

2003, for instance, the list of presidential candidate attendees made not just the *Manchester Union Leader* but also ABCNews.com's "The Note," a daily must-read for the national political elite. American politics today, including media coverage of politics, "lends itself to endless speculation, and gum-chewing, and thumb-sucking about what's going to happen, versus real reporting on what actually is happening," Duncan said. In that type of environment, grassroots campaigning in New Hampshire is important in part because of the image such action conveys to the watching media. "Having that as your backdrop to how you're campaigning is a good backdrop to have. It also saves you from getting a rap going, particularly early on, that you're doing it wrong" . . .

Second Stage: The Media Fishbowl

The seemingly interminable exhibition season finally ends in January of the year of the presidential election, when Iowa holds its caucuses and, soon after, New Hampshire its primary.

The Iowa caucuses are both inconclusive and definitive for candidates' fortunes. On one hand, the January caucuses held in precincts across the state do not actually award convention delegates to candidates; this occurs months later at state party conventions. On the other hand, and more important, the Iowa caucuses are "the gateway to a long and complex nomination process, and all players and all observers very much want whatever information they can glean" from the results, however transitory they may be. The media turn their attention from speculation on a candidate's prospects to analysis of the verdict from actual voters: "Iowa results, plus media spin" set the story line for New Hampshire and establish the roles of front runner, lead challenger (or challengers), and the remaining bit players who have the unenviable parts of long shots or also-rans.

For the week between the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary, the attention of the national political media descends on New Hampshire in a deluge. "That week is full of electricity," said Pat Griffin, executive vice president for the advertising firm O'Neil Griffin Bodi and a veteran of several political campaigns. In jest, he compared the last week before the primary to being on the set of *Doctor Zhivago*:

All these Washington types buy their mukluks . . . to come up once every four years. . . . They come up and say, "My God, where can I get my hair done? Where can I find arugula salad?" . . . Go to [Manchester restaurant] Richard's Bistro at night, they're all at the same places, [saying] "My goodness, can you believe this tundra where these people live?"

The national political media venture into the tundra—at least as far as Manchester and its environs, if not the seacoast or the Connecticut River valley or the North Country—because the people who live there possess something they want dearly: information on how actual voters feel about the presidential candidates. The Iowa caucuses, in which participants have to devote hours of time on a single evening, are usually low-turnout events attended by party faithful, in which strong organizations are often vital to a good showing. The New Hampshire primary, in contrast, turns out a much higher percentage of voters, and candidates must therefore be able to appeal to a variety of constituencies. Iowa and New Hampshire together, plus the media's interpretations of those two contests, winnow the field to a front runner and one or, at most, two or three challengers. . . .

Perhaps one of the reasons New Hampshire has been and remains an indicator is that it is an early testing ground of candidates' organizational skills, charisma, and appeal to the broad range of the relevant electorate. For, notwithstanding its idiosyncrasies—and what state is not idiosyncratic?—New Hampshire's populace is composed of various factions that have their analogues in the rest of the nation. How a candidate crafts a message to appeal to those factions or constituencies in New Hampshire does affect how he or she will be perceived thereafter. New Hampshire's ability to determine the nomination may be in question; that it is an early indicator of how a candidate plans on running a campaign and the likely chances of the success of that message, however, is not.

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DENNIS JOHNSON

From No Place for Amateurs

Behind the scenes of every political campaign today is a political consultant. Political consulting is a thriving business whose skills are employed not just by candidates for national office, but those running for state and local positions too. Referendum questions placed on state ballots are managed by consultants. No race is too small or too obscure to be aided by consulting firms, whether big time ones led by the famous (James Carrville, Dick Morris) or the anonymous one or two person basement operation. Dennis Johnson reveals the multitude of tasks that consultants perform for a campaign. He also gives some good tips on movies to rent on the topic: The War Room and Wag the Dog are particularly good choices for those who enjoy the blend of fact and fiction.

I don't want to read about you in the press. I'm sick and tired of consultants getting famous at my expense. Any story that comes out during the campaign undermines my candidacy.

