

Presidential Marketing

6 invaluable marketing lessons from a 2008 presidential candidate



By Jonathan Bostrom

Hello, I'm Jonathan Bostrom. I'm a freelance copywriter and I guess what you'd call a constant "student of marketing." In my opinion, marketing is the core of business – because without it, there is no business. I suppose that's why there are so many misunderstandings and fallacies surrounding it...

Anyway, I've written this short ebook to outline a great set of lessons in marketing – all based on the rise of a previously little-known (at least, to most Americans) 2008 presidential candidate through the use of viral marketing. I hope you find the story and the lessons I've uncovered to be helpful!

If you have any questions, email me at info@jonathanbostrom.com. Also, be sure to visit my blog, at *JonathanBostrom.com*, where you can also find my copywriting service.

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A remarkable phenomenon is occurring here in America during the 2008 United States presidential elections...

For all the apathy and boredom typically associated with all things political, there is a truly unique movement currently taking place.



It's all centered around one presidential candidate, a congressman from Texas – a truly remarkable man. In his lifetime he's been an active duty U.S. Air Force flight surgeon, an obstetrician/gynecologist – personally delivering over 4,000 babies, a U.S. congressman, and now, a candidate for President of the United States. But for all these accomplishments, he's had a relatively low public profile throughout the years – until now. Now, during the 2008 election, this candidate, Ron Paul, has started an incredible storm of wild support.

Incredible storm of wild support... Sounds a bit hyperbolic, doesn't it?

You might think so – but then, maybe you haven't seen this movement firsthand.

It doesn't take much to see that Ron Paul has been a remarkable candidate, even if you don't agree with his views. He's really been unlike any other candidate to ever run for the presidency of the United States – and the support he's received is unique in so many areas. Let's take a look at what I mean...

Money



One of the most amazing things about Ron Paul’s support is the massive amount of money he has received from thousands of supporters. On November 5th, the Ron Paul campaign broke political fundraising records, raising \$4.2 million in less than 24 hours. It’s especially impressive when you consider that it was supporters, not the campaign that organized the fundraising event.

The \$4.2 million record was not to last long though. On December 16th, Ron Paul shattered his own record by raising \$6 million more – again, in a single, 24-hour period. In the fourth quarter of 2007 alone, the campaign received a total of nearly \$20 million.

And in case you’re wondering, the money hasn’t been donated by three or four affluent Ron Paul fanatics. The November 5th event, known as the “Money Bomb,” had 36,672 unique donors. And the average donation continues to be less than \$90.

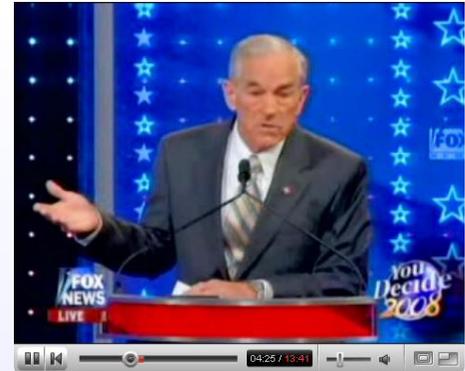
The Internet

As I mentioned, Ron Paul’s popularity really took flight on the wings of the Internet. The Internet has allowed what started as a small group of supporters to leverage themselves and

their message to reach thousands. The Internet has made it possible for Ron Paul's supporters – who are scattered across the country, even the *world* – to connect, spread ideas, and organize events.



The popular video sharing site, *YouTube.com*, has probably been the single most influential force leveraged by Ron Paul's support. Supporters upload videos of news clips about Ron Paul, speeches and debates with Ron Paul, Ron Paul events, Ron Paul campaign ads, Ron Paul themed video blogs, and a slew of user-made videos supporting Ron Paul in some way. Whenever he is on the news, within 15 minutes to a half hour, the video has been uploaded by at least one supporter onto YouTube. When I searched for "Ron Paul," I got *80,600* videos – far more than any other candidate. The campaign itself also has its own video channel, with 44,426 subscribers.



