Direct Marketing of Political Parties: New Machines or Brand Politics?

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Attempts to strengthen American party organizations have always faced an uphill struggle. The weight of history works against the political party as a strong, mass-based programmatic organization. But the activities of the Republican Party since the 2000 elections suggest that attempts to strengthen the party organization through grass-roots efforts may not only bear fruit but might also suggest a different future for parties. This paper takes an initial step toward studying the impact of direct marketing practices on party organizations. In the aftermath of the 2000 elections, Republicans and Democrats have increasingly turned to the techniques of Multi-Level Marketing (MLM) companies as a means to strengthening their organizations and energizing both activists and latent party members. What are the techniques of MLM and have they been successfully adopted by party organizations? Will these techniques provide the institutional support for a fundamentally new, grassroots party organization? Or, are the techniques of MLM just a modern method for candidates and their consultants to turn party organizations into an extension of their personal operations? Are these techniques too heavily dependent on particular candidates as marketable brands? John Kenneth White (2004) claims "both parties are at a rough parity with stable coalitions being created up and down the ballot thanks largely to the renewed importance of party identification and its ties to ideology and cultural values." Will MLM allow parties to institutionalize this renewed emphasis on party identification into a long-term strategy for party rehabilitation?

Political scientists have long studied party activists and regular, grass-roots members as a means to defining the American party system. Traditional scholarship highlights the weakness of party organizations and the loose affiliation of citizens to parties. The authors of the American Political Science Association's report, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System," (1950) called for a more active party membership as one component of a strengthened

party organization. The difficulty of that enterprise was demonstrated by Eldersveld (1964), who found that relatively few Democratic and Republican precinct captains engaged in "critical" activities: party registration, canvassing, and election-day efforts. Jackson noted that the many changes in the American party system since the APSA report "have not produced a fully developed responsible-parties system." (1992, p.80) Taking the authors of the APSA report to task for neglecting to specify concrete steps to achieving its goal, Mileur (1992) suggests that "Political parties are products of their environments–legal, historical, and cultural–and their reconditioning requires confronting these factors squarely."

The environment of American parties, with a closely divided electorate mirrored in partisan division in Congress and close presidential elections, is increasingly amendable to the tactics of MLM. The success of this enterprise might force scholars to revisit their understanding of the nature of American parties and the relationship between elites and activists. In the late 1990s, and specifically after the 2000 election, the Republican Party, under the guidance of Karl Rove and Blaise Hazelwood, instituted a new tool of party organization that borrowed heavily from the world of MLM firms such as Amway. The "72-Hour Task Force" became an important organizational tool of the GOP for registering new voters. The impetus for this innovative tool was straightforward enough. "By focusing on registering new voters who are likely to vote Republican," GOP Chair Marc Racicot wrote in 2004, "we can create the wining margin of victory in what is now a very evenly divided electorate." (Racicot, 2004) But the impact of the 72-Hour Project may yield long term benefits not only to the GOP but also to advocates of stronger, more organizationally sound political parties. While unlikely to move us closer to the model envisioned by the authors of the APSA Report, it may move American parties closer to the model of parties as "franchise systems" discussed by R. Kenneth Carty (2004).

The Republican Party had long used marketing techniques for party building, such as the innovative use of direct mail in the late 1970s and early 1980s. And because the Republicans developed MLM as an explicit strategy, this paper will largely focus on their efforts. The multi-level marketing of political parties is a new organizational tool and one that may either represent a direct threat to the loose associations that were the hallmark of modern American parties, and heavily criticized by succeeding generations of political scientists, or, the top-down organization of the MLM Party may simply represent a new form of bossism, but one shorn of its roots in localized and relatively stable party organizations that served to provide institutional support.

Multi-Level Marketing Techniques

Analyzing the low turnout in the 1996 presidential election, and the continued decline in party organizations and membership, Alan Greenblatt wrote in Congressional Quarterly, "The major parties are no longer reliable voter organizers . . . or candidate recruiters. Both parties still act as conduits carrying ideas between elected officials and the people, but neither now controls who will run or what those who run will say." (Greenblatt, 1997) The MLM of parties has the potential to upend the first element of Greenblatt's analysis. MLM may turn parties into reliable voter organizers.

