



Effective Voter Targeting

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Voter targeting is the process of identifying and contacting a desirable group of voters with a specific message tailored to the recipients. The process is important because campaigns do not have the time, money, or resources to effectively contact every voter in their district. More specifically, campaigns should not be contacting voters who will not turn out to vote or support their candidate or ballot issue.

If you are running for an elected office, you are probably very interested in politics and you probably vote in every election. It would, however, be a mistake to assume all voters share your views and voting behavior.

In reality, a large portion of people who are registered to vote do not participate in elections. Two obvious reasons for not voting are death or change in residency (moved). The third major reason is simple lack of interest. What makes this reason more significant is that voter interest varies with each election.

In November of 2008, roughly eighty percent of the voters in California turned out to vote in the presidential election. In a statewide election six months later (May of 2009), less than thirty percent turned out to vote. Effective voter targeting will help you identify voters who are likely to turnout for an upcoming election based on their participation in previous election cycles that had similar characteristics.

In addition to focusing resources on voters who are likely to turn out to vote, campaigns should also target individuals most likely to support their campaign. Campaigns can use voter data to target potential supporters and avoid wasting resources on individuals who are unlikely to vote for them. The bottom line is that intelligent utilization of voter targeting helps campaigns efficiently and effectively contact voters.

The first step in targeting voters is acquiring a statistical count report for your district. You can get these reports online from several data vendor websites or by contacting a data vendor. You should never have to pay for a count report.

A good count report will tell you exactly how many voters are in your district and break down the numbers by turnout propensity, party, age, gender, ethnicity and many other variables. The report should also provide a count of individuals (voters) and households.



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The individual counts are important – to make sure you are on track statistically to contact enough individual voters to win your election. Once a sound estimate is determined, a campaign can begin to put a strategy and budget in place. Unfortunately, this process is not simple and requires a combination of thorough research and gut instinct. Multiple candidates in your race and the turnout influence of other races on your ballot can make this step more complicated. The voter count also helps assess your campaigns productivity so you can examine if you are contacting enough voters to justify the required resources.

The household count is necessary for budgeting resources, since you actually make only one contact per household. For example, if a household has three voters in your universe, you only want to send one mail piece addressed to the three individuals, make one phone call (requesting to speak with the three individuals), and have one person to canvass their house.

The next step is to identify which voters are most likely to turn out to vote in your election cycle. While it is impossible to know exactly who will vote in a specific election, campaigns can utilize voter information to identify likely voters. The best predictor is vote history followed by permanent absentee status, home ownership, and age. If a voter has demonstrated a propensity to vote in similar types of elections, one can assume that they will continue their pattern. Permanent Absentee Voters are more likely to vote by anywhere from about 10% to 50%. Homeowners generally demonstrate a greater vested interest in their community and vote accordingly. In most cases, older Americans vote at a higher rate than younger voters.

The third step is to predict which voters would most likely vote for your candidate or ballot issue. Party affiliation, gender, age and ethnicity are the most frequently used fields for providing insight on how an individual may cast their ballot. Contacting voters and recording their opinion about a candidate or ballot issue provide the strongest indicator of how one will vote.

The final step is to identify when voter will cast their ballot. Voters can either be Vote by Mail voters (VBM) or poll voters. Vote by Mail ballots currently make up nearly half of all ballots cast in many elections. The percentage of mail ballots increase as the overall turnout decreases. Identifying these voters is crucial in order to make sure your campaign is adequately communicating your message before the voters return their



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ballot. Successful campaigns must have a VBM strategy as well as an Election Day voter strategy.

As sophisticated as some people make targeting voters seem -- it is mostly common sense. Campaigns want to contact voters who are likely to turnout and likely to vote for their campaign. There are many books devoted entirely to this subject and the importance of targeting cannot be overstated. Very few campaigns have unlimited money and volunteers at their disposal. Doing your homework and spending some time studying your district will ensure the resources you have are used effectively.

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