—BILL CLINTON to his new 1996 reelection consultants Dick Morris and Doug Schoen

JUST DAYS BEFORE THE 1996 Democratic National Convention, a smiling, confident Bill Clinton was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. Pasted on Clinton's right shoulder was a cut-out photo of political consultant Dick Morris, "the most influential private citizen in America," according to *Time*. On the eve of Clinton's renomination, *Time* was sending its readers a backhanded pictorial message: here is the most powerful man in the world, who fought his way back from political oblivion, and perched on his shoulder is the reason why. Suddenly the once-sective, behind-the-scenes consultant was a household name. In the early months of the reelection campaign, Morris worked hard at being the unseen political mastermind and strategist. "Being a man of mystery helps me work better," he confided to George Stephanopoulos. While Bill Clinton's 1992 consultants were talk-show regulars, wrote best-sellers, and traveled the big-dollars lecture circuit, Morris was the backroom schemer. Many media outlets had trouble even finding a file photo of the elusive Dick Morris, adding to the mystery and illusion of power.

Morris had been Clinton's earliest political adviser back in Arkansas during the first run for governor. They had a rocky relationship over the years, but following the Republican takeover of Congress in November 1994, Bill Clinton began meeting secretly with Morris. Working out of the Jefferson Hotel in Washington, using the code name "Charlie," Morris plotted the president's comeback. He was the anonymous, behind-the-scenes consultant who would retool Clinton's image, reposition his policies, and help revive his faltering presidency.

Throughout his career, Bill Clinton had a reputation for discarding political consultants. Those who helped him capture the White House in 1992—Mandy Grunwald, Stanley Greenberg, Paul Begala, and James Carville—were nowhere to be seen following the 1994 election upheaval. By the spring of 1995, Morris had assembled his own team, including veteran media consultants Bob Squier, Bill Knapp, and Hank Sheinkopf, and pollsters Mark Penn and Doug Schoen. They met regularly with several White House insiders to plan the remarkable political comeback of Bill Clinton.

Morris's anonymity was shattered when he was caught with his long-time prostitute companion by the supermarket tabloid the *Star*. The tabloid deliberately timed its bombshell story for maximum effect on the Democratic convention, with the scandal erupting on the day that Bill Clinton accepted his party's renomination for the presidency. Morris and his wife immediately left the Chicago convention and the Clinton campaign, retreating to their Connecticut home, besieged by reporters and photographers. Morris, the political consultant turned nefarious celebrity, had become a late-night dirty joke, damaged goods, and certainly a political liability. There were rumors that he was sharing sensitive White House information with his prostitute girlfriend, and Morris shocked many by announcing that months earlier he had signed a secret book deal to write the inside story of Clinton's reelection comeback. Morris now had plenty of free time to write his version of the 1996 campaign, work the talk-show circuit, join a twelve-step sex addiction program, retool his tarnished image, and pocket his \$2.5 million book advance. Though the Morris scandal scarcely damaged the Clinton campaign, it ended up being everything President Clinton objected to: Dick Morris was getting famous—and rich—at his expense. For the moment, Morris joined a short list of celebrity political consultants who became as famous and often far more handsomely paid than their clients.

For years Americans had been unwittingly exposed to campaign tutoring and manipulation engineered by political consultants. In the 1990s they grew curious about the manipulators. Suddenly, political consultants were hot properties. Movies, documentaries, and books gave us a glimpse of consultants at work. A film documentary, *The War Room*, made media stars of James Carville and George Stephanopoulos in Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign headquarters. Reporter Joe Klein's best-selling roman à clef, *Primary Colors*, detailed with unnerving accuracy the seamy side of the presidential quest by an ambitious young Southern governor and his avaricious campaign team. Later John Travolta starred as the silver-haired young presidential candidate in the inevitable movie version. *Vote for Me*, a PBS documentary, showed hard-charging New York media consultant Hank Sheinkopf patiently coaching his candidate, an Alabama Supreme Court judge, on the fine points of camera angles and voice projection. Another film documentary, *The Perfect Candidate*, chronicled the highly charged campaign of conservative lightning rod Oliver North and his consultant Mark Goodin as they battled and lost to the uninspiring, wooden Charles Robb in the 1994 Virginia Senate race.