One of the leading names in Multi-Level Marketing is Amway. The parent company of Amway is Alticor, the founder of which, Dick De Vos Jr. is a candidate for the Republican nomination for Governor in Michigan in 2006. De Vos' father, Richard De Vos, founded Amway in 1959. In 2004, Amway had sales in excess of $6.2 billion. The De Vos family has long had an affiliation with GOP politics and Dick DeVos' wife was the former chair of the

Michigan Republican Party. The formal entrance of the De Vos family into elective politics is only the latest evidence of the synergy between parties and MLM.

Amway's sales plain is exceedingly simple. According to the company's website, "It allows you to build your business through retailing products and sponsoring other people who, in turn, can retail products and offer the business opportunity to others. By passing your sales and marketing knowledge to your developing team, you not only build your own business network but also enable others to build one of their own" (Amway, 2005). MLM emphasizes a team approach to profit-making and business organization. Kleeneze, a major British MLM firm, explains the approach on its website: "By introducing (sponsoring) other people into the business, you are entitled to extra profits, based on the turnover of your group. This is the network marketing side of the business and the higher your group turnover, the more money you will make. Believe it or not there are people earning over £10,000 per month via this method" (Kleeneze, 2005). Tupperware's Australian website explains its team-driven approach: "As your recruits build you become an Associate Manager, hosting an average of five Demonstrations per week. On top of your Demonstrator rewards you will receive monthly bonuses for your team achieving sales targets, and for your first 6 months we support you with our New Manager Development Program" (Tupperware, 2005). MLM companies have become such a powerful wealth-creator that major corporations such as Citigroup have developed their own network marketing client companies. Citigroup's Primerica is a leading marketing of life insurance and financial products while Colgate-Palmolive operates Princess House, a direct marketer of household goods. Gillette once owned Jafra, a leading cosmetics firm in the United States and Europe.

Far from the quaint characteristics of Tupperware parties in the 1950s, MLM emerged in the twenty-first century as a multi-billion dollar enterprise. Their success is due in no small measure to their pitch. An analysis in the alternative online magazine, *EnergyGrid* declared that "The reason why MLM can work so well is that people are much more likely to fall for a sales pitch from a friend or relative, or a stranger in a home setting, than they are from a stranger in a shop or market, or an advert in a paper, magazine or on the Internet." (*EnergyGrid* 2004) To a large extent, the goals of the 72-Hour project mirror those of a multi-level marketing company. The RNC ran experiments to test the claims of MLM firms. According to Franke-Ruta and Meyerson (2004), in 2002, as an experiment, "four volunteers were pitted against a professional telemarketing firm, each with an identical script and separate lists of voter names. The four volunteers got almost 5 percent more people to the polls than the pros."

The first step in the building of a MLM party is to recruit Team Leaders and Precinct Delegates. The Michigan GOP's adaptation of the 72 Hour Framework was easily disseminated through blogs and it mirrors the successful business plans of MLM's such as Amway. After the initial team (upline and downline) is trained, the second stop was Voter Registration and the drafting of a precinct-by-precinct and county plan for the registration of new voters. (RWLC Blog, 2004)

According to the RNC's plan, "The first thing is to determine where the most important voting blocs/coalitions are that need to be penetrated and maximizing in order to achieve victory. It is important to prioritize to be effective." This was followed by the movement to "target coalition groups on issues that they care about and that will motivate them to vote. Some of these groups include; social conservatives, agriculture, Catholics, Sportsmen, etc. Targeting these groups can increase Republican turnout 4%."

The Republican Women of Leelanau County Blog defined the "the 7 components of a successful outreach and coalitions plan" as

Build the Team-Key leaders, Team leaders and Precinct Delegates.

