

Issue Branding

Problem

Missouri's transportation infrastructure (roads and bridges) was falling apart. Maintenance needs were rising faster than the state's ability to build or repair roads.

Solution

A sophisticated media plan supporting Amendment 3 started with billboard advertising to brand the proposal. Forty-five days before the election (on November 2, 2004), the Amendment 3 campaign spent \$120,000 on billboard posters throughout the state, as well as one freeway bulletin. The billboards said:

Amendment 3 End the Diversion.
Repair Our Roads. No New Taxes.

"The branding effort worked," said Rhoades. "Voter awareness shot up after the billboards went up."

Next, the campaign placed messages on pump handles at gas stations. Then, 17 days before the election, the campaign delivered (persuasion) messages via radio and TV. The overall campaign budget was \$1.3 million.

Background

In 2002, Missouri's road builders proposed a gas tax hike to pay for transportation improvements. It was soundly defeated at the polls, garnering only 28 percent of the statewide vote.

Missouri voters were unwilling to pay more gas taxes for transportation, and they believed that highway funds were being diverted to pay for other government spending.

Road builders and other business interests reorganized in 2004, with the goal of helping transportation by stopping the diversion of road money (campaign entity: Committee to Improve Missouri's Roads and Bridges).

In 2004, a broad coalition of business interests proposed a constitutional amendment to help fix Missouri's roads and bridges – known as "Amendment 3." But, as the election approached, few voters were aware of the proposal.

"In our first poll, seven out of 10 said they'd never heard of Amendment 3," said Mark Rhoades, general consultant on the statewide issue campaign. "In issue campaigns, if voters don't know what they're voting on, they tend to vote no."

Result

Missouri voters approved Amendment 3 by an overwhelming majority (78 percent voted yes).