In the movie *Wag the Dog*, the president's spin doctor (Robert De Niro) and a high-powered Hollywood myth-maker (Dustin Hoffman)

conjure up a wartime incident in Albania to cover up the president's sexual indiscretions with a twelve-year-old girl. Michael J. Fox portrayed the energetic, earnest young White House aide, a George Stephanopoulos clone, in the film *An American President* (1995), and later reprised the role in a television series, *Spin City*, with Fox serving as an aide to an unprincipled, vacuous mayor of New York City.

The bookshelf was suddenly filling up with insider accounts by political consultants. Well-traveled, controversial Republican consultant Ed Rollins skewered many of his campaign rivals and former clients in a book entitled *Bare Knuckles and Back Rooms*. On the dust jacket was the middle-aged, balding Rollins, poised with his boxing gloves, ready to take on the rough and tumble of politics. Carville and his Republican-operative wife, Mary Malin, teamed up on the lecture circuit, hawked credit cards and aspirin in television commercials, and wrote a best-selling memoir, *All's Fair: Love, War, and Running for President*.

Carville, Stephanopoulos, and Paul Begala reappeared during the Lewinsky scandal* and the impeachment hearings. Begala returned as the loyal defender inside the White House bunker, while Carville attacked special prosecutor Kenneth Starr on television talk shows and through an angry book. . . . *And the Horse He Rode in On: The People v. Kenneth Starr*. Stephanopoulos, meanwhile, singled by the president's betrayal, distanced himself from the White House and publicly criticized Clinton's behavior in his 1999 book, *All Too Human*. Morris, too, resurfaced on talk shows, wrote political columns, advised Clinton on how to deflect criticism during the Lewinsky scandal, and penned another book, immodestly titled *The New Prince: Machiavelli Updated for the Twenty-first Century*.

Despite the notoriety and self-promotion of Morris, Carville, and others, the celebrity consultant is the exception, not the rule. Most political consultants toil in the background, content to ply their craft in anonymity. Even at the presidential campaign level, consultants generally labor in obscurity. Few Americans had ever heard of Don Sipple or Bill McInturff, consultants in Bob Dole's dysfunctional 1996 presidential race, or Bill Clinton's 1996 consultants Bill Knapp, Doug Schoen, and Marius Penczner. Very few have ever heard of George W. Bush's chief strategist Karl Rove, Al Gore's media consultant Carter Eskew, or John McCain's consultant Mike Murphy.

Political consultants, both controversial and anonymous, have become

*The Lewinsky scandal led to President Bill Clinton's 1998-99 impeachment by the House of Representatives and subsequent acquittal in a Senate trial. Clinton was charged with being untruthful, in legal proceedings, about revealing his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern.—Eds.

essential players in the increasingly technological, fast-paced, often brutal world of modern elections. Through it all, they have changed the face of modern American politics.

Political Consultants at Work

In earlier decades, campaigns were financed and run by local or state political parties. They were fueled by local party activists and volunteers, by family, friends, and close political supporters. By the early 1960s presidential campaigns and statewide campaigns for governor and senator began seeking out media and polling firms to help deliver their messages to voters. During the next two decades, there emerged both a new industry, political management, and a new professional, the campaign consultant. By the 1980s every serious presidential candidate, nearly every statewide candidate, and a large number of congressional candidates were using the services of professional political consultants.

The 1990s witnessed yet another transformation. Candidates for office below the statewide level were beginning to seek the advice of professional political consultants. For many candidates, the dividing line was the \$50,000 campaign: those who could not raise that kind of money had to rely solely on volunteer services, and those above this threshold usually sought professional assistance. In some local political jurisdictions, record amounts of campaign funds were being raised to pay for campaign services, and races for medium-city mayor, county sheriff, or local judge took on the techniques and tactics once seen only in statewide, professionally managed contests. Professional consulting services, such as phone banks, telemarketing, and direct mail, were supplanting the efforts once provided by volunteers and party loyalists. This multibillion-dollar industry is now directed by professional consultants who make the key decisions, determine strategy, develop campaign communications, and carry out campaign tactics for their clients.