Facebook.com, the latest in social networking sites, has proved a valuable asset to spreading the word about Ron Paul. A unique feature that Facebook has is the ability to create "groups." These groups will typically have anywhere from 10 to well over 1 million members, a discussion board, posted photos, etc. By searching around, I found and counted *486 individual groups* dedicated to the support of Ron Paul.



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Meetup.com is an online portal where people of similar interests set up offline meetings and events. Unsurprisingly, this site has been used extensively in the 2008 presidential campaign, but none have used it more than Ron Paul's supporters. Ron Paul has a total of 1,543 groups – around the entire globe. He has meetup groups in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Brazil, South Africa, Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Australia. People from all these groups have held a total of 26,680 events.



In comparison, the candidate with next largest number of meetup groups, Mike Huckabee, has only 455 groups – none of them outside the United States. Of course, that's still a lot compared to Barack Obama's 78 groups and John McCain's 6.

Supporters of Ron Paul are found in many other places online besides the main networking sites. There are forums, like *RonPaulForums.com* and *RonPaulForum.com*. There are blogs, like *DailyPaul.com*, *RonPaulNation.com*, and *Blog.RonPaul2008.com*. Then there are less interactive sites, like *RonPaulLibrary.org*, a collection of Paul's writings, and *RonPaulRadio.com*, an internet radio site.



Ron Paul Forum
Hope For America - Be A Part Of It



Ron Paul Nation
HOPE FOR AMERICA



Vehicles

Vehicles... that seems like an odd one – stuck here amidst record fundraising and internet support. But it's true; Ron Paul has an impressive fleet of supporter-provided vehicles that bear his message and carry it all over the country.

The Blimp — At a cost of approximately \$350,000 per month, a group of supporters have – *without any involvement with the official campaign* – rented a blimp, covered it with Ron Paul's name, and flown it up and down the East Coast. And it's not just any



blimp. It's one of the biggest airships in the world – just shy of 200 feet in length. But there's more to the plan than just flying around. The team who operates the blimp regularly invites members of the mainstream and local media to come for a ride and do a broadcast. On top of that, they even have live video, streaming online

at RonPaulBlimp.com.

Cars — Avid Ron Paul supporters have taken vehicle customization to a whole new level. One supporter has taken his run-of-the-mill Hyundai and covered it in Ron Paul stickers, making a quite a piece of artwork and advertising. In a Fox News interview, the owner/artist said, "I'm getting flipped off a lot less and more thumbs ups."



Two friends showed their support by completely repainting a Honda CRX. With its new, flashy paint job – complete with a painted image of Ron Paul on the roof, they call it the “Ron Paul pace car.”



And for those who don't want to permanently modify their cars, there are backlit, rooftop signs available, along with the usual assortment of magnetic vehicle signs and bumper stickers.



Vans — With a few cans of paint and a lot of work, several supporters have converted their drab and boring vans into a rolling billboards. One, a slightly more professional job, even has glow-in-the-dark text!



Trucks — As all truck owners will tell you, there are things that trucks can do that other vehicles just can't. That has never been truer than in Ron Paul's campaign. Supporters have found some pretty novel ways to spread the word.



One supporter has installed a 53-inch plasma TV screen in the bed of his truck. Powered by four deep-cell batteries, he plays Ron Paul video clips in public places – though I'm not sure about in moving traffic...



Others have built a framework onto the back of their trucks to support extensive signage. And there are even a few big rigs sporting Ron Paul signs along their trailers.



Music

Yes, Ron Paul even has his own music. If you look online – especially on YouTube – you can find folk songs, rock songs, raps – all about Ron Paul. One guy named Steve Dore has even released a whole CD at *RonPaulSongs.com*. The lyrics from his song “President Man” aptly describe the sentiments of all “Ron Paul musicians” – if not all Ron Paul supporters:

for why there have been so many thousands of supporter gatherings. As Rudy Giuliani has said, “The Ron Paul people are all over the country.” He ought to know. Like several other candidates, he has on occasion been surrounded by far more Ron Paul supporters than his own. Ron Paul’s supporters will gather just about anywhere—regardless of whether or not their candidate is there.



