy. Nonetheless, all of its hype makes it both easy and tempting to see it as a turnkey, computer generated "miracle" solution for the challenges of a modern political campaign. ***It isn't a solution – it is a tool. It is not an event – it is a process.*** And like any tool and any process, it needs to be collaborative and needs to be part of strategic decision-making process and should be updated routinely. At the end of the day, MicroTargeting becomes another arrow in the campaign quiver – an arrow your opponent likely already has. By itself, MicroTargeting will never win any campaign, but used appropriately in a tight election it can provide the competitive edge you need to win.

From a Cost Perspective - Does MicroTargeting Make Sense for My Campaign?

For most statewide campaigns, the simple answer is yes. For most competitive Congressional races, again the answer is yes. MicroTargeting can also make sense for highly targeted State Legislative campaigns, most countywide efforts, larger citywide races and for other local races like zoning referendums and other ballot initiatives. However, there are always exceptions. If your campaign is going to rely entirely on earned media and on television, radio and other electronic means to communicate with your voters - then MicroTargeting is clearly not worth the expenditure. As each MicroTargeting project is built from the ground up for each customer, costs can vary widely. We regularly conduct projects for as little as \$35,000 but have also conducted nationwide projects that reach well into the seven figures. Please contact us with the details of your campaign or campaigns so that we can prepare a personalized proposal for you.