

Staying Up to Date

Tips on how to use VoIP



The election is 30 days away. You and your staff are living on cold pizza and three hours of sleep. Your money meter is reaching the red zone and you're exhausted.

Suddenly, your campaign manager tells you it's time to begin phone banking. In the push to Election Day, you'll need to call thousands of voters, get out the vote in every corner of your district, and still have money left over for your victory party. Campaigns are recognizing the need for flexible and inexpensive outreach—and voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) could be the way to go.

The Internet-based telephone outreach is one of the numerous Web-based technologies that's changing the way candidates interact with voters. Portable phone banks in particular have proved to be invaluable field tools, helping statewide, congressional and down-ballot candidates overcome financial and logistical challenges.

Here are a few things we've learned in our experience with VoIP:

Forget everything you know about phone banking.

VoIP and other Web-based applications are becoming increasingly reliable, and are replacing the need for permanent phone line installation or long-distance costs. You now have the power to run a 20-line phone bank off most high-speed Internet connections; so save your staff some precious time, energy, and money, and forget the hassle of the phone company.

Bring the technology to your volunteers, not the other way around.

Because the new suitcase-sized VoIP systems are portable, campaigns are running simultaneous phone banks in various locations. Last year, the Kaine for Governor campaign circulated four portable phone banks throughout Virginia; the staffers set up shop in a car dealership or volunteer's apartment one night, then moved into a college dormitory on the next night. The capability to move quickly all but eliminates the logistical nightmares of volunteer coordination.

Make the most of your volunteers' time.

If you're in a competitive race, your hometown voters have probably heard from you and your opponent(s) more times than they can count. When you find yourself knocking on the same doors over and over, consider the pos-

ROGER ALAN STONE AND
MAGGIE DUNCAN

sibility that you may be missing hard-to-reach voters. Emerging technologies in predictive or automated dialing allow campaigns to track down people off the beaten path.

Be creative.

Internet-based phone technology allows for flexibility and innovation. If you've recruited a fantastic group of Hispanic volunteers in Miami but need to get out the Spanish-speaking vote in Jacksonville, VoIP can serve as the inexpensive, easy solution to your geographic challenge. Online outreach means even the most scattered communities can find common ground.

New political technologies have begun to help groups of people connect. We're not replacing the town hall meeting; we're bringing it online. We're not doing away with door-to-door voter engagement; we're using new tools to be sure that we knock on doors we've long overlooked. Given the intensity of the upcoming election season, a campaign can't afford not to recognize the benefits of VoIP and other Internet outreach methods in making sure the message reaches voters in time. CAE

A pioneer in political technology and online outreach strategies, Roger Alan Stone serves as the President and CEO of Advocacy Inc. Maggie Duncan serves as the Director of Marketing and Client Relations of Advocacy Inc.