FIRST LESSON



After seeing the fanatical support Ron Paul has received, it's easy to assume there must be a master marketer behind the whole thing – someone who is skilled at selling and winning over thousands of people at a time. However, like most significant cultural movements in the past, this movement is not driven by manipulative marketing.

For that reason, if you were to compliment Ron Paul on his marketing skills, he'd probably have no idea what you were talking about. That's because to him, he's not really marketing - he's just being himself. He's just standing for what he believes. And people recognize and respect that. Twenty years ago, John McCain told Ron Paul's campaign chair, Kent Snyder, "You're working for the most honest man in Congress."

The truth is, sincerity is really the best marketing strategy. It's often assumed that marketing is about manipulation – getting people to believe something that really isn't true. Politicians and companies alike frequently market this way. But most people aren't stupid. They can often see through a pretense. And if they do, they will resent the fact that they've been tricked. Not only that, they'll tell everyone what a liar you are.

But fortunately, a growing "sincerity deficit" in today's world makes things a lot easier for those willing to be sincere, honest, and straightforward. As George Orwell said so well, "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act." In other words, by just being sincere, you will probably stand out from the crowd without any extra effort on your

part.

Of course, sincerity is never an excuse for laziness, or a “that’s just who I am” mentality. While “Just be yourself” is good advice, it means that you shouldn’t pretend to be something you’re not. It doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t be constantly striving to improve.

Also, sincerity doesn’t mean that there aren’t any other marketing tactics – or that all other tactics are manipulative. Of course not. There are plenty of honest, legitimate marketing tactics that you can and *should* use in conjunction with sincerity. And that’s the point I want to make. Sincerity should be the basis of your marketing. In fact, it’s not a strategy or a tactic at all. It’s a *foundation*.

THE LESSON: *Sincerity is the foundation of all good marketing.*

SECOND LESSON

A funny thing happens when sincerity is embraced as a “marketing foundation.” The desire to appear perfect and polished slips away. Slowly, the realization is made that PR isn’t the most important thing in the world.

This is another explanation for Ron Paul’s success. As a *Los Angeles Times* columnist said during an MSNBC interview, “He’s honest, he’s a serious guy, he’s a straight shooter, he’s not surrounded by consultants who package him to death until he’s made of plastic... People are absolutely sick and tired of plasticized candidates.”



Ron Paul is anything but a plasticized candidate. While other candidates obsess over the image they create, he cares only about his message and his beliefs. He’s not a great orator. His voice is often slightly shaky. He’s a slender, grandfatherly figure – hardly the type of person you’d expect to see elevated to the rock star status he has achieved.

It goes to show that if you have a strong idea and message, you won’t need to continually worry about your image. Your exterior image isn’t important to your audience. Your core idea is what matters.

This applies to business just as much as it does politics.

It’s a known fact that people like to buy from people – not faceless corporations. This was the

thinking behind businesses such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, a company famous for their depiction of the affable Southern gentleman who promotes it. And while this business model may be a little outdated, it illustrates the concept well. People relate to other people. And people buy from those that they can relate to.

I think lot of businesses strive too much for a shiny, “perfect” image. It’s as if the ultimate goal is to remove every evidence of humanity – every shred of personality. Whether that’s an attempt to appease the PR and legal departments, or a complete misunderstanding of marketing (or both), I don’t know. But I do know that it’s ineffective and dangerous.

The purpose of PR is really to minimize risks – the risk of appearing the wrong way to the general public. While it’s a good plan to minimize risks, it’s never a good idea to try and eliminate all risks. You can’t. And you shouldn’t try. Some risks are necessary. You can’t climb a mountain without the chance that you will fall down it. Ron Paul, for example, runs the risk that with his honest and straightforward opinions, he will be seen as a kook. And many people see him that way... you can’t win ‘em all. But he also has a following of some of the most devoted supporters in the world.