Build and Collect Lists

Calendar of Events

Communicate your message: Specialized Media

Surrogates

Register new Voters

Take advantage of the Internet

Once new voters had been identified and registered, the upline was to "establish a goal, develop a timeline, Recruit and train a base of volunteers to phone and enter responses into Voter Vault, work with the Michigan Republican State Committee on goals, surveys, and follow-up. Voter Vault is the Republican Party's newest tool for managing the voter list. The real strength of Voter Vault lies in the collective use and update of data. It contains information about all the voters in a given area. It is possible to print specific lists such as by gender, age, affiliations and whatever else may be needed."

The final element was to draft a county-wide plan of action: "Now all that is needed is to put all the information gathered in one plan and one timeline. This is critical. A plan lets everyone know what is expected of them and the timeline allows volunteers to plan ahead and save the dates on their calendars." Similar blogging appeals were found throughout Republican Party and affiliated websites and on individual campaign and collegiate sites. It is similar in design to the Meet-Up phenomena of the 2004 election, used to great effect early in the

campaign by the Howard Dean campaign. But MLM techniques advanced by the GOP promised greater results and organizational clarity.

Entrepreneur.com published an article on the success of MLM that makes clear the utility of this approach to party life. The key components are

1. Mentorship: "Practice what they teach. [To succeed,] you need to be willing to listen and learn from mentors. The way this industry is structured, it's in the best interests of the [veterans in your company] to help you succeed, so they're willing to teach you the system. Whatever [your mentor] did to become successful, it's very duplicatible, but you have to be willing to listen and be taught and follow those systems."

2. Hierarchy: "The higher-ups. It can be called various things, but the general term is the "upline," meaning the people above you. How supportive are they? Do they call you? Do they help you put a plan in place? Are they as committed to your success as they are to their own? You should be able to relate to [the people in your upline] and be able to call them at any time to say 'I need some help.' How much support there is from the people above you in the company is very important."

3. Recruitment: "Take up the lead with your downline. There's a term in the network marketing industry called "orphans"--when somebody is brought in and then the person who brought them in is just so busy bringing in other people that they don't spend the time to teach and train [the new person]. You should be prepared to spend at least 30 days helping a new person come into the industry--training them, supporting them and holding their hand until they feel confident to be able to go off on their own. You really need to ask yourself, are you willing to do that? Are you able to do that? This is really about long-term relationship building. It's not about just

bringing people into the business and just moving forward. It's about working with these people and helping them to develop relationships." (Smith, 2005)

At its essence, the 72-Hour Project was an effort by the GOP to use the tools and techniques of MLM to increase the number of GOP voters 72 hours before the polls opened on election day in 2002 and 2004. It its implementation, the 72-Hour Project created a new organizational level of activism, the grass-roots network, complete with upline and downline. Volunteers were recruited by national, state, local, and collegiate party organizations at rallies, meetings, and through the Internet. The new recruits were assigned to localities in which they would network. All such volunteers reported to a RNC Marshal who would organize them into units of 2-3 individuals. Each unit was assigned a specific task: operating phone banks, canvassing precincts, and assisting with campaign rallies. In some cases, such efforts paid dividends. The Bush campaign of 2004 received a good deal of criticism during the election for the closed nature of its rallies and events. CBS News reported, "It's all about getting out the message without any distractions, and making sure that there's no public argument to spoil the party." (CBS News, 2004). Civil liberty groups and political opponents decried what was viewed as either extreme security measures or hostility to open and free political discourse or both. But viewed from the lens of MLM, the practice was a way in which to reward a downline with a tangible benefit for their organizational prowess. The *Washington Post* reported that "Tickets to Bush events, distributed by the Republican Party, go only to those who volunteer or donate to the party or, in some cases, sign an endorsement of the GOP ticket and provide names and addresses." (Eggen, 2004)

The training involved was rigorous and often occurred over period of months and often targeted at specific goals of expanding the GOP coalition and registering new voters. Daron Shaw reported that

