



Political consultants say online campaigning will dominate in 10 years

Washington, D.C., March 29, 2009 – In the 2008 elections, Americans saw lots of TV ads and received lots of direct mail from politicians, but political consultants predict that their campaign communications tactics will change dramatically as they become more effective at using online technology and social networking.

Political consultants from around the country turned the tables for the American Association of Political Consultants' (AAPC) 18th Annual Conference this weekend, polling themselves about the state of their industry and using the results to understand how they'll persuade voters in the future.

The study conducted for The AAPC by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates reveals that both Democratic and Republican consultants are still loyal to traditional voter contact tools such as television advertising and direct mail, but that use of these practices will diminish as the online campaign revolution continues.

In 2008 the consultants polled report that their campaigns spent most of their money on either direct mail (31.4%) or television advertising (32.6%). But professionals say the mix of their voter contact budget is already changing, and that ten years from now Internet advertising and outreach (30.7) will edge out TV (29%) and direct mail (22.9%). Specifically, professionals say that email (58%), posting videos online (44%), social networking (42%) and blogging (32%) will play very important roles in reaching and mobilizing voters in the 2010 election cycle.

Last year, however, professionals struggled to integrate new technologies and optimize online outreach efforts. Only one in three consultants (35%) say the campaigns they worked on in 2008 did an excellent job integrating e-mail into their approach. 22% say their campaigns did an excellent job using online videos, and only 10% say they did an excellent job blogging.

"As the profession of political consulting evolves technologically, its economic impact is growing. Professionals estimate that they each exercised direct or indirect decision-making over spending \$500,000 [median amount] with businesses other than their own during the 2008 election cycle," said AAPC President Whit Ayres.

Despite the recent economic downturn, this impact is likely to continue. Only about 10% of respondents believe that campaign spending will be reduced "a lot" in the 2010 election cycle.

When it comes to what partisan consultants think about their own party strengths and weaknesses, 38% of Republicans recognize that leveraging new technology is their party's biggest weakness; for Democrats it's crafting effective messages (33%).

"Rather than thinking of politics as a set of short-term campaigns, political consulting is evolving into a secure profession," said pollster Derek Richer of Penn, Schoen & Berland. "Two thirds of consultants have worked on political campaigns for over 11 years, and most of them intend to stay in the business for at least another decade."

When asked what they would do if they were not working in the political profession, the number one answer was "I can't imagine working in any other field".

Methodology: Penn, Schoen, and Berland Associates, LLC, conducted the Internet survey from March 5th 2009 to March 23rd 2009 among 401 political professionals. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 3.9% at the 95% confidence level and larger for subgroups.

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Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, a unit of the WPP group (NASDAQ = WPPGY) is a global research-based consultancy that specializes in messaging and communications strategy for blue-chip political, corporate and entertainment clients. We have over 30 years of experience in leveraging unique insights about consumer opinion to provide clients with a competitive advantage - what we call Winning Knowledge™. PSB executes polling and message testing services for Fortune 100 corporations and has helped elect more than 30 presidents and prime ministers around the world. More information is available at www.psbresearch.com.

The AAPC is a multi-partisan trade association with over 2,500 members from all fifty states, territories, and other countries. Membership reflects a wide range of ideologies, partisan affiliations, and professional specialties, and includes students and academics.