Still, the vast majority of companies and individuals seem to think they *can* win ‘em all. They ignore the lessons that others freely offer, while wondering why no one really cares about them.

THE LESSON: *You can’t win ‘em all. Don’t try.*

THIRD LESSON

Once you combine sincerity and honesty with a healthy distrust of projecting a perfect and polished image, you are bound to be different. You might even feel like a sore thumb sticking out in your industry.

No one knows what this feels like as much as Ron Paul. He's really gained a reputation in Washington for his contrary beliefs - opposing legislation that he believes conflicts with the Constitution and Americans' rights. This, in combination with his medical background, has given him the nickname "Dr. No." He's the only Republican in the election who wants to pull out of Iraq and countries all around the world. He's the only candidate who admits that the problems with the American economy run very deep - and he promises to root them out at their point of origination. And he's relentlessly attacked and ridiculed for these positions. Yes, he's different.



But does he try to hide it? Smooth over his unconformities?

Not a bit. In fact, he uses them to his advantage. With sincerity and straight talk, he gathers around himself those that hold the same beliefs. But an interesting thing has happened. Those few first supporters - early adopters, you might call them - have gone out carrying the message, and returned bringing their friends. Ron Paul has one of the most diverse groups of supporters imaginable. He's garnered support from Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, Christians and Muslims, young and old. He even has support from a lot of people

who don't agree with him on a number of issues. Out of the hundreds of supporter comments on his website, there are some that say something to the effect of, "I don't agree with Ron Paul on a lot of things, but I feel that I can trust him."

The lesson here is that sticking out like a sore thumb isn't a bad thing. Our goal shouldn't always be to fit in. Some of the greatest successes in history have come from those that would popularly be termed "misfits."

From a business perspective, difference is the lifeblood of marketing. Difference keeps all products and services from becoming commodities. But a commonly made mistake is that businesses will not recognize how they're different. They will just assume that they must be exactly like every other business in their industry. That just isn't true. *Every* business is different in some way, shape, or form. All you need to do is find the difference. And then focus on it.

THE LESSON: *Be different and use it to your advantage.*

FOURTH LESSON

One area in which Ron Paul is very different from almost all other politicians is his frugality. And not just in Washington. Even though he has taken in a huge amount of money for his campaign, he has been very conservative spending it. Ron Paul's campaign has been described as "a campaign that flies Southwest, stays at the Best Western, and eats in diners."



But on the other hand, Ron Paul is not a cheapskate. And his campaign is anything but poor quality. According to political commentator Lew Rockwell, whenever he's been to a Ron Paul campaign event, he sees at least a dozen different kinds of T-shirts, bumper stickers, buttons and the like being sold or given away – "nice stuff, not homemade schlock."

So what's the lesson here?

Simple. Invest resources where there is a strong likelihood of a return on that investment.

All too often, both politicians and businesses spend money on things that have little or no possibility of generating or helping to generate a return. This can often be seen when someone first decides to start a business. They dump all their savings into and/or rack up a pile of debt on trivial things that will do nothing to help them cut a profit. Expensive decorations, furniture, events – the trappings of success often hinder success.

The same rules can even apply to promotion. Yes, running a Superbowl ad feels good, but is it

profitable?

The Ron Paul campaign knows one rule very well: Put your time, money, and effort into things that have a good likelihood of generating a ROI (return on investment).

Frugality becomes a whole lot easier when you think of every dollar you spend as an investment. If for every dollar you spend, you want to bring in X many more dollars, you'd better make sure you invest those dollars wisely. Sometimes that means being what others would call "cheap." Sometimes it might even mean being more extravagant than others. But it all depends on what the investment is worth.

THE LESSON : *Is this going to generate a ROI?*

FIFTH LESSON



An area that the Ron Paul campaign has apparently decided to invest in heavily is Ron Paul’s website, *RonPaul2008.com*. It doesn’t take much more than a passing glance to see that the investment has paid off. I think this is, hands down, the best website I have ever seen. (Interestingly, with the attention that’s been focused on Ron Paul for his Internet success, other candidates’ websites have started looking suspiciously similar.)