> The coalition program looked to identify prominent individuals with credibility within a specific coalition or formal leaders of coalition groups. The coalitional groups of particular interest include the right-to-life associations, family policy councils, home school associations, sportsman alliance groups, veterans' groups, small business associations, farm bureaus, chambers of commerce, and anti-tax groups. Party personnel were charged with hosting regular conference calls with key leaders to invest them in Republican efforts and to motivate them on issues they care about. Events, in particular, were targeted—Republican representatives were present at every gun show, state fair, Veterans of Foreign Wars convention, Christian music festival, business expo, anti-tax rally, and fish fry they could find (Shaw, 2004).

This type of organizational harnessing of activism was an obvious offshoot for party leaders such as Rove and Hazelwood who had long studied the effectiveness of MLM organizations.

The Christian Coalition Model

The GOP did not have to look far for a successful adaptation of MLM principles into politics. Evangelical Protestants had become the major coalition partner in the GOP during the 1980s. The presidential campaign of 700 Club Founder Pat Robertson and the subsequent creation of the Christian Coalition demonstrated the electoral clout of the Christian right in GOP

primary and caucus elections. Later, 72% of Evangelicals would cast a vote for the GOP during the crucial election of 1994. (Green, 1995) Eighty percent would vote for George W. Bush in 2000. (ABC News, 2000). Brett Clifton's study of the influence of the Christian Coalition within the GOP suggests its high level of success is due to its heavy use of electoral mobilization and policy formulation rather than its financial might (Clifton, 2004).

The Christian Coalition maintains nearly 2,000 local chapters in all 50 states. It claims approximately 2 million members. The keys to its success are its large and devoted membership, its voter guides that are disseminated around the nation through its affiliates and churches, and its sophisticated marketing strategies. Ralph Reed, former head of the Christian Coalition and 2006 Republican candidate for Georgia Lieutenant Governor, declared in a 1996 interview that the precursor to the Coalition was Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Falwell "was a trail blazer, and it was, in effect, a media strategy and a direct mail strategy, and a rally strategy where he would fly around the country holding rallies and would pass buckets down the aisle and take up money and of course they had a huge mailing list." But the 1989 creation of the Christian Coalition brought the success of MLM to the movement. "What they did not have was they did not have sophisticated, well trained lay grassroots leadership," according to Reed. "This grassroots politics has been practiced by the left for decades but it's new for conservative--a conservative faith community. I would rather have a thousand school board members than one president and no school board members." (Reed, 1996)

Reed focused the Christian Coalition away from presidential politics and toward voter registration, candidate recruitment, and mobilization at the state and local level. "We focused on where the real power is: in the states and in the precincts and in the neighborhoods where people live and work," Reed told the *New York Times* after the 1992 elections. "On the one hand,

George Bush was going down to ignominious defeat in a landslide. On the other hand, the anecdotal evidence is that at school boards and at the state legislative level we had big, tremendous victories" (Mydens, 1992)

From 2000 to 2002

It was the closeness of the 2000 elections, presidential and congressional, that pushed the GOP into a new organizational framework that would drive their future campaigns. The Republican drive in 2001 and 2002 had three prongs. The first was financial and Bush used the summer months to raise record amounts of money for Republican candidates while focusing on get-out-the vote drives and defending the record of his party during the fall months leading up the election. The second prong was a strategic attempt to unite the party of liberal and conservative Republicans around his leadership, specifically his wartime leadership post 9/11. His focus and efforts were not dissimilar to his predecessors as the President advocated a general election strategy of helping GOP incumbents and challengers across the party spectrum, but they were tinged with a heightened sense of national security that invariably aids the President. In Maine for liberal Republican Senator Susan Collins Bush called her "a breath of fresh air in Washington, D.C. She's kind of an independent thinker, I might add. I don't do everything she says -- she doesn't do everything I say. But she's an ally, and I'm proud to call her friend" (Bush 2004). In South Dakota in late October on behalf of the Senate candidate John Thune Bush urged "all the citizens of this state and around the country, Republican, Democrat, or independent alike, to go to the polls. But I believe when those discerning Democrats and those wise independents take a look at the candidates that I'm here to support, they're going to vote for

