

Master of the Internet: How Barack Obama Harnessed New Tools and Old Lessons to Connect, Communicate and Campaign his Way to the White House

By Richard M. Barron

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

School of Journalism and Mass Communications

JoMC 713 Global Impact of New Communication Technologies

Copyright 2008 by Richard M. Barron

Richard M. Barron is a reporter and editor at the Greensboro News & Record newspaper in Greensboro, N.C. and is a candidate for a Certificate in Technology and Communication in May of 2009.

He was 2007 co-winner of a first-place award for business writing in North Carolina for an investigation of problems consumers faced since banks began cracking down on credit over-extension during the past four years. In addition, he was the editor of first-place winners about the vanishing world of the small-time tobacco farmer and the world of workers at American-owned factories in Mexico.

His experience includes sixteen years as the editor of a weekly business newspaper and the business pages of the News & Record.

Barron has received extensive training in writing and editing at The Poynter Institute and the American Press Institute. He earned a BA in Politics from Washington and Lee University.

Honor pledge:

"I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance while preparing this assignment and I have written the code myself." – Richard M. Barron

Introduction

To master the art of communication with the American people, a president must master the predominant medium of the day. Franklin Roosevelt, with his Fireside Chats, combined his personal touch with radio, which had a personal impact on families in every home during the Great Depression. John F. Kennedy, with his cool good looks and style, had the perfect political image for television.

Now, in addition to those talents, President-Elect Barack Obama has mastered the far more complex medium of the Internet to build an army of workers, a broader network of supporters and a war chest that ultimately provided the financial muscle he needed to win a historically contentious election and forever rewrite the campaign textbook.

Thesis

The Internet has become a mass medium like no other. It combines the audio attributes of radio, the visuals of television and the depth of text with a malleable quality unlike any medium before. It uses enormous computing and transmission powers to send data around the world in an instant with unlimited interactive communication.

Barack Obama's improbable electoral victory in November 2008 was the culmination not only of a successful message, an engaging candidate and historically tumultuous economic times for America; it happened to come along when the Internet environment had reached a benchmark of maturity.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project reported in 2008 that 75 percent of all Americans, or more than 147 million people, use the Internet, including and that 91 percent of people between 18 and 29 use the Internet.

Nielsen Online called this "the first truly digital campaign," and noted that on Nov. 4, 2008, 42.38 million unique audience members used current events and global news sites – up 27 percent from the week before.

With a large population online, especially young people, Obama's campaign was able to engage participation through new interactive tools including e-mail and text messaging, Twitter and Facebook, and the population's growing comfort with Internet commerce.

This essay will show through published statistics, contemporary reports and academic research reports that Obama built communities of people online who contributed money and then met in person to get out the vote. And without missing a step, the campaign moved into a transition mode that appears ready to harness is making every effort to keep that network of 10 million together for the future administration.

The Internet and politics: History

Campaign experts were unsure of how to use the Internet in its early years. A study of 1996 campaigns for U.S. Senate by Robert Klotz (1997) showed that assumptions that the Internet would level the playing field with open access for all had not come true, at least by 1996. But it was clear that candidates wanted to have a stake in the Internet, whether they thought it would help or not – and even if the material they posted to it bordered on the absurd:

In the 34 Senate races, 50 of 68 major-party candidates had home pages. Of the 20 races in which Libertarians fielded a candidate, only 9 candidates had a home page. On the whole, Libertarian candidates had the least sophisticated, least comprehensive, and most eclectic home pages of all candidates. Libertarian pages included the only candidate home pages which were incorporated into an academic home page with extensive documenting of the physics of polymer self-diffusion (Phillies 1996), or contained poetry. (Klotz, 1997, p. 484)

He goes on to say that, at the time, members of congress were less likely – 63 percent – to have campaign home pages than non-members – 82 percent. And those with less campaign money were less likely to have home pages than their well-heeled competitors by 56 percent to 79 percent, Klotz p. 484.

By 2000, however, candidates clearly recognized the growing potential of the Internet as a medium of persuasion.

Benoit and Benoit (2005) suggest on p. 232-234 eight advantages that candidates had realized by 2000:

- 1.) The Internet can spread information like television, radio and newspapers.
- 2.) The Internet's audience is huge and continually increasing.

- 3.) The Internet is not as expensive to use as television.
- 4.) The Internet allows campaigns to pass information to voters without a media filter.
- 5.) The Internet allows campaigns to respond quickly to charges from other campaigns.
- 6.) The Internet allows candidates to offer longer, more complete messages to voters.
- 7.) The Internet allows campaigns to send personalized messages to voters and allows voters, through chat rooms and other networks, the chance to put their own personal stamp on campaign information.
- 8.) The Internet can be interactive, collecting information from voters and Web site users and tailoring responses.

Other early lessons would later become crucial to the Obama campaign.

