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Would you first walk me through how you were hired onto the Burr campaign?

I was running a group called generation opportunity, the Koch-backed millennial organization – and I was at a luncheon sponsored by the N.C. Free Enterprise Foundation, where Paul Schumaker and Brad Khron (?) was speaking. Paul is the top GOP consultant in the state. He did all of Senator Burr's campaign, Thom Tillis, his clients include George (?) holdings, Congressman Pittinger, you name it – he's worked with a lot of our folks. So I approached Paul afterwards, told him about what I was doing, so he and I had drinks a while after that and chatted in further detail about what Generation Opportunity's doing – the need to engage other demographics, as the Republican party is changing, especially in Wake County, Mecklenburg, trying to talk to and relate more to millennials and minority groups, because as North Carolina changes, it's important to start working with those groups and bring them into the fold, especially independents, as elections begin to happen. So Paul and I got to chat about that, and then he asked me if I would be interested in the Burr campaign, and I said absolutely. I met with the Senator's staff, and he brought me on board January 1st.

Describe to me the team you worked directly with and their backgrounds- were they all from politics? Anyone from other industries – the tech industry? What about vendors?

Everyone on our team and every one of our vendors had political backgrounds. Our data vendor, i360, came out of the Koch group – they were the number one [Audio breaks up] data. They have their own database, so we work with them a lot. Our digital team – the guys that handled all of our online ads, emails, email acquisition – they are strictly political – they came from the Romney campaign and everyone on that team has been involved in politics. All of the staff came from politics, working in various campaigns throughout the country. So everyone involved was political. Our mail vendor was a political mail vendor. Our TV buyers only handle political – everyone was political.

Would you tell me the names of some of those vendors?

Our digital vendor was Targeted Victory. Our data vendor was i360. Our media buyer was National Media – but we also worked directly with Google for some of our digital buys. Our pollster was Ben Folger (?) through Public Opinion Strategies.

Outside of working with Google and directly with vendors, were there other technologies that you used – or was anything developed in-house?

Our theory was “the Republican party is an extension of our campaign,” so this cycle the Republican National Committee invested millions of dollars into running a field program in North Carolina, so they handled all of the grassroots efforts, they were feeding data into our database, they were doing all of that – going door-to-door, making phone calls. They were in

charge of all that, so there was really no need for us to invent something new. We did do some new stuff – we started utilizing Snapchat. An example of that is, you know, Deborah Ross opposed legislation that would've banned burning the American flag, so on the 4th of July, we targeted major fireworks celebrations, and designed our own Snapchat filter of Deborah Ross burning the American flag, as an earned media ploy and to get that message out there in a new format, targeting people you may not be able to find on Facebook – as millennials are leaving Facebook and going to Instagram and Snapchat, we figure it's a good way to start to get to that demographic. We also did geo-targeted Snapchat filters on every college campus in North Carolina the first day of school, as well.

Overall, when it came to digital – social media, email, websites – what were the campaigns big goals? Fundraising? Getting out the vote?

Realistically, especially for social media, it was humanizing Senator Burr. Often people think of politicians as these wealthy, self-centered individuals. But the reality is, Senator Burr is one of the most authentic people you will ever meet. For example, instead of going to big rallies and doing big things for earned media, he and Mrs. Burr would get in his car and drive out to rural North Carolina and go talk to people in a grocery store. He's just a really authentic person. A tree fell in his yard, we got a video of him cutting the tree down, chopping it up – you know, splitting wood. We wanted to show that side of him more than just putting out your generic ad or Facebook post. We did a lot of that on social media – just the humanization of him, highlighting his record. So that's really how we used social media. Email was all about fundraising. We did a lot of online fundraising – raised maybe three-quarters of a million dollars online, just in small-dollar donations. We focused a lot on that.

Digital – it's really all about your ads. Everyone talks about your tactics and everything, but if your content sucks, there's no point in spending money on it. That's just the reality of it. If you have something generic, and it's boring, no one's going to watch it anyway, so you're just wasting money. So we tried to focus on really strategic content – whether it was having the senator on there, or targeting individuals with different messages. We targeted veterans with geo-TV ads, where we had a veteran talking about why it was important to vote for Senator Burr. We had moms, we had a mom with her kids talk about that. We got real specific – because especially now, with the amount of data you have, our geo-targeting – we took our data list from our vendor, took the various universes, gave them to Google and our digital vendor, and they targeted all those individuals accordingly with the various messages.

