

Tapping Into History for Fun and Profit

A Social Media CASE STUDY

***Or... How leveraging social media and current events can
drive awareness of your campaign***

Helen M. Overland

June 7th, 2009

focusedmarketer.com

Table of Contents

Situational Background 3

The Campaign 3

CoalitionOpinion.ca..... 4

 Presentation & Positioning 4

 Content and Goals 4

Outreach Actions 5

 Twitter 5

 Facebook 5

 Other Contacts 5

Results 6

 Sources of Traffic 6

 Direct Visitors 7

 Traffic and Votes 7

Conclusions & Learnings 8

Finally... 9

 License for Use: 9

Situational Background

Near the end of November 2008, Canada's Parliament suddenly experienced a crisis. Partly in response to budget changes, Canada's opposition leaders gathered together to sign an agreement to form a coalition. Since Canada has a parliamentary system, this coalition could have ousted the sitting government, and legally taken power.

The speed at which the coalition was formed and signed was almost blinding, and caught many Canadians completely by surprise. Within about a one-week period, Canadians went from receiving an economic update from the government elected only several weeks earlier, to potentially having a completely new government formed by three other parties, simply by signing an agreement. Many Canadians were confused, hopeful or upset by the events, and for several days in late 2008, Canadian political emotions ran unusually high.

In fact, the speed of the events is a focal point of this case study. The coalition was first heard of by Canadians on November 30, 2008, and the deal was signed and announced the next day on December 1, 2008. With no time to digest the news, many Canadians reacted quickly to the parliamentary situation.

The Campaign

As a Canadian watching the news on December 1st, it suddenly seemed very clear that the division between those for and against the potential coalition government was sharp and vehement. There was therefore a need for a central place for people to express themselves and their opinion about this important issue.

Would it be possible to gain the attention of Canadians interested in this emotional issue? The theory was that an organization (or person) which can respond quickly should be able to raise awareness through tapping into current events through social media.

The campaign run to test this theory consisted of one website, with one conversion point consisting of a simple voting form.

It should be noted that since the coalition debate was very short-lived, the campaign only ran for about 2 days in total. Once the debate ran out of steam, it seemed wise to end the campaign, as further efforts would gradually become less and less effective. Therefore, the data and results generated from this campaign were done so within a 2 day window.

CoalitionOpinion.ca

To empirically test this theory, on December 1st the domain CoalitionOpinion.ca was registered. A few hours later, just after midnight on December 2nd, the site was live and ready to go.

Presentation & Positioning

Because of the heated debate, it was important that the site appear to be as non-partisan as possible. If the site appeared to take a side, then people who may otherwise have voted and shared the site with friends may have been discouraged. It was also important that the site not appear to be a professional pollster company. The reason for this is because public perception can be that polls are usually paid for by parties, and people may have felt unwilling to participate if they felt their vote might be used to make a point they may or may not have agreed with.

In keeping with these goals, the site is basic and as neutral as possible. The background colours are white and sea-green – colours associated with no particular party. The colours of all 4 major parties involved appeared lightly at the top of each page. Finally, the site specifically stated it was “*Non-Partisan!*”, and “*we’re not taking sides, so go ahead and vent*”.

Further to the design of the site, the outreach strategies that were used were also as non-partisan and as fair as was practically possible. For each reach out to a “yes” leaning organization, there was an attempt to reach out to a “no” leaning organization.

Content and Goals

The main draw and “conversion point” of the site was a simple voting widget which asked the question “*Do You Agree or Disagree with the Idea of this Coalition Government?*” People could choose one of only two answers: “*Agree*”, or “*Disagree*”. People could also add a comment, or view comments on PollDaddy.

The site also contained some information on Canada’s parliamentary system. It also displayed current conversations on Twitter about the coalition, and displayed headlines about the coalition from Google News. (Note, since the coalition is no longer a hot topic, the widgets no longer provide relevant information).

Outreach Actions

The campaign had a budget of \$0, since the intent of this test was to determine whether social media could actually send qualified traffic to a site, and complete a conversion action. No banners, PPC or any other form of advertising except social outreach were engaged for this campaign. In addition, with the exception of sending one tweet on Dec 4th, **these actions were all taken on the first day of the campaign – Day One.**

Twitter

A tweet was sent to the *semlady* twitter account announcing the site just after midnight on December 2nd. The tweet can still be seen here: <http://twitter.com/semlady/status/1034556915>. A link to the site was also tweeted and retweeted a few times by a handful of people – less than 10 in total. A few people who seemed interested in the topic were also sent direct messages through Twitter. Some of the tweets have since disappeared, but existed during the time the campaign was active.

Facebook

During the time the campaign was running, there were a variety of facebook groups dedicated to the topic of the possible coalition government. Some of these groups were for the coalition, and some were against. The two largest groups – one for, and one against – were identified, and a message was left with each group letting people know about the website.

Other Contacts

Each of the English-speaking political parties involved – Conservative, Liberal and NDP – were also contacted, either through an email or a form on their site.