Although the Internet was still in an early growth phase during the 2000 campaign, candidates would find various ways to exploit its advantages early in the game.

Sen. John McCain earns an ironic footnote in this history for his use of Internet communication during his 2000 campaign for president:

Here's how politics has invaded cyberspace: In the hours of darkness between John McCain's victory in New Hampshire and the start of the next business day, he raised \$300,000 and found 4,000 new volunteers through his Website. By week's end the total was \$2 million and 22,000 volunteers-- numbers that would have been even higher had the site not become temporarily dysfunctional because of heavy traffic. (Birnbaum, 2000, p. 84)

Birnbaum (2000) writes that the Internet was already changing politics radically, especially because "a campaign contribution is a click and a credit card away." That, too, would become the origin of tens of thousands of small contributions that built a big foundation for Obama.

In 1998, Jesse Ventura stunned establishment pros by winning the Minnesota governor's race, Birnbaum writes, by, in part, e-mailing more than 4,000 supportive voters.

Now, campaign Websites are as common as bumper stickers. All major presidential campaigns have Internet departments that raise money, recruit and direct volunteers, and produce so-called banner ads that run on the top

or bottom of widely read Web pages. Some of those ads are targeted by cross-referencing lists of registered voters with Internet users. McCain did this when his campaign sought people to circulate petitions to get his name on the ballot in Virginia. (Birnbaum, 2000, p. 84)

The following scene by Rapaport (2000) gave those with an imagination a window into the future of campaigning:

Yes, Virginia (northern Virginia, to be specific), there is a Max Fose. I know this because I am sitting with the soon-to-be-legendary Webmaster of the John McCain presidential campaign and watching one of the damnedest political exercises the year 2000 campaign will likely produce. Fose is staring intently at a PC in his office at McCain's national headquarters in Alexandria. A spartan former printing plant, the place hums with the tension of a military command post on the eve of battle. Dozens of young men and women hunch forward in front of computers or talk urgently on their standard-issue Nokia cell phones.

Campaign donations scroll down the screen in relentless real-time display. Each of these Web-based credit card transactions is political ammunition, ready to be loaded, aimed, and fired on this day, one week before the Super Tuesday primaries. No muss, no fuss, no messy checks to be photocopied, sent to the bank, and cleared -- just sweet, instantly exploitable Visa, AmEx, and MasterCard electronic cash.

"I check the contributions several times a day," says the especially young-looking 28-year-old who is, at the moment, both wired and tired. He has been working 18-hour days for six months. "It's running close to \$30,000 an hour," he says, hard pressed to keep the wonder out of his voice. (Rapaport, 2000, para. 1-3.)

Politics, however, like commerce, is an art that must move forward or die, and as McCain would find to his dismay, the Democratic Party would be the next to adopt the best technology.

Howard Dean and modern Internet politics

The Internet's impact on elections has not happened in a vacuum.

The medium itself has driven much of the technological innovation that makes millions of individual contributions to campaigns possible. But so has the political environment in which the technology developed.

The 2004 election marked another quantum step in the fusion of politics with the Internet.

Darr (2006) writes, “The electorate was sharply divided over President George W. Bush and a war deeply unpopular with a substantial portion of the voters. And the Internet continued its emergence as a vehicle for political campaigns to inform, organize and raise money.”

Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean was the first to exploit these conditions early in 2004 as he kicked off his campaign.

Other candidates had discovered the potential of raising money online in 2000 – John McCain raised \$2.2 million in the week after the New Hampshire primary – but this was only a precursor to 2004. Dean raised more money online than any candidate before him, and raised a greater proportion of his total campaign funds from donors giving \$200 or less than any of the 2004 candidates except Dennis Kucinich. Dean also raised more money than any other Democratic candidate by the end of 2003, something that typically assures a candidate of the nomination. The other Democratic candidates relied on donors who contributed \$1,000 or more, which is the more traditional early fundraising path for presidential primary candidates. (Darr, 2006, p. 13)

According to Darr (2006), techniques developed during the 2004 campaign would become staples during Obama’s route to victory in 2007 and 2008:

- Appealing to a large number of small donors
- Using established Internet networking sites to draw the faithful together
- Understanding how the dynamics of Internet giving appeal to certain voters
- Understanding who uses the Internet and how to reach them.

Small donors are good for the political process. On one side are arguments made about the supposedly corrupting influence of large contributions. On the other side are a set of affirmative arguments about the importance of civic engagement. Getting more people to give even a little money is seen as healthy for the political process. More small donors indicate a broad and active electorate. Donations tie donors to the campaign, giving them a stake in the process and increasing the likelihood of their participating in other ways. (Darr, 2006, p. 13)

Simply by having a Web presence, a campaign is inviting interested donors, according to Darr (2006). A person looking for information about a campaign is already tuned in and has invited himself into a pool of potential donors.