The real revolution we're seeing in politics is all data. We built custom data models where you're taking thousands of consumer data points, matching it to a voter profile, and you're able to tell where someone is on this issue, and if they're likely to vote for the senator – wherever you want, you can find basically anything and everything – make universes down to whatever you want. That's really where the strategic part comes in, is creating the correct universes and targeted individuals with the right ads that will relate to them.

And the other thing, especially with what we see now with fake news, it's about making sure it's real and authentic. Whatever you do, you want to make sure there's evidence for it. So

when would cut an ad, we would then buy up all the search terms on Google that we would think would relate to that ad, so when people are watching it on TV – and we always see the evolution, people are watching it on TV but they also have their phone or iPad or laptop while they're watching TV, and people go and google whatever it is. So, say we put up an ad about Deborah Ross and sex offenders. We would buy "Deborah Ross" and "sex offender," and then a couple things we would do – the first thing, is when we would do it, we had our own landing page that we made, not as Richard Burr-branded to try and make it more believable, and we had all the sourcing about Deborah Ross' opposition to the sex offender registry, and then the link below that was News & Observer articles about it; her democratic opponents calling her out for it. We wanted to make it as believable as possible, and that was one way to do it. Google Ad Words is a huge avenue to do things just like that.

The most fascinating thing that we found in the campaign was did a focus group of white, independent, female suburban voters – and we showed them an ad about the Iran Nuclear Deal, and they did not believe that that happened. They said "absolutely, no way would anyone make that deal with Iran, that's completely idiotic" – but it happened, here's the actual news story. And they're like "now we don't believe that, and then we're like "well, ok, would you believe that the United States flew a half-billion dollars in cash to Iran in the middle of the night and gave it to them?" they're like "now that's as far-fetched as it could be." But we're like "no, this is God's honest truth."

We even showed them news sources and they didn't believe it. So that was the real struggle – making things believable. I don't know if you saw that ad with Kelly Lowe (?) – the woman who was a rape survivor. We had her, because she had a story to tell – she was a survivor and a really strong woman, and having it come from her, the opposition to a sex offender registry, just made it that much more powerful.

Did the technologies you were using – ad words, social media – did any of that change from the beginning of the campaign towards the end? Did you begin to tailor more as you saw results from certain things?

Absolutely. Everything was measurable, and we do a lot of polling to measure where we're at. And frankly, in terms of polling, we actually – and I'm sure Glen and everyone else in the polling industry is going to be pissed at me – polling nowadays, as we saw, everyone said Hillary Clinton was going to win by a landslide – is wrong, it's absolutely wrong. In North Carolina, their sample included large swaths of African-Americans, but didn't include the angry, working-class white male, so their sample was completely inaccurate. So what we're seeing are data vendors like i360 that are out in the field and able to do person-to-person research – they're asking "who do you plan to vote for" in a targeted universe, so we're able to see that more accurately. The other thing they're doing is they're contacting people on a weekly, if not daily, basis, and refreshing all of their data models. Those data model refreshes on a daily basis help us with our targeting. So, every day it's changing – and the message is ever-evolving. For example, we started off our messaging campaign with two very positive ads about Senator Burr's work – you know, helping an inner-city school get funding, helping African-American children, helping families who have autistic kids save for their future. Great

stories, very powerful – talking about amazing things he’s done – but the reality is: no one cares, which is a sad thing. But, so then we ended up having to realize “alright, this isn’t moving the numbers, so that’s when we switched to Kelly Lowe, and we had that up for a really long time, because the numbers were moving and moving. So then we made a strategic decision – we’re like alright, let’s try to go with something else, and we went with something else and it didn’t really work, so we went back with the Kelly Lowe ads.

