

Advocacy

When lobbying, political campaigning, lawyering, and business management come together

by Michael J. Kerrigan

As the tools of electioneering are being used in issue lobbying, and the principles of business management are being applied to both, the professionalization of the political process is giving way to a new industry. It's called advocacy. And it's redefining what we mean by the word "campaign."

Corporate America has had a profound influence on the business of politics. Since the 1960s, lobbyists have paid close attention to the growth and structure of the corporate world. As corporations change and prepare to move into the next century, lobbyists — the third house of government — will be overhauling their means of issue advocacy to meet the needs of the future.

American corporations faced with global competition have adapted by downsizing, out-sourcing, and value-adding — by re-inventing themselves.

Today's corporate executives are customer-centered and information-driven; they manage their inventory as well as their relationships on a just-in-time basis.

Something quite different has evolved in the political realm. While the lobbying sector resisted serious ventures into the world of information technology, preferring to do business the old-fashioned way, the "do-it-for-me-school," the campaign consultant specialty began to "corporatize."

Some claim the transition was inevitable for campaign managers; they saw the light because they shared many of the advertising and marketing techniques of their marketing brethren. Thus, adopting expertise from corporate marketing was a natural progression. Other analysts claim the corporatization of political consulting was prompted by the need to better address accounts receivable and cash flow problems. Both views agree on one thing: campaign management borrowed heavily from corporate management and revamped a political specialty.

The new look of campaign consulting showcased itself clearly in the 1970s, with corporate America prominent among the clients, during the initiative and referenda campaigns, particularly those affecting the tobacco and insurance industries in several big states like California.

Because the campaign consultant business had adapted to better accommodate new markets and clients, it was able to share in both the gross lawyer product and the gross campaign consultant product in mega-states like California.

It wasn't long before the other specialty of politics, issue advocacy, followed suit. Just like Plunkett of Tammany Hall, they too saw opportunity in the corporate realm, and took it. The lobbyists — the third house — came of age in the 1980s.

In fairness to the business of politics, however, it might be mentioned that once the decision to corporatize was made, copying gave way to creativity. The talent of political campaign consultants did not go unnoticed by the corporate sector. The student had learned quite well, and the teachers readily took note. The "Daisy" commercial employed by Joe Napolitan and Tony Schwartz in Lyndon Johnson's 1964 victory over Barry Goldwater was probably the most powerful 30-second, single time slot yet to appear on television. The stage was set and political writings like *The Responsive Chord* and *The Selling of the President* documented the political transition that resulted in the fusion of campaign consulting and corporate marketing.

The corporate realm reacted to political changes as well. The government relations function became professionalized. The public affairs profession was ultimately viewed as a profit preserver rather than a

cost center, and the public affairs officer was no longer likely to be the CEO's brother-in-law but, rather, a well-credentialed, battle-tested, experienced executive.

Ironically, the third house — the advocacy specialty — while being the last political area to corporatize, is now leading the charge in adapting to yet another reality that has hit the political business market: the call to "adhocracy." Adhocracy is problem-solving by bringing talent to bear on a problem only for as long as is needed to come to a successful conclusion.

Adhocracy views government relation management from the perspective of one campaign at a time. When the goal is achieved, the advocacy team disbands.

This out-sourcing is a key difference between campaign advocacy management of the 1990s and more conventional entirely in-house government relations functions of the 1980s.

Because advocacy and campaign management have redefined their businesses to service corporate clients at both the national and state levels, advocacy must structure itself such that it can respond readily when changes occur that affect its clients. So, too, corporations, to keep pace with a rapidly changing marketplace, must

restructure much of the advocacy function. In fact, the idea of looking only internally for advocacy must be carefully scrutinized in the new reality of doing business in the 1990s. Completely vertically integrated companies will be about as common in the future as completely in-house government relations departments.

Few advocacy businesses can expect to be on endless retainer arrangements. As corporations pare to lean and accountable entities, the advocacy organizations they retain must be equally lean and accountable.

Their services in the 1990s will require lobbyists to get information quickly, assemble campaign teams on an as-needed basis, win, and then disband.

The lobbying firms of the future will be built with adhocracy as the modus operandi. Because all politics is local, indigenous advocacy firms will link nationwide, share information, strategies, and, when appropriate, clients. Corporations will engage such firms nationwide, regionally, and locally because these firms will possess both local expertise as well as the synergy of their network.

In the future, the smart players will understand what corporate public affairs, marketing, advertising, campaign consulting, lobbying and lawyering all have in common: They are all in the service business.

Advocacy will understand that the client is the reason for their existence; services will be customized rapidly to answer client demand; and responsiveness and flexibility will be key to competitiveness. The metaphor of the "campaign" will continue; advocacy will utilize all the appropriate tools to win and serve its clients. Finally, the power of information before and after issue campaigns will not go neglected. Excellent information readily acquired will add value to the advocacy business. But the most important feature of advocacy in the 1990s will be this: After each campaign, advocates will have to re-earn the privilege of being retained.

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