And while postal mail solicitation was by far the most commonly used pitch by the Democratic Party, Darr (2006) writes, it's impossible to ignore the growing attention drawn by e-mail solicitation and Internet contact in general.

Using established sites

The Dean campaign used established Web operations, Meetup.com, for example, as organizing hubs for supporters with common interests. United by more than an affinity for the candidate, these supporters would often discuss an interest in their professions, hobbies or family life.

The service was tremendously popular at bringing together activists during the 2004 election, particularly supporters of Howard Dean early in the election. During much of the campaign supporters of Dean made up a large portion of all Meetup members. More than a year after the election the Democracy for America Meetups, an offshoot of the Dean campaign, still comprised more than 150,000 Meetup members. (Darr, 2006, p. 32)

Wolf (2004) goes deeper into the history of Dean's Internet bid.

Dean's Internet success was something of an accident, Wolf (2004) writes. In 2003, the candidate was lured to a meeting in New York City and found that 300 very active supporters had built their organization on Meetup.com, a tool he had not heard of before.

Back then, the leading group on the site was a club for witches. Zephyr Teachout, Dean's director of Internet outreach, describes sitting across from campaign manager Joe Trippi in the early weeks and hitting Refresh again and again on her Web browser. "I was obsessed with beating Witches," she says. "Witches had 15,000 members, and we had 3,000. I wanted first place." (Wolf, 2004, Web archive, para. 5)

Further:

By mid-November, the Howard Dean group on Meetup would have more than 140,000 members, though Meetup would matter less. After demonstrating his fundraising prowess, Dean bagged endorsements from two of the country's most powerful labor groups, the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. (Wolf, 2004, Web archive, para. 7)

Understanding how the Internet appeals to certain voters

Those who use the Internet tend to donate more heavily. And of those who donated on the Internet, 80 percent received campaign e-mails regularly, according to Darr (2006).

But more than that, those donors were also more engaged. It's hard to imagine someone who receives postal mail forwarding that mail along to another voter. But that's what happens with large frequency among Internet donors:

Online donors were far more likely to forward e-mail. Among people who received e-mail, 70 percent of online donors admitted they forwarded some along to others. Small donors do so as frequently as large donors. If they received e-mail, Democrats and Republicans were just as likely to forward it. (Darr, 2006, p. 40)

Dean's success on the Internet was not enough to propel him to victory, however, and his campaign broke down just after the Iowa Caucuses.

But his strategies would live on in many guises.

Mack (2004) wrote that Dean's strategy had as much to do with the activist nature of his supporters as by their willingness to donate:

As such, his site has an activist flavor and many touch points for involvement. Such a strategy "wouldn't suit every candidate. It fits Howard Dean well," says Morra Aarons, director of Internet communications for Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.). Visitors to Kerry's site are more inclined simply to be seeking information, Aarons says.

But the candidates are taking bits and pieces from Dean. "There are definitely tools and tricks that the Dean campaign uses that we've looked at and said, 'Oh, maybe we can use this,'" admits Mike Liddell, director of Internet strategy for Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.). Examples include posting images of Lieberman flanked by supporters, to visually illustrate the

fact that he has a following, and changing the site's Weblog from a diary to an interactive feature that welcomes comments from visitors. (Mack, 2004, Web archive, para. 11)

Internet banking: A parallel development

As voters who use the Internet have engaged in the political process, they have done so partially with tools that have enabled a revolution in commerce as well.

According to Checkfree.com's 2008 industry report, 67.9 million households, or 80 percent of the estimated 85.1 million U.S. online households, use online banking services, up from 63.4 million in the 2007 survey.

That suggests an unprecedented comfort level with the security, convenience and accuracy of online banking and commerce that is available to a broad section of the electorate.

Donors could use a credit or debit card to make contributions through a Web site, and campaigns could cut processing and reporting costs and get immediate access to the donation. Collecting small online contributions has become so easy and efficient that campaigns have greater incentives to pursue small donations. Thus these two important developments in American politics in 2004 – small donors and online giving – are closely related. (Darr, 2006, p. 27)

Mack (2004), in an interview with Darr, also pointed out the qualities that were unique to Dean's campaign:

Not everyone can do what Dean has done. The Internet plays to his strengths--just as TV played to the strengths of John F. Kennedy. Carol Darr, director of the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet in Washington, theorizes that "charismatic, outspoken mavericks" are the ones who attract Internet followings. "Since the Internet is interactive and it requires the user to take an affirmative action, to go to a Web site, to log on to a chat room, you have to have candidates that motivate people," she says. "It's not like couch potatoes, where you just sit there and are the passive recipient of whatever commercial comes along." (Mack, 2004, Web archive, para. 12)

It is possible, then, that while McCain billed himself as a "maverick" in his failed 2008 bid for the White House, it was Obama's cool-headed approach to organized activism that drew out the Internet participation he needed.