The influence of political consultants goes well beyond getting candidates elected to office. They play an increased role in ballot measures by helping clients determine ballot strategy, framing issues, and even providing the campaign foot soldiers who gather signatures for ballot petitions. Consultants use marketing and mobilization skills to orchestrate pressure on legislators. Political telemarketers link angered constituents directly with the telephones of members of Congress. Overnight, they can guarantee five thousand constituent telephone calls patched directly to a legislator's office. Political consultants are also finding lucrative markets internationally, serving presidential and other candidates throughout the world.

In the commercial world, a business that generates less than \$50 million is considered a small enterprise. By that measure, every political consulting firm, except for some of the vendors, is a small business. Most of the estimated three thousand firms that specialize in campaigns and elections have ten or fewer staffers and generate just several hundred thousand dollars in revenue annually. Only a few firms, such as media consultant Squier, Knapp, and Dunn, generate millions of dollars in revenue; most of this money, however, passes through the consultants' hands to pay television advertising costs.

Leading polling firms, such as the Tarrance Group or Public Opinion Strategies, may have forty to eighty employees; most are support staff working the telephones and part of the back office operations. Quite a few firms are cottage enterprises—one- or two-person boutiques, often in specialty markets such as event planning, opposition research, fund-raising, or media buying. Many political consulting firms operate out of the basement of the principal's home with no more than telephone lines, computers, fax machines, and online access. For example, even after he became famous as Clinton's principal political adviser, James Carville and his assistants worked out of the "bat cave," a basement studio apartment on Capitol Hill that served as Carville's home and nerve center for his far-flung political operations.

Firms that rely solely on campaign cycles are exposed to the roller-coaster of cash flow: many lean months, with very little money coming in from clients, countered by a few fat months, when the bulk of the revenue pours in. In addition to the on-off flow of cash, the firms must deal with the logistical difficulties of juggling many candidates during the crucial last weeks of the campaign cycle and the enormous time pressures of a busy campaign season. Some consulting firms have around-the-clock operations during critical weeks of the campaign. These political emergency rooms are geared to handle any last-minute crisis. During long stretches when there are few campaign opportunities, professionals and support staff may have to be let go until the cycle picks up again.

One of the most difficult but necessary tasks is to even out the steep curves in the election cycle so that money and resources flow more regularly. Consultants have developed several strategies for this: convincing candidates to hire consultants earlier in the cycle, stretching out the amount of time they stay with campaigns, and seeking out off-year races, especially down the electoral ladder, such as mayoral races, general assembly, and other local contests, many of which in past years would not have sought professional assistance. Consultants are becoming more involved in the

growing business of initiatives, referenda, and issues management. Many of these campaigns are tied to the same election cycle as candidate campaigns, but others are tied to local, state, or congressional issue cycles. Political consulting firms also pursue clients from the corporate and trade association world and international clients. By spreading out business, consulting firms are able to stay competitive, smooth out the peaks and valleys of the election cycle, and keep their heads above water.

In the 1980s firms began to shift away from heavy reliance on candidate campaigns. For example, the late Matt Reese, one of the founders of the political consulting business, who had worked for more than four hundred Democratic candidates, changed direction after the 1982 elections to concentrate on corporate and trade association clients. Republican consultant Eddie Mahe shifted his business from 100 percent candidate-based in 1980 to about fifteen percent candidate-based in the early 1990s, picking up corporate and other clients. In the mid-1970s Wally Clinton's pioneering political telemarketing firm, the Clinton Group, gained 90 percent of its work from candidates, but has since moved away from reliance on candidates to issues and corporate work. Many successful consulting firms have followed this pattern and now have much of their business coming from noncandidate campaigns.

As corporations have discovered the value of grassroots lobbying and issues management, consultants who specialize in direct mail and political telemarketing have shifted focus to legislative and issues work. Corporate and trade association organizations took special notice of the successful political consultant-orchestrated grassroots campaign run against President Clinton's 1993-94 health care proposal. For political consultants, such work is often far more lucrative, more reliable, and less stress-inducing than working for candidates in competitive election cycles. Some of the most successful political consulting firms have less than half of their revenue coming from candidate campaigns. . . .