them. It's in the best interests of their families, it's in the best interests of this state that these three men be elected to their offices" (Bush 2004). Later that day in Indiana on behalf of Chris Chocola, Bush told an audience, "You have an obligation to our country, you have an obligation to democracy itself. So I'm here to -- in South Bend to urge Republicans and Democrats and independents, people who don't care about political parties, to do your duty, and to go to the polls; to assume your responsibility as an American, and go to the polls. And by the way, I've got a suggestion when you get in there, Chris Chocola is the right man for the job" (Bush 2004). The language Bush chose was often the political language necessary for a head of party who is also head of state and head of government, particularly in wartime. His fight with congressional Democrats over the bill to create a Department of Homeland Security risked becoming a question over the patriotism of his opponents. This type of suggestion buried Woodrow Wilson's hope of a League of Nations with U.S. participation in the final years of his presidency. Bush was often much more careful but it was clear that he believed there to be significant policy differences with the Democrats even if he talked more frequently about the virtues of individual candidates.

Further, unlike most of his predecessors, the Bush White House took an active, if at times, behind the scenes, role in promoting particularly strong GOP candidates in state primary elections. The White House very publicly let it be known that they supported Norm Coleman in Minnesota, Jim Talent in Missouri, Greg Ganske in Iowa, and Richard Riordan for the Gubernatorial nomination in California. California Republicans spurned the presidential advice, choosing William Simon as their nominee and lost a surprisingly close election to incumbent Gray Davis. Polls indicated that Riordan was the most likely candidate to beat Davis and place that most significant of electoral states in GOP control.[6]

Once the financial and party leader pieces of the puzzle were in place, the third prong was organizational, the 72-Hour Project. Garance Franke-Ruta and Harold Meyerson noted in *The American Prospect* how Rove's predictions that Bush would win 50-51% of the popular vote in 2000 was off by a crucial 2 percentage points. The RNC's political director, Blaise Hazelwood, had research showing that union households in 1998 and 2000 were turning out vote at rates much higher than their percentage in the population. Evangelicals, meanwhile, were underperforming, putting Republicans at a distinct disadvantage in the final 72 hours of a race, when union mobilizations led by the AFL-CIO were having a strong impact in turning out households that would vote Democratic" (Franke-Ruta and Meyerson, 2004). Thus was the MLM of parties put into action.

Party organizations in key battleground states became the living room of upline manager and downline recruits. "The big thing that brings them [campaign volunteers] all together is viral activity," claimed the Bush/Cheney 2004 Campaign Manager Ken Mehlmen (Bai 2004, p. 47). Because the goal of this vibrant grass-roots organization was to reach as many voters as possible during the final 72 hours of the campaign and get them to the polls, human interaction and organization of efforts was at a premium. The *Washington Post* reported that "the work paid big dividends on Election Day, when a surge of Republican voters in states such as Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Missouri overwhelmed the Democrats and turned what many had called one of the most competitive midterm campaigns in history into a substantial Republican victory" (Balz 2003, p. A17). The Republican effort was similar to the Democratic Party machines of a bygone era that were notoriously effective at voter turnout.

Bush was also relentless in his efforts, visiting forty states and over 100 congressional districts on behalf of Republican candidates. During the last 5 days, Bush visited 17 key candidate

events. After the election 73% of those 17 had won, many with tight races and some with a

margin of just 1% of the vote. What is it that Bush did differently than his predecessors?