2004-2008: Internet engagement and the information explosion

The rise of the Internet has coincided with the slow demise of mass media.

Traditional newspapers, broadcast networks and other bulwarks of the information culture are now sharing the stage with a host of upstart players from blogs to robot news aggregators.

The price of admission to the Internet is cheap and the potential audience is limitless.

Individuals are actors in this medium, not just anonymous, passive consumers. With e-mail, personal Web sites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, text messaging, YouTube and other technologies, the world of what has been called “Web 2.0” is a fluid place where users collect and disperse an endless stream of information.

Clever campaign managers have seen the possibilities:

- With YouTube, a menu of the candidate’s speeches is “always on.” A good speech lives on long after its first broadcast.
- A candidate’s Web site is the crucial portal, the brand, the key fund-raiser and the social circuit for volunteers.
- Computer technology and an engaged electorate is a campaign marketer’s dream: creating endless possibilities for re-contacting voters during a campaign.
- And after a successful election? We may be entering the era in which elected officials can bypass conventional media and speak unfiltered to millions of voters without spending a dime for TV time.

The Age of Obama: From the Internet to the White House

Barack Obama’s winning strategy in the 2008 presidential election incorporated the best strategies and technologies that had gone before. Obama used these tools with care and calculation to help raise \$600 million and build a database of 10 million engaged supporters and potential volunteers.

It was the first national campaign to masterfully meld desktop, mobile, video and e-mail platforms into a seamless wave of constant communication to voters.

Obama did not ignore traditional media. But by relying heavily on new media, he found a way to bypass the traditional filters of television producers and newspaper editors to speak directly to voters with a message that he could fully control.

A new toolkit

By 2008, Internet tools and the Internet audience had reached a critical point. Tools had become effective, reliable and inexpensive ways to reach and receive feedback from the public. And Internet users – a growing percentage of the public – expected to interact with political candidates as they do with music sites, retailers, banks and news providers.

Miller (2004) interviewed Trippi and noted that Obama was able to do more than repeat Dean's best practices from 2004 because he had more money saving tools at his command:

Mr. Obama used the Internet to organize his supporters in a way that would have in the past required an army of volunteers and paid organizers on the ground, Mr. Trippi said.

"The tools changed between 2004 and 2008. Barack Obama won every single caucus state that matters, and he did it because of those tools, because he was able to move thousands of people to organize."

Mr. Obama's campaign took advantage of YouTube for free advertising. Mr. Trippi argued that those videos were more effective than television ads because viewers chose to watch them or received them from a friend instead of having their television shows interrupted.

"The campaign's official stuff they created for YouTube was watched for 14.5 million hours," Mr. Trippi said. "To buy 14.5 million hours on broadcast TV is \$47 million." (Miller, 2008, blog page)

Miller (2008) also notes that the Internet has turned the entire nation into fact-checkers. A lie or misstatement can hardly get through the web of dedicated amateur researchers before it is hunted down and corrected on a very public network.

Miller spoke with popular blog editor Arianna Huffington:

The John McCain campaign, for example, originally said that Governor Sarah Palin opposed the so-called bridge to nowhere in Alaska, Ms. Huffington said. "Online there was an absolutely obsessive campaign to prove that wrong," she said, and eventually the campaign stopped repeating it.

"In 2004, trust me, they would have gone on repeating it, because the echo chamber would not have been as facile," Ms. Huffington said.

The Internet also let people repeatedly listen to the candidates' own words in the face of attacks, Mr. Huffington said. As Reverend Jeremiah Wright's incendiary words kept surfacing, people could re-watch Mr. Obama's speech on race. To date, 6.7 million people have watched the 37-minute speech on YouTube. (Miller, 2008, blog page)

The right message: Winning the nomination

Voters now expect candidates to offer sophisticated Web sites.

Seven of the sixteen major candidates kicked off their bids online in 2007, according to a non-byline article in *The Economist* (2008).

But technology does not guarantee an excellent site any more than a fine instrument guarantees beautiful music. The player must set the right tone.

Republican McCain and Democrat Obama won their parties' nominations because they connected with voters through their stories, speeches and Web sites.

McCain won the Republican nomination, wrote Hirschorn (2008), because he managed to project his authenticity through all media, including his Internet messages.

The Democratic primary campaign between Obama and Sen. Hillary Clinton was as bitterly contentious as the general election would prove to be.

Hirschorn (2008) believes Obama ultimately won, in part, because he understood how to communicate using the Internet and Clinton did not.

In fact, Hirschorn (2008) suggests, Clinton's attempt to connect in a folksy way with Internet users came off as disingenuous and lacking authenticity.

He describes a series of e-mails that the campaign sent out to potential supporters as part of a fund-raising campaign. The e-mails were cast as a personal invitation to "do lunch" with Hillary Clinton. As they evolved, it became clear the campaign was asking supporters to donate money in exchange for a drawing that would allow three to be with former President Bill Clinton to watch a televised debate involving the senator.

