



What We Can Learn As Marketers As the Bell Rang Concluding the “Last and Final Round” of the Presidential Election

While marketing books have a lot of branding techniques to offer, it is the real life scenarios that can teach us much more about how to adopt these marketing methods and make the product a success.

The upcoming Presidential elections of 2008 are a classic study for marketers and demonstrate quite blatantly how by using the right branding approach even the underdog can turn the tables around. So if looking to play with the big boys and win the game, the right strategy is of utmost importance.

Obama started off as the perfect underdog with his “terrorist” links and non-warring background, while McCain played the fair-haired guy to the T, with his war veteran record and his political experience. So at the time of launch, it seemed that Obama would loose to McCain by a fairly large margin.

As the bell rings to conclude the third and final round of the Presidential debate, the people of America gear up to judge the match between the challenger and the champion, the polls tip drastically in Obama’s favor.

What has changed the scenario so drastically?

Simply put, it was Barack Obama’s flawlessly executed marketing policy that was propagated by Rob Frankel. Right from the very beginning of the campaign, Obama worked towards promoting himself as the one and only solution to his voter’s problems.

Obama’s corner started off with most odds stacked against him. Not only was he the challenger and therefore not exactly in the good books of the judges, but he was also the first African American to have ever gotten so far in the Presidential elections of the United States of America. Having defeated Hillary Clinton by 1208 votes to emerge as the democrat candidate for the presidential election, Barack Obama knew well that he had a long fight carved out for him. His associations with “terrorists” in his early life and the controversy related to his pastor Jeremiah Wright delivering sermons said to be racially and politically charged were his weak areas.

However, despite these weak points, Barack was able to slowly and steadily gain supporters due to his immense and focused ability to highlight his strong points and strike his opponent armed with them. Instead of dealing with the Presidential campaign as a soap opera, Obama concentrated on the more vital issues at hand. He has attacked the Republican corner armed with anti Iraq war punches and health benefit strikes. The lighter punches came in the form of his support of the ‘Employee Free Choice Act’, the



'Equal Pay' policy, 'increase of minimum wages up to \$7.25', 'New Energy Plan' said to bring down US fuel consumption by 35 % and the 'Tax Credits', which would lower the strain on middle class families.

Fully understanding the fact that he needs to portray himself as not just a better fighter than McCain, but absolutely and fully capable of defeating his opponent completely, Barack Obama has clearly, practiced and prepared well.

As is obvious now, the main trick in Rob Frankel's theory lies in convincing prospects that the product is not simply better than the competition but is the only sole solution to the prospects needs. Obama also understood that he must market himself as the overall victor from the very beginning of the campaign. Therefore, irrespective of the size of the venture, it is imperative that the products achieve the status of being the 'lone solution' rather than a 'better one' than the competition. Obama knew well that as long as voters see him as simply better than McCain, they would continue to shop till the day of the polls. So instead he moved in with hard punches in the form of sound policies and convinced the stands that he was the only one deserving of the championship trophy. If the product is able to come across as the only solution to the buyer's problems, it is unlikely that the competition will be able to break this image easily.

But then what made McCain loose out in the polls despite being considered a strong and more established player?

McCain seemed to have reached desperation by the end of the third round of the debates. In fact from the very beginning he seemed to unwisely choose to attack Obama on a personal front. McCain despite being considered the stronger candidate when the match began is feeling the rise of the mercury now. Instead of attacking the policies of his opponent, McCain seemed to have adopted a more personal attack approach. He ignored his own policies completely and instead chose to try and go for a knock out shot by highlighting Obama's personal past. Of course, as we all know the strategy seems to have failed quite drastically. At every moment McCain seems to be illustrating what his competitor cannot do rather than what McCain can do for the prospects. Voters do not care about being told what Obama is personally; they care about what McCain will do for them and their betterment, if they vote for McCain. If McCain was going to move towards a knock out he would need to come up with much more vital and stronger blows like what economical reforms he offers etc.