Arguably, the terrorist attacks of 2001 had the same effect on the polity as the Great Depression

in the 1930s, creating a wave of public support for the President that allowed him to reverse the

historical course and demonstrate the strength of a strong executive as party leader. The

overwhelming reelection of congressional incumbents also favored the GOP. Despite having to

contest 34 open seats in the House and 7 in the Senate, most of those seats were from states that

Bush carried in the 2000 presidential election. Bush approached this election with clear

advantages. And the Democratic strategy of alliance with the President on certain issues

backfired badly. "Democrats were complicit in the strategy pursued by White House political

genius Karl Rove," complained E.J. Dionne. "By trying to work around Bush-and, in may states,

by running as Bush supporters—Democrats did exactly what Bush needed: They helped keep his

approval ratings high" (Dionne 2002).

Still, many commentators wondered whether the key to his future success might exist in a

Democratic Congress. "Americans will regard the Republicans as fully in charge and will hold

them accountable for gridlock," stated Norman Ornstein on October 31, predicting the response

to a GOP victory (Ornstein 2002).

After fielding a strong ticket in most states, with particular attention to open seats, the

President returned to his chief of state role. As the early glimpses of his campaign speeches

indicate, Bush called upon the American people to assist him in fighting the war on terror and

protect homeland security by electing good people to Congress. The relatively low turnout in the

election assuredly assisted the GOP, particularly because the turnout of GOP voters increased

4% nationally since 1998. This rather small up tick in voter turnout among Republican partisans

took on a heightened importance as ideological voting reached a high in the modern era in the

2000 presidential election. In that election, 90% of Republican and Democratic identifies voted

for their party's presidential candidate. With the slight increase in turnout, and the President's

relentless campaigning for help, nearly 35% of voters who turned out claimed they did so to help

the president (CBS News Poll 2002). Democrats compounded their problem by underestimating

Bush's appeal and using key resources on losing battles.

Ryan Lizza in the *New Republic* reported, "In race after race, the Republican margin of

victory was larger than what the final polls predicted. In Colorado, the last public poll showed

Wayne Allard at 44 percent, yet he won with 51 percent of the vote. In Georgia, where

Republicans had one of their best GOTV operations, Saxby Chambliss was at 44 percent in the

last two polls but received 53 percent. There were similar surges in the Senate races in North

Carolina, New Hampshire, and Texas." (Lizza, 2002) The success of these efforts provided the

evidence party leaders needed of the effectiveness of not only Bush as party leader but also the

MLM of parties. Indeed, by 2004, Bush's efforts as party leader bore fruit because of the

organizational MLM techniques on the ground. According to Bush's chief strategist Matthew

Dowd (2005)

> we were able to win some close races that we probably wouldn't have won unless
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> we had learned from what we had learned in 2000 through the 72-Hour Task
>
> Force and done some things. I mean, we put a lot of stuff in place in Georgia,
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> where we had some surprising victories in the Senate and the governor's race. We
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> put some stuff in place in Minnesota, where [former Vice President Walter]
>
> Mondale was supposed to win and ended up losing to Sen. [Norm] Coleman.
>
> Missouri. So there were some spots that we did some stuff that I think we pulled

some races out. We had good candidates, but also, we had such good tactics. But

having a president with a 60 percent, 59 percent job approval helps.

Presidential Party Control

The final element of the MLM of parties is the role of Bush as party leader. As Bush

turned away from the midterm and toward governing with a strengthened majority, he was given

an unusual opportunity to broaden the GOP coalition and reshape the congressional party. The

Republican Majority Leader of the Senate, Trent Lott of Mississippi, declared at a celebration for

Senator Strom Thurmond, the segregationist 1948 Dixiecrat candidate for President, "I want to

say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud

of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these

problems over all these years, either" (Edsall 2002). Despite a quick apology and because of

previous flirtations by Lott with racially insensitive comments, the White House was brought

into the dispute. The *Washington* Post editorialized that "unless it is thoroughly and publicly

repudiated by national Republican leaders, Mr. Lott's message will be one more reason for the

Democratic Party's base to remain firmly fixed where it is" (*Washington Post* 2002). In

response, the White House engaged in an historic effort to intervene in the matter to bring about

Lott's removal and install their favored candidate, Senator Bill Frist of Tennessee as Majority

Leader. "The Lott affair could not have ended in a way more helpful to the White House," wrote