The chummy approach, Hirschorn said, showed just how little the Clintons understood the Internet and its users.

For example, the e-mail from Bill said: "We'll sit down in front of a big TV with a big bowl of chips, watch the debate, and talk about the race."

Then, just like a sitcom wife, Hillary wrote: "Can I ask you a favor? Bill mentioned 'a big bowl of chips' in the email he sent you Tuesday. If you are one of the three people who get the chance to join him, can you make sure he eats carrots, not chips?"

Further:

Like watching Nixon sweat on television in 1960, to read Hillary's e-mail today is to experience an old dispensation crashing headlong into the new. Clearly, someone at Hillary HQ—or, more likely, a highly paid consultant—spent serious time building a multiplatform, interactive strategy to swathe the electorate in the marital faux togetherness of Bill and Hillary running for office. Someone thought, *Hey, let's really connect with the public and let them in on what it's truly like to be a candidate for president in 2008, dangle in front of them like a big pepperoni pizza the prospect of intimacy with a past and possibly future world leader.* (Italics by Hirschorn, 2008, p. 116)

It didn't work, he writes, because the electorate wants candidates who speak in straight language and don't patronize their audience. Obama's Web strategy used no artifice in its language -- just simple, direct appeals.

Although Hillary Clinton promised "a conversation" with voters early in her campaign, it was Obama who truly engaged without an overt appeal, Hirschorn says:

In early March, Obama sent me an e-mail. It presumed no intimacy. It was titled "Will you make a call for me?" And it asked me to call six people, and, if needed, employ a script that I could access on his Web site. The theme of the e-mail was "connection," and the idea behind it was that voters would be swayed more by hearing from their fellow voters than from the candidate directly. "The most extraordinary things happen at the personal level, when you can make that personal connection to a voter and discover that you share a common vision of what ought to be," the e-mail read. "Make a call and make that connection today." In its frank way, the strategy recalled the chain letters we received as kids, but it also got to the heart of what a digital era campaign could be: honest about its agenda, distributed, connected. A conversation, even. (Hirschorn, 2008, p. 118)

Even a veteran Obama-basher finds plenty of faults in the way Clinton prosecuted her Internet campaign, writes Krishnan (2008).

He describes watching a television speech by Dick Morris, former consultant for Bill Clinton and now an author.

Morris said one factor that hurt Hillary was her lack of appreciation of the power of the Internet. In contrast Obama built up a formidable online following. Morris reckoned Barack Obama had a million online donors who kept funding his campaign, whether or not he won a given primary. Hillary's fund flow dried out along the way. Referring to the Clintons' ignorance and lack of faith in the Internet, Morris claimed that neither Bill nor Hillary even knew how to type. They believed in drafting speeches in longhand. (Krishnan, 2008, p. 19)

McCain Vs. Obama: A Story of Numbers

When McCain and Obama emerged from their national conventions and the final push toward the Nov. 4 election began after Labor Day 2008, both candidates had honed their skills on carefully crafted Web sites.

But Obama had more money and numbers of people connected to his Internet networks.

The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism wrote the definitive pre-election study of the campaigns' Web presence: *McCain vs. Obama on the Web* (Uncredited, 2008).

This study examined nine key characteristics of a successful Web effort and made close comparisons.

According to the report, those aspects were:

- Site customization – Ways a user could tailor the page for personal preference
- Demographic group pages
- User comments on campaign blogs
- Citizen-initiated blogs — In addition to the official campaign blog, several candidates provided a tool for users to establish their own blogs.
- Information delivery options — Tools to deliver information directly to users: RSS feeds, Podcasts, e-mail updates, mobile updates, and search capability
- Grassroots activity — Fundraising, organizing community events and voter registration information
- Social Networking — The presence of “social networks” and the number of social networks that a candidate displayed on his/her Web site (on the home page or elsewhere). These were embedded links that led the user to the candidates' profiles on respective external social networking sites.
- Newsroom — The section on the site that lists articles not authored by the campaign. These are predominantly articles about the candidate that appear in

the mainstream media (including editorials) and appear as either links to an external site or the article as a whole with the source.

- Translation— An option to translate content into a second language.

The Pew report (2008) found that Obama's Web site at the early stages of the presidential race in 2007 was superior to McCain's.

But as McCain became his party's nominee, his Web presence grew more sophisticated and became nearly as savvy as Obama's but was never able to recruit sheer numbers of engaged and networked supporters the way Obama's site did.

The Pew report (2008) found that McCain's site improved its customization and socialization tools to encourage networking online and offline activities, but it lagged behind Obama's in several ways.

Obama's Web site, www.barackobama.com, created an easier path to action for supporters, who could get up-to-date campaign news, talking points, download campaign posters and flyers, make computer-assisted phone calls to undecided voters in swing states, and map out door-to-door canvassing operations in their area.