David Meerman Scott, in his book, *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*, describes the best type of website as one that provides useful and interactive content for users – a link between a business (or politician) and the customers (supporters). He also says that it’s important that this type of website doesn’t subscribe to the traditional model of “interruption marketing” that demands one-way communication. In other words, the website shouldn’t be one big advertisement. Not only should it provide genuinely useful information, it should offer a way for people to voice their thoughts.

In my opinion, Ron Paul’s website does a superb job at both providing great information *and* ways for people to speak up. At *RonPaul2008.com* you’ll find all the resources you’ll ever need to make an informed choice for a candidate. But there are also interactive features such as the ‘Supporter Spotlight’ (which profiles random supporters) and ‘Supporter Messages’ (which cycles through hundreds of supporter comments). And of course, the campaign isn’t confined

to the website. A cluster of links at the bottom of the page lead to major social networking sites, encouraging supporters to spread the word.

So the lesson here is to have a great website, right?

Not necessarily, although that isn't bad advice. The real lesson is that it's crucial to have a link between you and your audience. You need away to communicate with them, yes, but they also need to be able to communicate back with you.

THE LESSON: *Open up a two-way communication link between you and your audience.*

SIXTH LESSON

One my favorite authors, Seth Godin, author of *Purple Cow* and several other great marketing books, recently wrote an ebook called *Flipping the Funnel*. In it, he describes how smart businesses (and politicians) should encourage customers and fans to spread the word – and make it easy for them to do so.



Nobody does this better than Ron Paul. He states his message and then stands back and lets his supporters do the work of spreading the message. One way he does this is through his website. As we've already seen, Ron Paul's website does a particularly good job of encouraging supporters to talk. Front-page links to sites like YouTube, Facebook, Meetup, MySpace, Flickr, and Digg suggest that people use these sites to voice their opinions, show their pictures and videos, discuss ideas, and generally spread the word.

It's worked astonishingly well. It's the supporters – ultimately – that have made the difference. *They* have organized the fundraisers, *they* have planned events, *they* have painted their cars, *they* have devoted their time, money and effort. As MSNBC's Tucker Carlson said, "The Ron Paul campaign doesn't really do that much. It kind of sits back and lets the supporters raise the money and generate the excitement."

We've already looked at how these people have become so motivated to go to such lengths. They're united around someone who shares their same beliefs and is sincere, honest, and straightforward about who he is and what he believes.

So with support like that, the official campaign has been wise to, as Tucker Carlson said, sit back and let the supporters generate the excitement. Seth Godin calls this “giving your fan club a megaphone.”

However, this is where a lot of people get worried. They are afraid of turning over the megaphone to their customers, fans, or supporters. They aren't yet willing to dispense with their preconceived notions about having a message and image rigidly controlled by PR. They aren't willing to relinquish control and turn it over to the most credible type of marketers – the customers.

Realize that word-of-mouth and viral marketing isn't about manipulating your audience to say what you want them to say. It's about getting them to talk about you. Period. They might say good things and they might say bad things. But once you “turn over the megaphone” you can't control those who are using it.

THE LESSON: *Encourage your supporters to talk - and then let them.*

Summary

You may not entirely agree with Ron Paul's views and policies, but you still have to respect him. With a simple and straightforward message, he has leveraged the power of technology to raise one of the most loyal group of supporters ever seen in U.S. politics. And he hasn't done this by bending the truth, skewing perspectives, or relying on exaggerated rhetoric. He's acquired his fanatical support through honesty, integrity, and a basic set of non-manipulative marketing principles.

The logo for Ron Paul's campaign, featuring the text "Ron Paul" in a white, bold, sans-serif font above the word "REVOLUTION" in a white, bold, sans-serif font. The "E" in "REVOLUTION" is stylized with a red outline and a white fill, and the "I" is also stylized with a red outline and a white fill.

Ron Paul
REVOLUTION