What Consultants Bring to Campaigns

Candidates, not consultants, win or lose elections. In 1996 voters chose Bill Clinton, not media consultant Bob Squier; they rejected Bob Dole, not pollster Bill McInurf. Candidates alone face the voters and ultimately bear the responsibility for the tone and expression of their campaign. Sometimes reputations are diminished and images tarnished by the campaign itself. For example, George Bush will be remembered for permitting a down-and-dirty campaign that included the infamous

"Revolving Door" and Willie Horton* commercials in his 1988 presidential campaign. In that same year, Michael Dukakis will be remembered for his ride in a military vehicle, hunkered down in an oversized battle helmet, looking goofy. Alphonse D'Amato and Charles Schumer will be remembered for the abusive, in-your-face campaigns they waged in the 1998 New York Senate race.

While candidates are ultimately responsible for their campaigns, there is no way they can compete, let alone win, without professional help. Professional consultants bring direction and discipline to the campaign. Few enterprisers are as unpredictable, vulnerable, and chaotic as a modern campaign. So much can go wrong: the candidate might go "off message," in which case the campaign loses focus; internal party feuds might threaten the success of the entire campaign; fund-raising might fall short of expectations, choking the life out of the entire enterprise. All the while, the opponent's campaign is raising more money, attacking with a sharp, clear message, redefining the race in its own terms, grabbing media attention, and efficiently mobilizing its resources. Campaign professionals are needed to bring order out of chaos, maintain message and strategy discipline, and keep the campaign focused.

The best consultants are able to define the race on their own terms—not the terms set by the opposition, the media, or outside third parties. In the end, the campaign boils down to letting voters know the answers to some very simple questions: who the candidate is, what the issues are, and why this race is important. Following are some examples of defining issues and messages.

From the 1996 Clinton-Gore reelection campaign:

DEFINING ISSUE: Who is better prepared to lead this country into the next century?

MESSAGE: "Building a bridge to the twenty-first century!"

From the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign:

DEFINING ISSUE: The shortcomings of the Carter administration's policies.

MESSAGE: "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?"

*The Willie Horton ad is a famous—or infamous—negative ad from the 1988 Bush-Dukakis presidential campaign. An independent PAC created the initial ad that accused Democratic candidate, Gov. Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, of allowing convicted murderer William Horton out of prison on a weekend furlough; Horton committed several violent crimes while on furlough. Because Horton was black and his victims were white, the ad stirred up racial tensions that lurked not too far beneath the surface of the 1988 Bush-Dukakis campaign.—EDS.

Republican consultant Lee Atwater was fond of saying that he knew that the message of his campaign was hitting home when he would go to a local Kmart and ask shoppers what they thought of the contest, and they'd simply parrot the message he had developed.

Professionals also take campaign burdens off the candidate. Campaigns are exhausting; placing extraordinary physical and emotional demands upon the candidate. The campaign staff, and especially the campaign manager, absorb as much of the stress of the campaign as possible. A campaign manager may serve as official campaign optimist, psychologist, and hand-holder for the candidate or, often, the candidate's spouse. The manager will make the tough personnel and tactical choices when the campaign starts going bad, and be the unofficial heavy (or whipping boy) when needed.

Consultants, particularly those in niche or vendor industries, provide legal, tax, and accounting services for the increasingly complex financial disclosure reporting requirements. They provide expertise in buying television time and placing radio and television commercials. Consulting firms capture and analyze television commercials aired by opponents and other races, and offer both quantitative and qualitative analysis from survey research, focus-group, and dial-group findings. Increasingly campaigns depend on specialists who also can provide a technological edge. Consultants provide online retrieval systems and websites, computer-assisted telephone technology, voter and demographic databases, and geo-mapping and sophisticated targeting techniques so that a campaign can know, block by block and house by house, who is likely to vote and for whom they would cast a ballot. Strategists are able to use predictive technologies, traditional statistical techniques such as regression analysis, and new artificial intelligence technologies such as neural nets and genetic algorithms to target potential voters.

Above all, consultants bring experience from other campaigns. Every campaign has its unique circumstances, events, and dynamics. But campaigns are also great recycling bins. When a consultant has worked for fifteen or twenty-five races, campaigns begin to fall into predictable patterns: messages and themes, issues, and tactics reappear, taking on slight variations—new twists to old challenges. Veteran consultants can save a candidate from making mistakes, spot opportunities quickly, and take advantage of changing circumstances. As veteran consultant Joseph R. Cerrall put it, tongue in cheek, we need consultants—"to have someone handy who has forgotten more about media, mail, fund-raising and strategy than most candidates will ever know."