Even after the McCain site's improvements, the report said, Obama had more MySpace friends by a nearly 6-to-1 margin, more Facebook supporters by more than a 5-to-1 margin, twice as many videos posted to his official YouTube channel, and had more YouTube channel subscribers, by an 11-to-1 margin.

One reason for the gap, according to the Pew report, is that McCain's Web site did not link to any social networking sites on its home page. It offered a presence on six sites, however: MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Digg, Flickr and—added in September—LinkedIn. But supporters were left to find those on their own.

Another interesting aspect of the Obama site was its archive function:

The Obama Web site offered far more text than McCain's, by virtue of the extensive archive of Obama's speeches (in August alone, 50,676 words on Obama's Web site versus 21,021 on McCain's). If you take speeches by both candidates out of the mix, Obama's site still features more words than McCain's, but they are closer. (Pew, 2008, Web site p. 1)

By Election Day, the Obama Web site had attracted many more users than McCain's site. According to Hitwise, an Internet usage research company, the Obama Web site attracted around a 65 percent share of visits to the two presidential Web sites for the week ending Nov. 1, compared to around 35 percent for McCain's. (Hitwise, 2008)

Making the right moves

A number of factors contributed to Obama's popularity on the Internet. He appealed to young voters, a majority of whom are Internet users. He was obviously a broadly popular candidate in general. And he offered a consistent campaign message.

But how did the campaign get it right on the Web page?

Now the Democratic Party Chairman, Howard Dean had learned even in defeat that the party had a deeper reservoir of Internet campaign tactics than Republicans, who had waged more conventional campaigns with Karl Rove and George W. Bush.

To take the right steps in 2008 and make them stick, according to Carr (2008), Dean hired the man who invented Web browsing, Marc Andreessen.

The story of how they met can send a chill up the history buff's spine:

In February 2007, a friend called Marc Andreessen, a founder of Netscape and a board member of Facebook, and asked if he wanted to meet with a man with an idea that sounded preposterous on its face.

Always game for something new, Mr. Andreessen headed to the San Francisco airport late one night to hear the guy out. A junior member of a large and powerful organization with a thin, but impressive, résumé, he was about to take on far more powerful forces in a battle for leadership.

He wondered if social networking, with its tremendous communication capabilities and aggressive database development, might help him beat the overwhelming odds facing him.

"It was like a guy in a garage who was thinking of taking on the biggest names in the business," Mr. Andreessen recalled. "What he was doing shouldn't have been possible, but we see a lot of that out here and then something clicks. He was clearly supersmart and very entrepreneurial, a person who saw the world and the status quo as malleable."

And as it turned out, President-elect Barack Obama was right. (Carr, 2008, Business Page)

Obama's campaign didn't invent anything new, Carr writes: "Instead, by bolting together social networking applications under the banner of a movement, they created an unforeseen force to raise money, organize locally, fight smear campaigns and get out the vote that helped them topple the Clinton machine and then John McCain and the Republicans." (Business Page)

And the synthesis that remains could rearrange the base of the Democratic Party:

And his relationships are not the just traditional ties of Democrats — teachers' unions, party faithful and Hollywood moneybags — but a network of supporters who used a distributed model of phone banking to organize and get out the vote, helped raise a record-breaking \$600 million, and created all manner of media clips that were viewed millions of times. It was an online movement that begot offline behavior, including producing youth voter turnout that may have supplied the margin of victory. (Carr, 2008, Business Page)

Obama gave more points of access to potential donors, according to Business Week.

Toward the end of her campaign, Clinton made an appeal to the public to go to her Web site and do what they could to contribute.

The request hinted at a key failing of Clinton's online fund-raising strategy. Obama wasn't asking supporters to come to his Web site to give money. His campaign was bringing donation tools to sites where Web surfers already hung out: YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, blogs, and wherever else supporters could post Obama's campaign slogan and a bit of code.

The result is that donating to Obama's campaign has become impulse-buy easy. Feeling inspired by an Obama speech on YouTube? There's a place to donate up to \$1,000 right beside the video player on his YouTube channel. Been meaning to get more politically involved like your friends on Facebook? Just click on the Obama picture next to their social network profiles to go straight to a donation site on the social network.

"This is the first year — with Web 2.0 — that candidates gave the tools to the voters allowing them to help raise money," says Ravi Singh, CEO of ElectionMall.com, a nonpartisan software-as-a-service firm that helps candidates raise money online. "That is a big paradigm shift." (Holahan, 2008, p. 2)

Obama's next step

When Obama enters the White House, he won't leave his Internet organization behind. It is likely, in fact, that he will use it to communicate with his supporters and the public at large.

When he is inaugurated on Jan. 20, 2009, his administration will have a database of 10 million e-mail addresses. This is a resource with possibilities politicians have only just begun to explore.

