

## Best Practices for Creating a Political Brand

Creating a brand is a demanding and comprehensive endeavor. In advertising, it is one of the challenges we face everyday – helping clients “find themselves” and craft their brand by pushing them to achieve their goals. Political advertising is unique in that it’s not a product or even a typical service; it’s a person, or perhaps a proposition. Either way, the steps are inherently the same compared to a product or service, so let’s walk through the best practices of political branding.

First, perform a SWOT analysis of the candidate. A SWOT analysis identifies and clearly defines the brand’s, or in this case the candidate’s, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The analysis is a very powerful tool, providing insight into potential and critical issues affecting brand positioning.

The SWOT process is as follows:

### **Strengths. (Internal)**

Strengths reflect the positive attributes, tangible and intangible, of your candidate. What does your candidate do well? What resources does your candidate have? What advantages does he or she have over the competition and how will this benefit others?

The evaluation should include the candidate’s strengths by area, experience, accomplishments, skills, values, ethics, education and political exposure – to name a few. The same is to be said if you’re pushing a proposition. Highlight its benefits and possible results, as well as how it serves to influence voters for the better.

### **Weaknesses. (Internal)**

Note the weaknesses held by your candidate or proposition. These weaknesses are areas or factors that are within your control. They may hamper your ability to obtain or maintain a competitive political edge, but can be looked upon as opportunities. Which areas might you improve?

Weaknesses might include lack of expertise, insufficient resources, negative public perception, limited experience or poor performance record. These factors might be under your control, but for a variety of reasons, need improvement to effectively accomplish your goals.

### **Opportunities. (External)**

Opportunities assess the external attractive factors that represent the reason for your candidate or proposition to exist. What opportunities are there and how will they benefit the mission?

These opportunities offer capitalization potential through the implementation of your branding efforts, followed by the marketing strategies. Opportunities may arise as the result of political situations, lifestyle changes, community

perceptions, legal issues and economic factors. Be sure to place timeframes around these opportunities, if possible. Does it represent an ongoing opportunity, or is it a window of opportunity? How critical is your timing? Opportunities are external to your brand and marketing strategy. For those internal opportunities that are within your control, classify them as strengths.

#### **Threats. (External)**

What factors are potential threats to your candidate's brand? Threats include factors that are out of your control and could place the brand at risk or create obstacles in gaining acceptance. These are also external to your brand. A threat is an obstacle created by an unfavorable development that may lead to deteriorating public support or perception. Competition – existing or potential – is always a threat no matter what you are branding. Other threats may include governmental regulation, economic downturns, devastating media or press coverage, shifts in public opinion and/or behavior and social issues. Get your worst fears out in the open and commence planning to avoid tarnishing your brand's perception.

It can be valuable to organize your threats according to their seriousness, probability of occurrence and relevance. The more successfully you identify threats, the more likely you will be able to position the candidate proactively.

#### **Beyond the SWOT Analysis.**

A SWOT analysis is just one of many tools used in best practices for crafting a solid political brand. Leveraging that insight is time well invested.

Now that you have completed the SWOT, take your learnings and apply these other branding principles. Good brands tell good stories. It's crucial to humanize your brand so people can connect on a personal level. The emotional connection provided by this strategy serves as the perfect platform needed to create a compelling reason for people to champion a cause or candidate. A brand's personality is formally defined as "a set of human characteristics associated with the name of a product, service or company." So, quite literally, brand personality attributes are "brand adjectives."

Furthermore, creating a solid brand that clearly understands the target audience is paramount. Your candidate should appeal to the people you want to reach. Do you know who these constituents are? Determine the characteristics of the average voter you wish to engage. Next, determine a demographic profile of your target audience:

- Age: How old is your audience? (Range and average)
- Gender: Which gender more naturally relates to the ideals and position?
- Income: What is the household income of the target audience?
- Education: What is their level of education, and how well will they comprehend your messaging?
- Location: Where does your audience reside?
- Marital Status: What is their marital status, as well as family or household size? If they are single, is marriage important to them?
- Lifestyle: Determine the values and lifestyle preferences of your target audience.

- Values: What does your audience value most?
- Influencers: Where do they get most of their decision-making information?
- Mediums: Do they research through the Internet, newspapers, books or television?
- Psychology: Are they first responders or followers?

Then, determine how you intend your target audience to interact with your brand:

- How will your target audience benefit from your message, platform, campaign or brand?
- What do they generally like or dislike about your message?
- What are their interests?

The breadth of these exercises can be as broad stroked or as in-depth as you prefer, based on the information needed to accomplish the goal. Once this information is collected and applied to the branding process, a comprehensive testing of the brand should be completed.

#### **Research and Test the Brand and Platform.**

There are several venues available for testing a candidate's brand and platform. The proper testing is necessary to ensure the brand is being delivered effectively and achieving your desired result. Here are a few considerations:

- Focus Groups (including social media groups)
- Interactive Polling
- Trackable Direct Marketing
- Online Surveys

Once your brand messaging has been solidified and the marketing and communications strategies are in place, do not overlook the importance of including analytics to measure effectiveness. Analytics will pay dividends over the course of a campaign allowing you to make informed decisions on what channels are delivering the results you're seeking – and then modify as needed.

Whatever your political affiliation, proper branding and marketing can make the difference between success and failure. What is your perspective on President Obama's ability to brand himself and continue to connect with voters?

- I'm Chris LeBlanc – evok's vice president, creative director – and I approve this white paper.