Dan Balz and Dana Milbank in the *Post*. "With Frist at the helm, Bush would have a more

appealing ally in his effort to recast the image of the Republican Party" (Balz and Milbank

2002). Though the White House attempted to portray itself as an innocent bystander to events,

Bush loyalists worked to engineer Lott's fall. Elisabeth Bumiller reported in the *Times* that "the White House used a succession of carefully timed public statements and anonymous, damaging leaks to bring about the resignation of Lott and the ascension of Mr. First, while publicly denouncing the leaks and repeatedly expressing the view that the president did not think Mr. Lott should resign" (Bumiller 2002).

Bush's efforts as party leader and the integration of national Republican themes to local organizations and campaigns is a remarkable turnaround for a party who had witnessed three electoral landslides at the presidential level under Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan, but watched its fortunes everywhere else worsen. Bush's decision to pursue a party strategy does not yet qualify the Republicans as a "franchise party" where party leadership is precariously balanced with the "policy and electoral demands of their supporters and the career aspirations of their professional colleagues" (Carty, 2004). American parties are not going to emerge as parliamentary parties because of one example of strong party leadership or the use of MLM techniques. But it is a key element. As Carty explains

> Franchise systems exist to couple the efficiencies of scale and standardization
> with the advantages of local participation in ongoing operations and delivery of
> the organization's product. Typically, a central organization, recognizable by its
> common brand, determines the product line and sets standards for its production
> and labeling, designs and manages marketing and advertising strategy, and
> provides management help and training as well as arranging for the supplies
> needed by local outlets (Carty, 2004).

MLM Comes to Political Parties

Ed Gillespie emailed his followers after the election the results: "1.2 million volunteers made over 15 million contacts, knocking on doors and making calls in the 72 hours before the polls closed. 7.2 million e-activists were contacting their family, friends, co-workers, The RNC registered 3.4 million new voters, enlisted 1.4 million Team Leaders, and contacted-on a person to person basis-30 million Americans in the months leading up to and including Election Day, and In the final 72 hours we met 129 % of our door-knocking goal; and met 120% of our phone-calling goal." (East, 2004)

Evidence of the successful adaptation of MLM tactics by the GOP is found in a series of PowerPoint presentations put together by Karl Rove. According to Byron York, the Rove plan was "unintentionally made available" to Democratic strategists (York, 2005). The plan uses the language of MLM from key phrases such as "Back to People Power" and "The results were conclusive–It Works!" It also borrows heavily from MLM techniques:

"If you need votes from a constituency, go after them in a serious and targeted way."

"Don't wait for outside groups to turnout voters, do it yourself."

"Customize mail and phone programs to individual voters and their concerns."

"Make all voter contact motivational, visually appealing."

"Fight for this vote like you mean it."

"Devote resources."

The results in 2004 of these techniques were greater attention to the grass roots and more viral activity that helped to tip Ohio into the Republican column and delivery the presidency to George W. Bush. "There are more campaign people around, more coordination, more ground

troops and grass-roots organizing," according to state Senator Jane Earll of Erie County in Pennsylvania (Raum, 2004). "To watch them recruit new voters and volunteers in exurban town houses, cajoling one neighbor at a time, is to imagine how it might have looked to see the Democratic ward bosses organize their tenements in the days of Tammany Hall," wrote Matt Bai in his description of the new breed of political machines engineered by the Bush forces. "The comparison suggests a vision of the future: win or lose, a lasting political organization could well be the legacy of the Bush pyramid. It's not unrealistic to think that these new precinct-by-precinct county organizations in fledgling communities all over America may endure long after Karl Rove has retired to lead seminars at a Texas university" (Bai 2004, p. 126).

