

COLUMNS

Why the presidential campaign was not a case study in building a mobile strategy

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By AN AMERICAN MARKETER COLUMNIST

By [Alex Campbell](#)

First, I would like to say I am a pretty positive guy. I like to see the glass half full, so it is difficult for me to write about how badly the presidential candidates missed out on the opportunity to use mobile to win the election.

With that said, as an executive who has been in mobile marketing for more than a decade, I can say with confidence and a bit of disappointment that the candidates missed a pretty big opportunity with mobile.

So if you are a marketer and you are looking for inspiration for your new mobile marketing program, there are plenty of better places to look than the presidential election. Let me, in the most positive way possible, explain why I feel this way.

The mobile tactics used by both candidates did not connect the dots along the customer journey awareness, transaction, engagement and loyalty. These are the four necessary steps to complete the customer cycle. They also did not capitalize on what makes mobile different: time, location and interaction.

Disjointed mobile tactics

The mobile tactics that were deployed by the candidates focused on one part of the customer journey, but failed to tie them all together.

For awareness, the candidates did not really promote their mobile experiences. When I did join both candidates' mobile communities, I never really felt closer to either candidate because of my mobile experiences.

When I was engaged by a candidate via my mobile phone, the engagement quickly ended.

I was usually sent a message that asked me to donate or enter a contest. There was very little effort by either candidate to understand who I was.

We all know politics is about understanding voters and telling them what they want to hear, so I was surprised to see neither candidate used mobile to do so.

While Republican nominee Mitt Romney's application actually did tell me how he felt about critical issues from time to time, neither candidate seems to care that when I am standing at the voting booth, I will have my phone with me. That is a huge and important opportunity, especially for those undecided voters.

Think about this as you pass by all those little yard signs that are placed the minimum legal distance from your polling center.

When I walk by a sign that says "Obama for America" or "Romney for America" that is a great sign. But I would like to see

why do not I have an Obama or Romney pass in Facebook that pops to the top of my phone when I am actually in the polling center? Something timely that could actually influence voters, literally, as they are about to mark their ballots.

Because he is the incumbent, Democratic nominee Barack Obama really could have used loyalty more.

I signed up for the Obama mobile club in the last election. Why did he not acknowledge that? The apps could have been designed for me a returning subscriber to use my influence with those who are still undecided.

Ineffective use of time, location and interaction

The candidates failed to capitalize on what makes mobile different.

Time, location and interaction are critical when it comes to mobile marketing.

To me, the candidates seemed to repackage a lot of their mobile efforts, which means they did not use mobile to engage me in relevant ways.

The apps felt like Web sites in app form. The mobile Web sites felt like Web pages in smaller form. The text messages felt like emails in 140 characters or less. I received a message one morning reminding me to watch one of the three debates. Why not send that right before the debate?

It took a while, but both candidates finally added the functionality in their apps for me to find nearby rallies and events. However, up until about a week ago, the apps pointed me to events in Washington. Meanwhile, I am in Chicago.

On the interactivity side, why can I not use the app, mobile Web site or SMS to communicate with the candidates' teams?

Mobile is two-way, yet neither candidate is using mobile to make it easier for me to communicate with him.

To me, it would have made sense to set up a ChaCha-type program, where voters could ask questions via SMS. It would have been relatively easy to do and would have cost a fraction of what they were spending on television ads that people skipped on their DVR.

From my perspectives, both candidates just did not care enough about using mobile.

It is pretty clear they see TV ad spend as the way to win the election. I am sure TV is incredibly important and that most voters are persuaded by TV ads, but there is a segment of voters who do not pay attention to those advertisements.

I think the massive swing in voter sentiment after the first debate demonstrates that TV ads are losing their effectiveness over larger segments of voters. This segment does not pay attention to traditional messaging, but genuinely wants to hear from the candidates directly.

Mobile is a two-way communication channel that neither candidate used effectively to connect with constituents.

Leveraging this channel and its personal nature could have gone a long way in helping the growing segment of voters who want to have a genuine relationship with both candidates.

It is unclear just how a better mobile strategy could have helped the candidates win voter loyalty, but one thing is for certain it did not do much to help.

When it comes to developing a mobile strategy for your brand, it is critical to understand your customer, their mobile habits and how they would like to engage with you. Chances are, they do.

AS I SAID in my opening, I am an optimist, so I have one caveat in all of this. I am open to the possibility that since I am located in Chicago and not in a more important location such as Ohio, that I did not get the best of either candidate's mobile experiences.

In fact, if that is true I take back everything I have said and the candidates actually do understand at least a little about how they can use mobile effectively.

I would be really interested to hear from someone in a swing state who actually had a great mobile relationship with either candidate. I am going to hold on to that sliver of hope that both candidates dismissed me because of my location. That would be awesome.

Alex Campbell is cofounder and chief innovation officer of Vibes, a Chicago-based mobile marketing and technology company. Reach him at alex.campbell@vibes.com.

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