Growing reliance on professional consultants is costly: the price of

admission to elections has risen substantially. The campaign, for many candidates, becomes a perverse full-time game of chasing dollars. Consultants have seen business grow because of the superheated fund-raising activities of the national Democratic and Republican parties, the explosion of soft money, and issues advocacy.

The best consultants aren't afraid of a fight. They know that in many cases an election can be won only if they drop the pretense of reasoned, civilized campaigning and take the gloves off. Campaigns engage in rough tactics because they work. Opposition researchers dig deep into personal lives, seeking out misdeeds and character flaws. Pollsters test-market negative material before focus and electronic dial meter groups. Then the media team cuts slash-and-burn thirty-second clips, using all the tricks of the trade: unflattering black-and-white photos of the opponent, ominous music and sound effects, and distorted features, salted with authentic-sounding textual material, often taken out of context. The direct mail pieces may get even uglier. The goal is to drive up the opponent's negatives, to paint the opponent in such unflattering ways that enough voters have only a negative view of that candidate.

Certainly not all campaigns use negative tactics. Candidates are often very reluctant to engage in mudslinging or demagoguery. Voters are turned off by negative campaigns and feel alienated from the democratic process. But campaign consultants see negative campaigning as a tool, not so much a question of political ethics or morality. If the only way to win is to go negative, then negative it is.

Professional consultants bring many weapons to a campaign. The campaign's theme and message are communicated through television and radio commercials, through direct mail pieces, and increasingly through campaign websites. Those communications are developed and honed through the use of sophisticated research analyses, especially survey research, focus groups, and dial meter sessions. Even more fundamental is the campaign's deadliest weapon, candidate and opposition research.

Professional campaigns and the political consulting industry will flourish in the decades to come. Candidates for public office—both incumbents and challengers—will not hesitate to raise increasingly larger sums of campaign funds to pay for professional consultants and their services. Despite the occasional outburst from elected officials or the public, candidates need, want, and for the most part appreciate the assistance they receive from professional consultants. We may see profound changes in campaign financing, communications, and technology. Through it all, professional consulting will endure, adapt, and prosper. Professionals have become indispensable players in modern campaigns.

WILLIAM EGGERS

From *Government 2.0*

The Internet has arrived on the American political scene. Former Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura used the Internet in his upset independent party victory in 1998. Senator John McCain raised money and communicated views on the Net in his 2000 run for the Republican presidential nomination. Howard Dean relied on the Internet to take him from former Vermont governor to serious presidential candidate in 2004. William Eggers traces the rise of online campaigning, detailing the Dean campaign's clever and innovative use of the Internet for everything from fundraising to volunteer organizing. Using the Internet, Dean's campaign manager Joe Trippi, "helped bring Dean to the dance," Eggers writes, "but when it came time to dance with the homecoming queen, the underdog turned fontrunner just couldn't get his feet right." Ventura, McCain, and Dean are only the early pioneers of Internet campaigning, to be sure.

WHEN FORMER WRESTLING STAR Jesse Ventura toppled both Republican and Democratic opponents to win the 1998 Minnesota governor's race, the Internet got almost as much credit as the governor's "maverick celebrity" persona. Ventura began his campaign with no major party (and no major-party war chest), no endorsements, and no public recognition of his ideas. For several months, he didn't even have an office.

But Ventura did have a webmaster: Phil Madsen, a former auto mechanic, wilderness camp guide, sales manager, and church youth director who, when the campaign began, had never even built a website. No problem. Madsen bought a copy of Microsoft FrontPage 98 and turned www.jesseventura.org into a miniature campaign headquarters, where supporters could do everything from join the JesseNet email list to purchase a Jesse action figure. The Jesse dolls made a mint for the Ventura campaign, over a third of whose contributions were collected online. Ventura even added a second line of dolls with outsized nodding heads to finance his reelection campaign. These dolls, the "bobbleheads," sold out.

Ventura's website helped his campaign in strictly political terms as well. The campaign published scads of policy positions on the site, and