

[SMALL BUSINESS TECH GUIDE]

THE POLITICS OF WEB STRATEGY

Obama's smart use of the Web helped him tap into key demographics; here's how you can do the same

SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS, TAKE NOTE: BARACK OBAMA has changed the political game, simply by utilizing the Web. By tapping into technology resources ignored by previous political strategists, Obama's campaign has forced entrepreneurs to rethink "business as usual."

Obama shrewdly signed on Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes as a key Web strategist for his campaign. **BLACK ENTERPRISE** has identified four key strategies that Hughes and his team developed: smart Website design and functionality,

active engagement with social networking media, a merging of old practices with new technology, and an embrace of user-specific access (users decide how they want to receive information and when).

The campaign's Web strategy generated unprecedented support for a presidential bid and, as important, a projected \$500 million in campaign contributions. How can you use the Internet to exploit your company's potential to reap big bucks? Follow Obama's blueprint for online success.

THE STRATEGY:**Smart Web Design and Functionality**

- **What He Did:** Built and leveraged his brand; BarackObama.com looks and feels presidential. It satisfies many of our expectations of what a future president should be: an organized, effective, forward-looking leader.
- **How He Did It:** Clean, easy-to-navigate Web pages
 - Prominent "Donate Now" button lets prospective donors easily click and donate from as little as \$25 up to \$2,300; they can also opt to donate monthly.
 - Visitors can type in their ZIP code to get a listing of nearby Obama events, sign up to volunteer as fund-raisers or canvassers, and receive a personal e-mail with their task or a list of names to call.
- **Bottom Line:** Your site must work for you. It should look and feel like your product and offer potential customers a unique, personalized experience.

THE STRATEGY:**Engaging Social Networking Sites**

- **What He Did:** Obama heeded the social networking call: Facebook, MyBatanga, LinkedIn, Twitter. He was there before Web 2.0 became the latest buzz phrase. He also created his own social network, My.BarackObama.com.
- **How He Did It:** My.BarackObama.com lets users send and receive messages, organize and host events, and even create their own Obama blogs.
 - On LinkedIn.com, he engaged professional networkers in discussions about the future of American business.
 - Obama used social networking sites to accomplish his goals—organizing, canvassing, and fund-raising—free of charge.
- **Bottom Line:** Targeted marketing is the takeaway lesson here, says Omar Wasow, co-founder of BlackPlanet.com. "The campaign has been smart about joining online communities and developing targeted messages for each audience, and they've been masterful at providing tools that allow supporters to self-organize on behalf of Obama's candidacy."



THE STRATEGY:

Merging Old Practices with New Technologies

- **What He Did:** Shared his energy plan with site members
- **How He Did It:** Obama's Web team used customer relationship management, or CRM, software to group and sort important information from the Website in a centralized contact database. This enabled the campaign to easily use electronic media to send out updates. Additionally, the Web staff could track the effectiveness of Obama's messages by analyzing e-mail open and click-through rates.
— Obama used Twitter (www.twitter.com), a microblogging service, to send out quick status updates along with a video announcing that his energy plan was available online. The campaign also uploaded a copy of the plan to his profile on Scribd (www.scribd.com), a popular document-sharing site.
- **Bottom Line:** Although August 2008 figures for unique site visits were unavailable at press time, the campaign peaked in January with roughly 3.25 million unique visitors and hovered around 2 million in July.

Yes, You Can ... Here's How

BARACK OBAMA'S USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES caught the attention of Bullock and CRM expert Brent Leary. Bullock, managing director at the White Bullock Group Inc., and Leary, co-founder of CRM Essentials L.L.C., were so intrigued by the Obama campaign's consistent use of social utilities that they began tracking the campaign's weekly innovations via their own site, Barack 2.0 (www.barack20.com).

"Many people view Obama's bid in historic terms, for potentially being the country's first African American president. But he can also make history for being our first CRM/social media president," says Leary. "And small businesses can learn a great deal from studying how Obama used social tools and strategies to meaningfully connect with people from all walks of life."

For business owners who are looking to promote their message in the marketplace, adds Bullock, the Obama campaign can serve as a powerful blueprint. "It shows them a real-world example of the positive effects of using the Internet as a marketing channel."

Some tools to get you started:

Zoho CRM (www.crm.zoho.com). A complete, on-demand solution, Zoho CRM is free for the first three members of a business. Tools include inventory management, customer support and service, and analytics.

Twitter (www.twitter.com). A microblog, Twitter lets members broadcast their activities and businesses quickly and easily. Receive "tweets" (messages) via mobile devices or the TweetDeck, an Adobe Air desktop application, currently in beta testing.

Scribd (www.scribd.com). A social document-sharing Website, Scribd lets you upload a variety of documents. The site offers free, unlimited storage and works with both Macs and PCs.

Google (www.google.com). Head to Google to check out easy-to-use small business tools such as Google Analytics and Website Optimizer.



THE STRATEGY:

Encourage User Choice

- **What He Did:** Announced his choice for vice president via text message
- **How He Did It:** Although the announcement didn't work out as planned, visitors who signed up online received a text message informing them of Obama's selection.
- **Bottom Line:** Choice entices customers, says Internet marketing guru David Bullock, and it's a cost-effective way to keep you connected with your clients. But, he stresses, "It's important to let your customers make the call on how they want to be reached."

—Alwin A.D. Jones