Significantly, official Republican party affiliation has not changed since the election of Bush, hovering around 31% of the population, with Democrats declining from 36% to 33% (Harris Interactive, 2005). MLM has not served to officially increase the number of Americans who are members of the GOP. But the processes are in place. Consider the reelection campaign of John Boehner serves as a useful example. Boehner allowed people to register as Precinct Captains on his website, www.fojb.com. The site advertised the 72-Hour Task Force as "A neighbor to neighbor, precinct by precinct grassroots program to remind people to exercise their precious right to vote." (Boehner, 2004)

In 2002, Bush was successfully able to transfer his popularity onto the party organization. This is not historically unusual: it was Andrew Jackson's prestige and popularity that was responsible for Democratic Party successes in the 1830s. But Jackson attached his popularity to a sustained party system and localized party organization. The Democratic Party lived well beyond the political popularity of its founding president. Bush's marketing of Republican Party politics has been in the context of a candidate-centered polity and his personal popularity. So the

President sold himself and his party as a brand. In the spring of 2002, a GOP pollster called this development the "Bush brand." The branding is a product of "Bush's sky-high approval ratings" that have had the effect of extending his popularity far "longer than normal, making him the GOP symbol." The danger, according to *U.S. News and World Report* is that "The brand dies when Bush leaves office" (*U.S. News* 2002).

But the unique role played by Bush during the 2002 elections, and the role of MLM in 2002 and again in 2004, suggests that however fleeting the "W" brand is in the early part of the new century, the new model of presidential-party interaction and the marketing of such may become the basis of resurgent party organizations. Ken Mehlman claimed "The most important thing you can do in politics is give someone a personal contact from a credible source. Not just a personal contact from a paid person on the ground, but someone in their church, their gun club or the PTA." (Kondracke 2004) In the days leading up to the election, an article in the *Los Angeles Times* commented that "in some ways the technologically driven outreach is a throwback to the days of the urban political machines, when ward heelers knew how to get out the vote in their part of the big city. After decades of less efficient direct mail and cold calls, the technology has evolved to the point that millions of residents living in battleground states are getting as much personal attention as a 1940s Democrat did in Chicago." (Menn, 2004, p. 14)

Conclusion

The Republicans use of MLM was a rational response to their critical need to increase voter turnout in the wake of Bush's loss of the popular vote in 2000. Wrapping a presidency in the cloak of party is both unusual by contemporary standards and fraught with political

uncertainty. But the Bush White House and the RNC carefully researched MLM tactics. As Dan

Balz and Mike Allen reported in the *Post*

> Bush's team did not go about this randomly. With considerable assistance from
>
> Dowd's research, the Bush operation sniffed out potential voters with precision-
>
> guided accuracy, particularly in fast-growing counties beyond the first ring of
>
> suburbs of major cities. The campaign used computer models and demographic
>
> files to locate probable GOP voters. Once those people were identified, the RNC
>
> sought to register them, and the campaign used phone calls, mail and front-porch
>
> visits—all with a message emphasizing the issues about which they cared most—
>
> to encourage them to turn out for Bush. (Balz and Allen, Nov. 7. 2, 2004)

Research by Pillsbury and Rivera suggest that previous problems with drives to increase

voter turnout ranged from "being too episodic," to "lacking an institutional base to improve

elections and the democratic process" (Pillsbury and Rivera, 2004). If the Republicans continue

to fund MLM operations, they hold out the possibility of providing the organizational apparatus

necessary for a sustained increase in GOP turnout.

Bush's efforts at party-building and voter turnout paid off with party victories in 2002

and 2004. However historical significant the results of those elections, the organizational

apparatus Bush left behind is important from the perspective of presidential party leadership. As

the examples of most modern presidents demonstrates, the natural impulse for presidents is to

seek personal political ratification rather than risk linking themselves to the party apparatus.

Even presidents more disposed to the mantle of party leadership have ultimately chosen to

pursue personal political victories. But the Bush team from 2001 through the 2002 elections and

beyond chose to build-up their party organizations by linking them to grass-roots activists and

tying it all together with the popularity of the president. The true test of the institutionalization

of MLM tactics will be whether or not the Republicans find the evidence of 2002-2004 so

compelling that they continue to use them.

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