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There were stories of Republicans masquerading as officials, calling voters to say they could cast their vote by pressing particular buttons on their phone. At the HQ there was a constant “spy watch” for infiltrators from the other side.

Manning the effort was the Director of Fields Operations, lawyer and a communications adviser. I worked alongside three other staffers looking after 100 of the 300-odd precincts whose voter numbers were called in throughout the day. We analysed the figures and then redeployed our “crash teams” of canvassers and phone bankers to certain areas where more work was needed to get the vote out.

At the 2pm round-up of results we found a number of precincts under-performing, especially African American areas. One measure deployed was an automated call from Bill Clinton and Jesse Jackson to voters’ homes telling them how important their vote was. Clinton also went live on Tampa radio. To get the Hispanic vote out we set up automated calls from Jennifer Lopez and Jimmy Schmidt.

When the polls closed at 7pm there was optimism as we saw the exit polls. The campaign staff had hired a room at downtown hotel, but by 1.30am it was heavy with despair. There were hugs and tears and an incredible sense of loss and concern as to what the next four years would bring. People could not believe how their fellow Americans had voted – they felt embarrassed and overcome with a sense of disbelief and hopelessness.

Pundits contest the main reasons for the Bush win. Some put it down to strength on Iraq and terrorism and his response to 9/11, but overwhelmingly it seems to be about religion, values and morals. Somehow Bush captured the importance of values to US people and capitalised on this through the election campaign. The Republican election machine mobilised the religious vote and in the US this is a huge base.

And why did Kerry lose? Were his messages too numerous and too complex? Campaign professionals always stress the importance of keeping it simple and sticking to a few issues. Perhaps this is where he went astray. In addition, perhaps Kerry went after the wrong section of the electorate. Did the targeting of independents cost core Democrat votes?

From a personal perspective I hope that the Democrats will not walk away from this with their tails between their legs. If so they will lose the momentum at a grassroots level that they have built up over the past few months. Somehow all the volunteer efforts must be sustained and organised to tackle issues at home and abroad in a positive and inclusive way. What must be avoided is a journey to the wilderness for the Democrat Party.

And for me .... the result was terrible – but what an opportunity.

# EXPERTS’ DEBRIEF: WAL-MART VS STARBUCKS

Dominic Meier attends a post-election political consultant conference, and finds himself wondering whether American tactics, considering the gulf in resources, really make sense this side of the Atlantic



The weekend following the US elections saw the International Association of Political Consultants (IAPC) once again invite members to their annual world conference, this time in Vancouver. As expected, the predominant theme was the US Presidential Election.

The election analysis by the top advisers of the Democrats and Republicans can be summarised as follows: While Bush managed to win over the majority of customers of the world’s largest trade chain Wal-Mart, Kerry was favoured by Starbucks customers. A survey of Wal-Mart and Starbucks customers showed that 70 per cent of Wal-Mart customers were in favour of Bush. This offered the Republican electoral campaigners a clear victory signal. Furthermore, the survey underlined the US-President’s popularity amongst vast swathes of the American people, who saw him as “one of us” in contrast to his “aloof” and “detached” challenger.

Both sides paraphrased their central campaign fields using the key words mobilisation, communication and fundraising. Something that the European communication experts took back to their capital cities with them, above all else, was the recognition of the huge increase in the importance of interactive instruments, as much for external as

well as internal communication. The strict, hierarchical and national campaign leadership, which has just been implemented by the Republicans, would not have been possible without internet-based communication. Even the reaction times between campaigns and counter-campaigns were again cut by the campaign planners. The latest internet tools for fundraising allowed for the collection of donations amounting to millions of dollars in a matter of just hours. New Email and text-messaging software optimised the mobilisation activities of campaigners in such a manner that personal messages from Kerry and Bush could be sent at any time to the millions of supporters. The high number of people registered to vote and a voter turn-out on a scale that had not been achieved for many years are testaments to the work of the campaign experts.

The amount of European campaign experts making the pilgrimage to observe the US elections was most noticeable. Considering the limited funds available, the issue of whether this will have an evident effect during the upcoming elections in European nations is however disputable.

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