

Making millions of voices heard

With an innovative use of social media and a savvy sense of what connects us all, David Plouffe helped America elect Barack Obama

By DORIAN BENKOIL | When our judges selected David Plouffe as a Game Changer, he was not yet the media star who would get a roar of approval from the crowd during Barack Obama's acceptance speech in Chicago, be profiled in Esquire magazine, and secure a book deal reported to be worth more than \$1 million. But he had led a team that built a community of campaign workers and volunteers using every tool available to mobilize, raise funds, get out the vote and make themselves heard. They turned We Media into We Politics through Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, mybarackobama.com (or myBo), YouTube, cell-phone applications, and an email list that finished with some 13 million names. In the process they raised millions on myBo, created an electoral landslide, and made history.

Under Plouffe's guidance, the campaign was tuned to an audience that embraced the messages they had helped create. Digital media outreach helped Obama engage in a huge conversation that captured the passion he ignited. Volunteers were empowered to take the reins, given the means to communicate locally and organize. Campaign operatives sometimes found a locale had coalesced before officials ever arrived. "Our approach from the very beginning was to try and have a collaborative relationship with our grassroots supporters. It wasn't just about money, It wasn't just about volunteer time," Plouffe says. "We wanted to share information with them about how the campaign was going, share information so they could be better ambassadors in their communities. We listened to them. Because of their feedback we made adjustments. ... They understood we valued and needed them, and we understood we valued and needed them, in a very honest way."



GAME CHANGER 09 CASE STUDY

David Plouffe

for mobilizing millions with a methodical media campaign that utilized the Internet, cell phones and personal communication devices as never before.

The tools were available to anybody, but the Obama campaign used them shrewdly, overcoming the Clinton juggernaut then trouncing John McCain. When people registered on myBo from battleground precincts, they were instructed how to get out the vote. Elsewhere, they were given contacts to call in the hard-fought regions. People with iPhones were offered an application that would access their address books and dial contacts in the contested areas. Plouffe “understood fundamentally what new media could do,” says Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, who was director of online organizing for the campaign. Plouffe told us the new channels were also crucial to informing supporters, many of them new to voting, about basic details. “We used digital media and the Internet to move information to people, about how to register to vote, where the polling location was, where the caucusing location was,” Plouffe says. By the time Obama won, the campaign was digitally linked to 25 percent of his supporters, according to reports.

It all added up to a sea change ten times more impactful than what Republican campaign icon Richard Vigurie invented decades ago with targeted direct mail, says conservative political strategist Patrick Ruffini. He marvels that Obama’s YouTube videos, alone, scored millions of views equal to some \$47 million in paid media placements. “That’s more than the media budget or about the same as most presidential election campaigns,” he says.

The question now, of course, is what Plouffe will do with the powerful instrument still in his hands. He continues to send emails to the list, under the title “Organizing for America,” imploring supporters to stay engaged. One Obama video Plouffe touted that heralded the economic stimulus plan got about 700,000 views in three days. When Plouffe via email suggested house parties to discuss the package, more than 3,300 were convened. MyBo still has tools for organizing, with a quick buttons to create local gatherings, as well as links to a variety of interest groups and social network pages.

“I think it’s a remarkable thing if in communities around the country, these debates happening in Washington are happening on doorsteps and in diners and on the phone,” Plouffe says. “What we’re designing here in terms of Organize for America is right from the grass roots. And we’re going to let their feedback continue to guide us, to listen to them.”

If the Obama administration uses the tools that way, then “we media” will have arrived in the White House, helping us become part of the process as never before.

David Plouffe
www.mybarackobama.com

The mastermind behind Barack Obama's social media campaign for president.



*Strategist David Plouffe
(image from the site)*