

March 28, 2006

Case Study: GREEN PARTY OF CANADA

Email's viral properties give legs to grassroots petition campaign

Challenge

The Green Party of Canada needed to get a message to people across Canada – not just its own supporters – and they needed to spread it quickly and cheaply. Because the party garnered 4% of the vote in the 2004 federal election and was running a candidate in each of the country's 308 ridings in the 2006 election, it felt its leader should appear in the nationally televised leaders' debates. The party knew many Canadians agreed. But how to reach those people and motivate them to tell broadcasters that the Green Party should have its podium?

Solution

Alison Keys, president of Ottawa-based Keys Direct Marketing & Communications Inc., quickly settled on an email campaign to mobilize support for Greens in the debate. Keys knew email's viral capabilities and its appeal to savvy Green supporters made it a natural medium to get people talking about the issue.

"We started with a fairly small number of names," says Keys. "We needed to contact more without the expense of direct mail. And we needed a message that would get people's attention and get them excited enough to sign a petition."

Email fulfilled the low-budget, high-reach criteria; it suited the Green Party's goal of reducing paper use, and it gave the campaign a personal touch. "We are a grassroots organization so we make use of technology that empowers multidirectional grassroots communication, not just one-way broadcasting," says Green Party Executive Director Jean Langlois.

Keys came up with the message "defend your right as a voter" to appeal to people's sense of justice. Her firm then put together an email invitation encouraging people to sign an online petition and turned to an outside supplier to deploy it.

Problems soon emerged: One message was sent before it was approved, the vital "forward to a friend" function wasn't working, and the outside firm didn't capture much of the valuable data generated by the campaign, such as who opened the message, who forwarded it and what issues recipients felt were important in the election. Keys then turned to the email-marketing specialists at Inbox Marketer Inc. to turn the campaign around.

"We understood the importance of the viral aspect of the campaign," says Inbox account executive Sarah Haggerty, "so we designed the interface to allow recipients to forward the message to 20 friends." Inbox tracked open rates, click-through rates and who sent the message to friends, as well

Inbox Marketer



as whether the friends signed the petition. Inbox also tallied which election issues respondents felt were most important and invited recipients to sign up for future mailings.

When Canadians signed the petition, a message indicating their support was automatically sent to the television networks, as well as to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, and Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

Results

The forward-to-a-friend function really “clicked” with Canadians. More than 44,000 people received the invitation to sign the petition through this function. By election day nearly 49,000 people had signed the online petition.

The Greens’ Langlois says Inbox’s quick turnaround time and grasp of the party’s needs were invaluable during the pressures of an election campaign. He adds that using an outside email supplier was more cost-effective than doing it in-house. And the Green Party has a valuable database to mine for future campaigns.

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