

# Reaching the Undecided Voter

By Thomas W. Campbell

Aside from the candidates, every election consists of at least **four groups of people** - supporters, non-voters, unregistered voters and undecided voters. A healthy campaign strategy should be designed to address all four types from now until Election Day.

**SUPPORTERS** already know who they are going to vote for in the upcoming election. They are sure about their decision, and usually no amount of campaigning on either side will change their mind. Although it's possible to lose supporters to an opponent, it very rarely happens. Supporters are the "backbone" of any campaign, because it's just not possible for a candidate to do all the work necessary to win the election. Supporters must always be treated with respect and never taken for granted. They will make most of the donations to your campaign, and with their help, allow you to reach others who have not yet become supporters.

**NON-VOTERS** are those people who are registered to vote, but for some reason or another just don't vote. Many people who fall into this category feel unable to make a qualified decision about which candidate will do the best job, so they just don't bother. "After all," they will say, "why vote if you are not sure about who is most qualified to win the election? If I just take a guess, I might be voting for the wrong person, and do more harm than good." Sometimes, this defense is a "smoke screen" for their unwillingness to expend the time and effort it takes to make a qualified decision. And one of the main reasons that people in this category don't vote is because they don't believe that their vote will make a difference anyway.

**UNREGISTERED VOTERS** are eligible for registration, but just won't take the time or make the effort to do so. Some unregistered voters will work in a campaign for a particular candidate as if they are a supporter, but keep the fact that they are not registered a big secret. Still others never register to vote because they have no interest in the process, and don't really care who wins the upcoming election.

**UNDECIDED VOTERS** are those people who are not quite sure yet about which candidate to support, but do plan to vote in the upcoming election. Undecided voters may be leaning one way or the other, but they don't become "supporters" until they have definitely made up their mind and are ready to jump in the car, drive down to the polls, and cast their vote for a particular candidate. Undecided voters believe in the process, and will vote because they feel it's their civic duty to do so. In a way, they are the "silent majority" of voters who really want to make the best voting decision they can, but are either unable or unwilling to take the time to decide who should get their vote. Usually, people who are undecided right up until Election Day are "straight ticket" voters. The outcome of most elections is usually based on how successful candidates are about being able to reach this group of undecided voters.

Although a successful campaign strategy should make an attempt to appeal to all four groups, the candidate who wins the election will be the one who is able to

convert the most number of undecided voters into becoming supporters. After serving as Campaign Manager in two mayoral elections, and as an active supporter in many other elections, I offer the following conclusions about how to appeal to the undecided voter:

**1. Converting the undecided voter to becoming your supporter is all about education.** It is the candidate's job to educate the undecided voter about his or her position on key issues that are important to the election. This is typically done by purchasing advertising in newspapers, magazines, radio and/or television, using direct mail, holding public meetings, and publishing a candidate's website. While all of these methods are necessary for exposure, they are not really effective for reaching the undecided voter. Undecided voters believe that anything sponsored by you is going to be biased in your favor. Therefore, undecided voters will not know whether to believe your message, or that of your opponents. For this reason, they will usually disregard your advertisements completely. Undecided voters are most easily offended by the candidate who uses "mud slinging" tactics in his or her advertising. These people will feel some degree of sympathy towards the candidate who is being attacked, even if that candidate does not appear to be the best qualified person for the job. Using "mud slinging" tactics is like taking medication for a migraine headache. Doing so might cure the headache, but the "side effects" might be deadly to your campaign.

**2. Spending more money than your opponent does not guarantee that you will attract the undecided voter to your side.** There is no doubt that having a larger campaign fund "war chest" will provide a candidate greater opportunity for increased exposure. The ability to buy more advertising will definitely get your campaign slogan (and your face) out to a larger audience. But again, throwing money at a campaign does not really attract the undecided voter. Once again, undecided voters believe that advertising sponsored by you will be biased in your favor, and so they will tend to ignore those ads.

**3. One of the more effective ways to reach the undecided voter is to participate in candidate debates or candidate forums.** Typically, these functions are held in a public place, such as a meeting hall or banquet room which will seat a large group of people. To reach even more people, some of these functions are broadcast on radio and television. Debates and forums are popular because they provide a way for the undecided voter to compare the position each candidate takes on specific issues. At these functions, candidates take turns answering questions or making statements on important issues. Ideally, after listening to each candidate address the question or concern, the undecided voter will be in a much better position to judge which candidate should receive his or her vote. These functions, however, are not perfect. One drawback to debates and forums is timing; if the undecided voter is not available when the function takes place, it's doubtful that they will ever see it. Another drawback is that they tend to favor the candidate who can think more quickly about how to respond to a question or issue. A candidate who may be more qualified to serve might not perform as well in this venue.

In my opinion, the most effective way to attract undecided voters is to provide them with an unbiased and objective source of information about how each candidate stands on important issues surrounding the election. And without a doubt, the most effective way to provide that source of information is through an Internet website dedicated to that purpose. Undecided voters will visit that website to read and understand candidates' positions on key issues because they know that they will not be bombarded with biased campaign ads. Furthermore, they will visit that site because it is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, for their convenience.

A new website that offers objective and reliable candidate information is the USA Voter's Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)). The USA Voter's Guide is a website that allows voters the opportunity to direct questions and issues to candidates in those elections in which they have an interest. Furthermore, it provides an equal amount of space for candidates to respond to those questions and issues. Some have described USA Voters Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)) as an automated, on-line candidate's forum, offering the undecided voter a place to read unbiased information about candidates.

Using USA Voters Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)) is a three-step process. Here's how it works:

**Step 1:** Elections are registered by voters, supporters or candidates. Elections include those on all three levels - federal, state and local. For example, USA Voters Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)) includes the 2008 Presidential Election, state congressional elections, gubernatorial elections, mayoral elections, town council elections, school board elections, and even elections for sheriff and town clerk.

**Step 2:** Once elections are registered with USA Voter's Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)), all of the candidates are provided the opportunity to make a general statement about why they are the best qualified to win the election.

**Step 3:** Voter's can sponsor questions and issues that are important to the election. Each candidate is offered the opportunity to answer the question or address the issue. USA Voter's Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)) will provide exactly the same amount of space to each candidate in an attempt to keep it completely objective and unbiased.

The USA Voter's Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)) is an effective tool that can be used by candidates to let voters know why he or she should win the upcoming election. It should be an integral part of the overall campaign strategy for any candidate who is convinced that he or she is the best person for the job!

USA Voter's Guide ([www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com)) is free to voters, and candidates can post their responses to questions and issues at no cost. The website is funded by supporters who sponsor questions and issues, and by offering candidates the option of enhancing their candidate listing for a small fee. For more information about this website, visit [www.usavotersguide.com](http://www.usavotersguide.com).