

Humanize the Candidate

Problem

The candidate was criticized as distant or aloof. Running for his second term in the US Senate, Bob Bennett (R-UT) wanted to address that complaint, showing that he could relate to people. In sum, the campaign sought to “humanize” the candidate.

Solution

The candidate instructed his campaign to create advertising that would “cut through the clutter” of other political messages. The Bennett campaign used billboards to humanize the candidate. The campaign bought no TV or radio ads.

The tone of the billboard advertising was light, gentle, and playful. The Bennett campaign spent \$150,000 for a statewide pre-election showing, starting with a two-week “teaser” period. Senator Bennett’s son, marketing consultant Jim Bennett of Salt Lake City, wrote most of the copy. “We were self-deprecating and self-congratulatory at the same time,” said ad-writer Jim Bennett. Several of the billboards used alliteration, such as:

“The billboards became part of the lexicon of the campaign,” said Jim Bennett. “When he (Senator Bennett) went out to speak, he was introduced as ‘Senator Beanpole.’ He loved it.”

Meanwhile, Bennett’s light-hearted tone made his opponent’s negative (radio) advertising seem harsh and shrill.

Background

Bob Bennett was elected to his first six-year term in the United States Senate in 1998, with 64 percent of the vote. The Bennett name is well-known in Utah; Bob Bennett’s father had served 18 years in the Senate. Bob Bennett had high name identification in Utah when he ran for reelection in 2004.

Result

Bob Bennett was re-elected with 68 percent of the vote on November 2, 2004, a 4-point gain to Bennett’s performance in 1998. “The billboards were wildly successful. We set the tone we wanted. We humanized the candidate, showing that he can relate to people. And, it was cost-effective,” said Jim Bennett.