Consumers cannot be held on to for a long time simply by inciting them emotionally against the moral drawbacks of the competition. At the end of the day potential clients can only be converted if they feel that the product is adding some value to their lives. John McCain is sadly missing out this point completely. It is critical to the success of the marketing strategy that the products strong points be highlighted rather than simply going on with criticism of the competitions commodities. Prospects only care about what the product can do for them and unless the product is marketed in this light, it is unlikely to receive much success. Instead of portraying to the people that McCain can provide them



with the stability they need, he continued to try and bring down Obama from his pedestal. The more he attacked Obama, the more he drew attention to his opponent. Obama grabbed this attention and convinced voters about his policies and sealed his portrayal as the only solution to their problems. So in attacking Obama, McCain actually helped Obama rather than himself. So when looking to capture the prospect; sell the product rather than bringing down the competition.

Also McCain forgot to emphasize on how he is going to be different from the former President. Obama on the other hand, left no opportunity to stress how his tenure will be unlike Bush's reign. After 10 years of Bush, the voters are looking forward to a change and most of them saw none being offered by McCain. As marketers too, it is imperative that the product must be highlighted as different from the ones that already exist in the market. As is clear now, unless the product is propagated as different from its competition, it is unlikely that it can be marketed as the sole solution to the clients needs.

Another huge mistake made by McCain came in the form of his disrespectful comments towards Obama. By adopting underhand methods to bring the competition down, one actually glorifies the competition in the eyes of the prospect. Not respecting your opponent conveys to the buyer, that the competition is creating panic for the defender and is making the defender loose control. This results in an automatic loss of goodwill and projects the defender as weak and scared. Simply put, it is futile to try and mar the reputation of the competition. Rather as a seller, one must at all times work towards a confident image and portray the product as the one and only solution to the prospects needs. McCain's referrals to Obama as 'this one' were considered derogatory by the voters who felt that this 72-year-old veteran is in a street fight rather than the Presidential election. Bad mouthing and mud slinging is a lousy marketing gimmick which mostly repels the prospects rather than attract them.

What has almost sealed the deal against McCain has been his inability to rethink and change his strategy in accordance with what was working for him and what was not. Since McCain had had a taste of the first two rounds, it was imperative for him to change his strategy and work towards what is working for him rather than continue to invest money and energy into strategies that are failing to convert. The wild tactics that McCain adopted may have worked in winning smaller and less skillful fights, but McCain was looking to defeat a skillful fighter such as Obama and therefore needed to move back into his corner and come up with consistent and perfected strategies. However, sadly he continued to invest in the strategies that were going against him to begin with and lost out even in the third and final round.

As marketers we also need to understand that keeping up with the times and changing our strategies in accordance with them is essential for the strategy to succeed. Money, time and energy must be invested only in those aspects that are working in the favor of the product. Simply, haphazard-flinging punches will only result in loss of energy. On the other hand targeting the areas where the punch is most likely to benefit is the trick to leading in the trade. As the Pareto theory of 80/20 suggests, two important concepts to



realize is that 20% of the population has 80% of the wealth and only 20% of your marketing efforts account for 80% of profits. As marketers it is important to target these sections. Randomly trying to appeal to the entire population and not specifically targeting the spenders will result in sheer waste of time and money, with the returns not coming in proportionately. McCain did not focus on his major voters but instead tried to appeal to the emotions of all of America. Obama on the other hand knew his vote bank well and insured that he captured it completely by concentrating on them only.

As we come closer to the grand finale, as voters and marketers most of us wonder if the 72-year-old veteran McCain will last it out with the young gun Obama. Is America calling upon young blood to step in with their reforms and ideas and is signaling the older players like Sugar Shane Mosley and Bernard Hopkins to retire? While the answers to these questions will be clear on the first Tuesday of November which is 4th, as marketers our quests will continue longer.

It seems like the crux of the situation lies in choosing ones fights wisely and picking only those that are big enough to matter and small enough to win. For both the legendary fighters and the challenger, a sound fighting strategy is crucial. Under estimating the competition and going in with a flimsy plan of action is sure to result in defeat, be it the big boys or the small game. After analyzing what strategy is working for the product, the marketer must tap on it fully so as to be able to imbed the product in the mind of the prospect as the 'only solution' for the buyer and all while presenting yourself in a courteous, respectful and professional manner.