

times you need to be in front of it and very much in control of the situation.

- Know how much money you can spare to respond to any negative or set-up. Contributors are especially anxious to pony up another contribution if it means countering a dirty trick or attack.
- Determine objectively the impact a dirty trick has had on the campaign. Do not overreact by acting like a victim and overplaying your response.
- Catch yourself before a dirty trick undermines your momentum. Don't be obsessed with one negative; watch for others to be launched from other fronts.
- Get back to your message. She who sets the agenda, especially in the final days of a campaign, is much more likely to win.

Follow this advice, and you'll not only stave off dirty tricks, you'll turn them into an opportunity to strengthen your own agenda.

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How to Manage Your Voter File

by Bob Blaemire

It took a long time, but now nearly everyone gets it: A good campaign requires a good voter file. That's a welcome development for all of us in the business of political targeting and voter contact. But, as they say, the devil is in the details. Here are some keys to getting and managing the kind of voter file that helps win elections.

Know where to get a high-quality voter file.

From a planning perspective, it helps to understand the options and make your decision early in the campaign cycle. There is no reason for a campaign to re-invent the wheel by creating a voter file from scratch. That takes time, shifts the focus away from developing a good campaign strategy and rarely results in cost-savings that are worth the effort.

Though the state party may be the place to go for your voter file, it's critical to understand precisely what you're getting before you buy anything. The base cost should not be the sole criterion when selecting a voter file for your campaign. You should seriously consider factors like customer service, data quality, hygiene, in-cycle updates and the data handling tools. Also,

Rule of thumb: Don't do anything more costly than "thinking" until you get at least some money up front.

make sure you talk to previous users of the state party file before you write a check.

Beyond the state party, voter file vendors offer plenty of options, including specialty lists, modeling and a wide range of business and political experience. Be tough and thorough when assessing vendors' service options. And get assurances the vendor can provide in-house voter file expertise. Your vendor should have the deep bench strength, voter-file knowledge and internal resources to answer any question your campaign has about the data.

Know the kind of data you need.

Every campaign requires certain basic information: current name, address, age, party (in party registration states), voter history and political geography. However, you should think ahead about those issues relevant to your specific campaign and decide which data sets can help you better find your targets: those voters who are more likely to respond to your campaign based on an issue.

For instance, if classroom size in the public schools is your issue, you need to be able to find households most likely to have school-age children. If rent control is your issue, knowing who rents and who owns is critical. The potential list is endless.

Don't be penny wise and pound foolish. Trying to save money that prevents you from being efficient in your targeting and voter contact actually costs you more in the end.

Know when to have the voter file available.

If you believe that good planning leads to good results, then the answer is obvious: Make your voter file decision early in the campaign cycle. You'll not only save time and money over the long haul, but will avoid uncertainty and exasperation in the middle of the campaign. A file created late in the cycle may prevent you from doing effective direct mail or phone programs when you need them most. Walk lists produced without adequate time to implement the program will hurt your effort.

A good voter file lets you make early, responsive and accurate targeting decisions within and among the groups your campaign has identified. Remember, these decisions will have an impact on program budgets. A strong file allows for better budgeting and decision-making because it puts counts, lists and targeted universes at your fingertips.

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