

Is Australia Ready for the Obama Generation?

After travelling to Washington D.C. earlier this year to spend time with some of the world's greatest political campaigners, I came away thinking – is Australia ready to be 'Obama-ed'?

As the world's most scrutinised democracy, it makes sense that political parties from across the world send their teams over to America to observe campaigns in attempt to transfer their winning techniques back home.

The 2009 Art of Political Campaigning Conference was attended by 450 delegates from across the world, and featured 100 speakers over 40 panels.

The three day event attracted campaign managers, candidates, political junkies, and of course consultants who enjoyed lively discussions on how the 2008 President election impacted on modern campaigning.

Despite being a keen follower of American elections and campaigns, I must admit to being overwhelmed when confronted with the logistics of techniques used in 2008.

As someone who has worked on numerous campaigns in Australia and the United Kingdom, I'm used to campaigning the traditional way - building up a candidate's profile, demonstrating their local credentials and showcasing their local platforms. I've come from a background where target audiences have been easy to sort, categorise and find.

Although I had heard of the new methods of campaigning, nothing prepared me for what I actually saw – the new multi-dimensionality of campaigning. Campaigns that recognise that voters don't just go to one source to find one piece of information. Campaigns that showed you need to target your message in a variety of formats and forums.

Automated robo-calls, social networking, cyber door-knocking, SMS message deployment, swift-boating, widgets, click and pledge and nano-targeting were just some of the many new techniques that will undoubtedly filter into our campaign cycles.

The previous methods of one-size fits all campaigning has been thrown out the door – allowing for niche campaigning that targets the right person with the right message.

These new techniques will undoubtedly be introduced to Australia during our next election. But the question remains - are we ready for it?

Australians have a unique personality. Things that wash with Americans won't necessarily wash here.

How will we respond to automatic phone calls from our leaders asking for their votes? Will we respond to multi-media campaigns from 'community' groups who offer 'suggestions' or make claims about a particular candidate in a non-partisan way? How will we feel when we find out that the internet pages we are viewing have been tailored with key messages from political campaigns?

The 2010 Australian Federal election will allow Australians to see the next generation of campaigning.

All major political parties will spend considerable resources on fully integrated communications strategies.

Parties will again pitch their messages through those traditional methods such as letterbox dropping and information stands, but will also try to garner support through new mediums such as digital radio, television, social networking sites, and internet sites.

The logo for BBS (Brisbane Business School) features the letters 'BBS' in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The letters are set against a dark grey rectangular background.

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They will be able to get their message to certain homes just by targeting certain web impressions.

Obama's campaign opened the floodgates and set the benchmark for the next generation of campaigning.

It will be interesting to see how Australians adapt to this new era.

This white paper provides only a brief summary of the latest trends in government communication. For more information contact Luke Myers on 07 3221 6711 or lmyers@bbspr.com.au.