

Obama 2.0 – how the West was won

So, the USA's Presidential election is over. Reason finally won out over fear. Or did it? Has the fear merely transmuted from one insidious form of terror into another?

What should have happened four years ago has now finally happened. But so much damage has been done over the last four years that the new President's agenda will be severely compromised.

Last election, America was dissatisfied with the Bush administration but allowed their personal fear and cowardice to colour their voting choices.

But fears of possible terrorist attacks pale in comparison to waking up every day worrying about where the money to pay the bills will come from. That's tangible fear that affects nearly every American.

So now the complexion of America has changed and not just literally. A new President will replace

an old one. The old one is a decent man but proved incompetent as President - not the first time that has happened. Often, we have the opposite. We can only hope the new president is both decent and competent.



Obama's strategists unleashed the power of the Internet and took it to a new level. Be prepared for a wired presidency that could have unprecedented influence.

But what does this election mean and what does it tell us about a changing America?

First and foremost, the Republican party's terribly misguided and damaging emphasis on social issues - faith-based politics (a sacrilege in a country that fervently believes in separation of Church and State), anti-women's rights, anti-immigration - has proven disastrous. These were directed at and appeal to, a diminishing demographic. They have dug a deep hole for themselves and can spend the next four years arguing about how to climb out of it.

Talk about having to re-brand oneself. Good luck!

Do what companies do. Change your name, hire an ad agency and PR firm and start over. But this time, become more attuned to the changing demographic and philosophy of the American people.

Victory touch-points

It can be debated as to what the touch-points were for the impressive Obama victory. Was it mainly an anti-Bush reaction? The economy? The war in Iraq? A surge in new voter - mostly democratic - registration among the young, black and Hispanic demographics? Or just a cyclical need for change that Americans are known for?

All of the above? Pundits are still debating. But a look at the final red state/blue state electoral voting map is telling: www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/2008/

Many traditional red states (Republican/conservative base) went blue this time. Why? The above-mentioned reasons? Yes, to some degree. Certainly, the

Republican message was completely outdated and out of touch with the changing beliefs of the electorate. But also, there has been a demographic change in many of these states due to migration and immigration. New Mexico has the highest proportion of Hispanics of any state. It went for Obama, as did Colorado and Nevada. Certainly the Hispanic voting bloc is a force to be reckoned with, as is the black voting bloc.

But, looking at the 'Solid South' which was once solidly Democratic but has been solidly Republican for quite a while, we see some major defections in Virginia, North Carolina and Florida. Why? Large black voter turnout? That wouldn't be enough. Obama loses by a landslide if he doesn't capture a significant bloc of white voters in each state.

These states are changing. Lots of Yankees have moved south for retirement in Florida, jobs in North Carolina and Virginia. So, the complexion of these states has changed. Many Hispanics have moved in as well.

The American West and South are changing. And political parties and marketers need to take notice. Where are things not changing? Well, Alaska looks pretty stable and a conservative stronghold for the Republicans. But they have more moose, bears and sled dogs than people - not enough to turn an election nor change the fortunes of the Republican party.

A tectonic shift in strategy has forever changed the face of American political campaigning. Harnessing the power of the Internet in political campaigning began in earnest four years ago. Eight years ago, Bush's direct

DOUG SACKS says the recent US Presidential election represents both a social and technological revolution.

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marketer extraordinaire Karl Rove used the power of micro-targeting through the traditional channels of direct mail and telemarketing. Howard Dean's campaign principally, but also the Bush campaign in 2004, was successful in demonstrating the power of the Internet. But Obama's strategists unleashed it and took it to a new level. Call it Obama 2.0 and be prepared for a wired presidency that could have unprecedented influence.

This campaign transformed campaign financing by building a huge network of small contributors and raised more than 600 million dollars; enough to dominate the TV airways with political ads in key states allowing the Democrats to expand the map and compete in traditionally Republican states.

Beyond fundraising

But it went beyond fundraising to reach, energise and register voters in record numbers, organise supporters, manage the news media, track and mould public opinion, and perhaps most importantly, to wage and withstand political attacks, including many carried by blogs that did not exist four years ago. It was said to be a 'profound leap forward technologically'.

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The changes go beyond what Mr Obama did and reflect a cultural shift in voters, producing an audience that is at once better informed and more sceptical. As a result, this new electorate tends to be more questioning of what it is told by

campaigns and often uses the web to do its own fact-checking, mitigating the affect of dirty tricks. Post-election strategies for organising the Obama 'social network' may affect future public policy and how it is implemented.

Look at it through marketer's eyes: He's built the largest network anyone's ever seen in politics, with the potential to appeal to millions of Americans instantly. The Obama camp is now figuring out how to keep its e-database of 3.1 million contributors and +10 million supporters involved.

Having the ability to directly

influence tens of millions in real time will be a power no other President has ever had. With the click of a mouse, millions of emails can be sent out informing, influencing policy, asking voters to support Presidential policy.

Is this a little bit scary? Can this power be used for evil as well as for good? Possibly. But one must trust the electorate to make informed decisions.

Check out: www.change.gov

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