In addition, a couple of newspapers which allowed discussion on their websites were identified. Comments or messages which pointed people to the website were left with the sites with the idea that people might see the site and come and visit. Since these links were not live, any traffic driven through these efforts is effectively untraceable.

Results

Sources of Traffic

Most of the traffic that came to the website did so within a 48 hour period. In fact, the majority of the visitors arrived on Day One. **Within a day and a half of launching the site, there were about 1,100 votes cast through the widget on the website**, with over 20 comments left on PollDaddy.

Following are traffic patterns as tracked by Google Analytics. As is clear here, most of the traffic arrived on Day One - the first day of the campaign, when the website first launched.

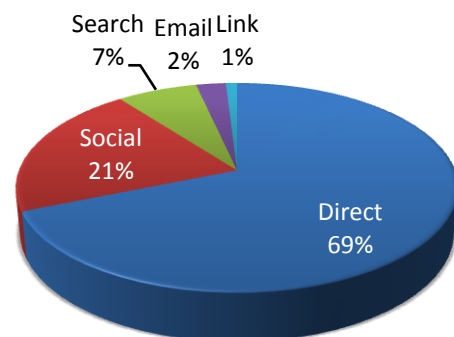
Day	Traffic
Day One (Dec 2)	846
Day 2 (Dec 3)	120
Day 3 (Dec 4)	44
Day 4 (Dec 5)	13
Day 5 (Dec 6)	6
Day 6 (Dec 7)	6
Day 7 (Dec 8)	16
Day 8 (Dec 9)	3

The biggest sources of traffic for the site were actually **Direct Traffic** (728), **facebook** (153) and **twitter** (56).

When we group the sources of traffic up into categories we get the following view of where traffic came from:

Source	Visits
Direct	728
Social	220
Search	73
Email	27
Link	10

Visits by Source



A few blogs also picked up the site and linked to it, from both sides of the political debate. In addition, there were several traceable email referrals – people who received an email about the site and visited the site through a link. Only people who viewed their email in a web-based system could be tracked.

Direct Visitors

There are three likely sources of the large number of “Direct” visits to the website:

1. People who heard of the website and **typed the domain name in directly** (unlikely to be a major contribution with such a short campaign run)
2. People who **saw the link in a newspaper website comment and pasted it into their browser** – this cannot be ruled out, but seems from a practical point of view to be somewhat unlikely to generate the numbers seen here
3. **People who were emailed the link** – Based on experience, this would seem to be the most likely source of the “Direct” traffic. If people click on a link in their Outlook or other email software, it generally cannot be tracked, and is usually marked as a “Direct” visit

Traffic and Votes

During the first day or so, there were slightly less visits to the website than votes counted in PollDaddy. This is probably due to the fact that the poll on PollDaddy was set to “public”, and people on the PollDaddy website could find the poll and vote on it there. Although the PollDaddy system tracks people to prevent them from voting twice, it is possible that a few enterprising people circumvented the system and managed to vote more than once. However, if this was the case in any serious way, we would expect to see a more skewed result than the 49%/51% result that the poll ended with.

Conclusions & Learnings

Considering that this campaign was generated “from the hip”, with no prior planning and with a site launch less than 6 hours after the initial idea, this campaign could be said to be a solid success.

Based on this campaign, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Social Media Can Drive Relevant Traffic – The website drew over 800 people on its first day of launch, with no press release, no advertising, and virtually no prior planning. Just a few tweets, a few messages in facebook, and a few carefully targeted emails did the trick. What could the campaign have achieved if the coalition debate hadn’t fizzled so quickly?

Time is of the Essence – This campaign went so smoothly mainly because it was running in tandem with a major developing story in the news. If you can jump on board the speeding locomotive while it’s still in action, you have the most to gain by the momentum. That being said, consider carefully which news stories to tag along with and how you approach them – there’s generally less risk when exercising good taste.

Don’t Spam Facebook – After joining the “for” and “against” groups and writing messages in each group, I was locked out of facebook for 24 hours for potential spam. Be aware that joining groups too quickly and leaving too many messages in facebook can result in your account being flagged. While I don’t think 2 relevant messages are spam, it’s facebook’s system, and they can define it how they like.

Consider PollDaddy Pro – it would have been interesting to know where people were voting from, and to have had further analytics information from the campaign. This information is only available in a paid version of PollDaddy. If this is vital to your campaign, you may want to consider this upgrade if you choose to use this system.

Add an “Email to a Friend” Form – It might have been helpful to have had an “email this to a friend” form on the page, where potentially incoming links from email recipients could have been better tracked. Going forward, this would seem like a natural inclusion for a campaign of this nature.

Finally...

Keep in touch with what we're working on at the Focused Marketer:

Visit us at FocusedMarketer.com

License for Use:

Feel free to share this work on your personal or commercial blog, intranet, website, email, etc. as long as nothing in this document is changed, including the name and links to the website.

