Why Candidates Need to Have a Solid Video Marketing Strategy Come 2020

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With more than a year to go until the first presidential ballots are cast, 2020 is already shaping up to be the most expensive election ever. The latest forecasts suggest overall spending on political ads will reach a whopping $10 billion, a nearly 60% jump from 2016 and more than twice the sum in 2012.

This spending bonanza is fueled in part by the divisive political climate. But another big factor this time around is the crowded field of well-funded Democrats for whom cost is no object as they fight for traction in the crucial months ahead of the Iowa caucuses.

Of all the tactics in the modern campaign marketer’s toolkit, video is turning out to be the fastest growing and most strategically important. Video viewing habits are rapidly splintering across new screens and platforms while traditional TV is no longer a viable fallback plan for broadcasting a candidate’s message to the American populace. More than ever, political campaigns need to embrace a proactive approach to video, looking beyond analog—and even social media in some instances—to find more impactful ways of engaging audiences across the broader digital landscape.

Prioritize digital as pathway toward engaging millennials

This election year will mark another major inflection point in

the future of TV. In the recent midterm elections, millennials surpassed boomers as the largest voting block for the first time, and more than two-thirds of this younger cohort are primarily watching content through streaming services as opposed to cable or satellite.

Political advertisers need to revamp their overall approach to TV, allocating additional budget to digital channels such as OTT and connected TVs (CTV) and leveraging more data than ever before for targeting purposes. This shift will be most stark for Democrats, as they look to make up significant ground this cycle. In 2016, for instance, the Trump campaign invested more than 40% of its media budget on digital while the Clinton campaign devoted just 2.5%.

Diversify media plans amid continued brand safety concerns

Social media is too big for any campaign to ignore. But advertisers must also proceed with caution, lest they ignore the steady drumbeat of cautionary tales that seem to overwhelm the news cycle every few weeks. There will always be inherent dangers in placing ads alongside user-generated content, which by nature is unpredictable and prone to include extreme or unsavory viewpoints. As the reputational and transparency risks of social media increases, savvy political advertisers should invest greater effort into diversifying their portfolios, looking for ways to engage target audiences beyond the confines of the walled gardens, which are reportedly planning to de-politicize ads in the coming election season.

Experiment with video

As video campaigns are increasingly distributed through digital channels, there is an opportunity for political advertisers to drive goals beyond brand awareness. Many campaigns this cycle have added calls to action at the end of their online video, OTT or CTV campaigns, inviting prospective

voters to watch more clips about a candidate, signup for email alerts or rank the issues they’d most like to hear discussed in the next primary debate. Retargeting campaigns can further engage committed voters to take additional steps, such as making a donation or volunteering to canvas in their neighborhood.

Politics has always been a stubborn and volatile business for marketers, with strong incentives against deviating from what has worked in the past. But as the pace of change in consumer video habits accelerates, winning campaigns will need to adopt a more agile approach. This is especially true in the realm of TV, where prospective voters are no longer passive channel-surfers but wired multiplatform mavens ready to engage.

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