Just as John F. Kennedy mastered television as a medium for taking his message to the public, Obama is poised to transform the art of political communication once again, said Joe Trippi, a Democratic strategist who first helped integrate the Internet into campaigning four years ago.

"He's going to be the first president to be connected in this way, directly, with millions of Americans," Trippi said.

The nucleus of that effort is an e-mail database considered so valuable that the Obama camp briefly offered it as collateral during a cash-flow crunch late in the campaign, though it wound up never needing the loan, senior aides said. At least 3.1 million people on the list donated money to Obama. (Murray and Mosk, 2008, Web archive)

Techniques of using the Internet for campaigning – posting speeches and interviews online, directly contacting supporters – will continue. For example, the transition team has posted Obama's interview on CBS's news show "60 Minutes" at www.barackobama.com, and campaign manager David Plouffe has used Obama's blog, <http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/hqblog>, to appeal for suggestions from supporters on how to run the administration.

Supporters are still actively communicating on Obama's networks, and, as Garofoli (2008) of the San Francisco Chronicle reports, the campaign has no shortage of suggestions for using the Internet to govern, from heavy use of video to daily "tweets" on Twitter talking about recent meetings or upcoming plans.

The pressures of the presidency and security concerns could seriously blunt those good intentions, however, and risk disappointing or even alienating an idealistic and enthusiastic support base for the president-elect.

The transition team may not know what the administration plans to do, or is lowering expectations, but few details have emerged yet, Garofoli (2008) writes.

Some ideas have come from Mathoda (2008), a lawyer and money manager who blogs at Mathoda.com.

Mathoda (2008) predicts that Obama could communicate at almost no cost with any number of supporters to direct their influence to representatives and senators, and to contribute to specific issues, even down to the zip code level.

For Obama, that means acting more as a modern manager who sets a message and lets the rank and file determine its direction.

In some ways, controlling an Internet social network is about channeling its energies in moments of need, but otherwise just providing it tools and then allowing it to undertake its own path. Many Obama campaign messages

have not been things the campaign has created but items created by the crowd that the campaign chooses to highlight. (Mathoda, 2008, Web archive)

Rather than fighting the bureaucracy or opponents from within Washington, Obama may use the same tactics he used against campaign opponents: Provide information and action guidelines to his supporters who can take over and help him get things done with their own influence, according to Mathoda (2008).

Obama clearly has a delicate challenge ahead. On one hand, his enthusiastic and idealistic base of supporters may easily work to achieve his goals. But if the pressures of the presidency and security concerns blunt Obama's Internet tactics, millions could be disappointed if the approach is less than truthful, crystal clear and transparent.

Critical analysis

To use a well-put cliché, much of the research available for this topic is "a mile wide and an inch deep." Hundreds of newspaper stories about Obama's Internet campaign provide the basics. Many assert his mastery of the medium. Few explain, however, exactly how and why Obama triumphed partly through the Web.

In the end, this author culled through short, superficial research to find, and build upon, older research papers and articles that explained early techniques for Internet campaigning.

For example, Birnbaum (2000) wrote a fresh approach to McCain's 2000 campaign for president, and the parallels were striking. The technology wasn't as sophisticated, but Birnbaum's reporting clearly showed that the seeds were planted for this endeavor.

Research about the 2004 race using Howard Dean as the model Internet campaigner further deepened the case that this medium was gaining steam. Wolf (2004), for example, in a relatively short piece called *How the Internet invented Howard Dean*, used a clever title and surprising revelations to show that this form of campaign marketing is as much serendipity as technology. It was Wolf's clever journalism that, again, resonates today because it highlights the simple and surprising origin of Dean's Internet primacy.

Benoit and Benoit (2005) wrote the only definitive story out of hundreds viewed that offered a basic format for *Criteria for evaluating political campaign Webpages*. It showed in a scholarly and heavily researched journal article just how far standards had changed for effective Internet communication. Compared with the pages that Klotz (1997) looked at in a piece about senate campaigns, Benoit and Benoit also showed how technology had grown. Klotz suggested a candidate was superior if he had a page, regardless of its quality.

Carol Darr, executive director of the Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, edited the definitive early report about the emergence of online giving in the 2004 campaign for president, *Small donors and online giving* (2006).

Although no longer definitive for today's complex politics, Darr's report features deeply researched commentary from an original survey of 1,500 small donors. The critical researcher of today's politics will find its principles and ideas central to understanding the mechanics of the strategy.

A researcher must find good information in 2008 wherever he can, since the history was being written on the fly. A statistic from Nielsen Online here, a deep composite of the electorate and the Internet from Pew Internet & American Life Project there, culled with a critical eye, can help build an enormous portfolio of data for this election year.

Some current work seemed to be over-written in Obama's favor, such as a piece in Rolling Stone called The Machinery of Hope that ran March 20. Dickinson (2008) provided an entertaining overview of the Obama machine, but this paper called for more definitive and conclusive work.

Perhaps the most informative article of the year, one which added polish to a wealth of raw information, was written by Carr (2008). His *How Obama tapped into social networks' power*, from the New York Times of November 10, 2008, showed how Obama propelled himself beyond simple Internet marketing and set himself up to be a president that governs through the Internet.

Conclusion

Barack Obama would not have won the 2008 presidential election without broad support from 66.7 million American voters.

Eighteen percent of those voters were between 18 and 29 years old, according to the National Exit Polls Table at elections.nytimes.com.

And, according to that report, 66 percent of those young people supported Obama.

Because of Obama's superior use of the Internet for communication, fund raising and network building, he was able to reach more young people than his opponent because 91 percent of young people use the Internet.

As the Internet matures, those voters will also mature, and new generations will be immediately exposed to the medium we now consider "new."

Historians will likely look at the election of 2008 as a major turning point for political strategy.

References

Americans were highly engaged in presidential election at the polls and on the Web, according to Nielsen Online. (November 4, 2008). Nielsen Online. Retrieved November 21, 2008 from http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/pr_081105.pdf

Benoit, P.J. and Benoit, W.L. (2005, Spring). *Criteria for evaluating political campaign Webpages.* Southern Communications Journal, 230-247. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website
https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/commmon/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Birnbaum, J.H. (2000, March 3). *Politicking on the Internet.* Fortune, 84-86. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website
https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/commmon/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Carr, D. (2008, November 10). *How Obama tapped into social networks' power*. New York Times. Retrieved November 21, 2008, from Website http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/10/business/media/10carr.html?_r=2&oref=slogi_n&ref=business&pagewanted=print.

Darr, C.C. (2006, March). *Small donors and online giving*, 1-64. Institute for Politics Democracy & the Internet. Retrieved on Nov. 13, 2008 from http://www.cfinst.org/books_reports/pdf/IPDI_SmallDonors.pdf.

Demographics of Internet users. (2008, October 20). Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved November 21, 2008 from http://www.pewinternet.org/trends/User_Demo_10%2020%2008.htm

Dickinson, T. (2008, March 20). *The Machinery of Hope*. Rolling Stone. Retrieved Nov. 15, 2008, from www.rollingstone.com

Flickering here, twittering there. (August 16, 2008). Economist. Retrieved November 7, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Garofoli, J. (2008, November 24). *Obama testing ways to use Internet to govern*. San Francisco Chronicle. Retrieved November 28, 2008, from <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/11/23/MN7214842D.DTL&type=politics>.

Hirschorn, M. (2008, May). *Only connect*. Atlantic Monthly. Retrieved November 29, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Holahan, C. (2008, August 26). *Has Obama already won in online fund-raising?* Business Week Online. Retrieved November 7, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Klotz, R. (1997, September). *Positive spin: senate campaigning on the Web*. Political Science and Politics, 482-486. Retrieved from JSTOR database through UNC

University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website

https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/commmon/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Krishnan, V. (2008, August). *The idea of Obama*. Siliconindia. Retrieved November 7, 2008, from Business Search Premier database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website

https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/commmon/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Mack, A.M. (2004, January 26). *Politicians log on*. MediaWeek. Retrieved from Communication & Mass Media Complete database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website

https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/commmon/course.pl?course_id=286043_1.

Mathoda, R. (2008, March 20). *The coming digital presidency*. Mathoda.com. Retrieved November 22, 2008, from <http://mathoda.com/archives/189>.

McCain vs. Obama on the Web. (2008, September 15). The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. Retrieved Nov. 14, 2008, from Website <http://journalism.org/node/12773>.

Miller, C.C. (2008, November 7). *How Obama's Internet campaign changed politics.* Retrieved Nov. 21, 2008, from The New York Times online blog Bits. Website Bits.blogs.nytimes.com.

Mosk, M. and Murray, M. (2008, November 10). *Under Obama, Web would be the way.* Washington Post. Retrieved November 21, 2008, from Website http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/10/AR2008111000013_pf.html.

National exit polls table. (2008, November 5). New York Times. Retrieved November 27, 2008, from Website <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html?scp=1&sq=national%20exit%20polls%20table&st=cse>.

Rapaport, R. (2000, May 29). *NET VS. NORM.* Forbes, 53-60. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database through UNC University Libraries E-Research Tools. Website

[https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/commmon/course.pl?course_id= 286043 1.](https://blackboard.unc.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/commmon/course.pl?course_id=286043_1)

Top presidential candidate 2008 Websites. (2008, week ending November 15, 2008).

Hitwise.com. Retrieved Nov. 28, 2008, from Website

<http://www.hitwise.com/political-data-center/key-candidates.php>.

Wolf, G. (2004, January). *How the Internet invented Howard Dean.* WIRED. Retrieved

Nov. 21 from <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.01/dean.html>