Then, we switched over – at one point, Deborah Ross was accusing Senator Burr of being a millionaire because of his work in the Senate, when the reality was he’s making \$147K a year, which is obviously a lot of money, but Mrs. Burr built a real estate company from the ground up, and is actually the breadwinner in the family. And so, our strategy changed – they’re attacking us on this, and we had a good opportunity to say “Hey, wait, no. This is not how it is. And here you are attacking a successful businesswoman.” And our big target was independent suburban moms. How dare you attack a woman for being successful in this day and age? Again, that moved the needle a lot.

Once we got off that message, we went back to various other things, whether it was terrorism...when Obamacare came out in October with the premium increases, we were ready. January 2016, we were ready with attack ads on that, because we knew the premiums would increase. So the day it came out, we just piled on. Because, again, we knew that when we put that ad up, people would start searching “what’s happening?” and everything that comes up – we didn’t even have to pay for it – was news article after news article that Obamacare is increasing North Carolinians’ premiums, and we’re sitting here telling everyone Deborah Ross wants that. Every day it was changing, and that’s the one thing I tell anyone in politics, is if you’re not willing to change and adapt, you shouldn’t even bother getting into it.

How much trust was put into just the raw data? Was the data allowed to steer strategy 100%, or was it data plus experience plus gut and intuition?

For Paul [Schumaker] and I, it was data 100%. The Senator – he is one of the most politically-savvy individuals I have ever met – never had a doubt in his mind. He knew what was happening. He knows the state. Paul and I are obviously looking at data models, because we’re the ones managing the changes in message and everything else – so for us it was a lot of data. Part of it was just gut instincts.

Beforehand [election day], our data vendor was able to tell us, based on their models, what the early vote looked like and who was voting. So Election Day came, and we knew we had it in the bag, because we saw our data models and how great they were. Then, we get the actual early TV voting at 8:00, and we’re like “well, this is over,” and at that point it was just by how much are we going to win? Because we were thinking – if we’re down 250 or more, it’s over, but we were up like 125, so we were like “Well, shit, this is awesome.” So yeah, we relied on data, but the Senator is a gut-instinct type of guy.

So did you have to prove the worth of the data to Senator Burr at all?

Sometimes. Again, we had to prove why we needed it, and explain it to him, because he was used to running just instinct-run campaigns. His last campaign was in 2010, and data wasn't really that prevalent then and he won in a landslide, so he didn't really need to focus too much on that. So we just tried to show him how it was moving the needle and things like that. It's definitely tough, because you have these candidates that have run before and they know the state - but you want to make sure that, now that we have all this science behind it, we see that the science works. Gut instincts didn't tell anyone that Donald Trump was going to win the election.

Speaking of, he's been there before - do you think that you had the incumbent advantage there in terms of strategy and data, and data that you already had?

No, because we started fresh with our data, so we didn't really have any advantage there. To be honest with you, there was not really an incumbent advantage at all. You had the Republican presidential nominee talking about draining the swamp, and you had Marco Rubio, Richard Burr, all of these politicians there that are pretty much career politicians - so we had a disadvantage. Our advantage was that we had Deborah Ross.

We got her opposition research book, and it was one of the happiest days of my life. We ended up having problems when we were doing message testing through our polling, and it was hard because we had to see what actually even believable. I mean, some of the things she did were so extreme - you know, that's another thing that's very important is "is this message even believable?" Some of it wasn't believable, like I told you about the Iran story. The other problem we had was there were just so many messages that tested so well and we had to figure out which one to pick.

That leads to my next question, which is: how much did you look to what Deborah Ross was doing, especially digitally, and how much was it a response from you guys?

Oh yeah, you've got to be able to pivot and attack. The one thing I will say is we don't like to play defense. You just shouldn't be playing defense. I think James Carville said it, "if you're on defense, you're losing." So, we came out positive, found out it wasn't working, and then we came out guns blazing.

She came out with, and it was working, attacking him for being a millionaire, all this other stuff, but the reality was she had her own baggage there - she owns three homes, two of which she received historic tax credits to remodel. So it's pot calling the kettle black, so we called her on it - we had Mrs. Burr call her on it. So we had to adapt when they did that, and then we saw the movement get back towards our messaging working, we went back on the offense.

From that moment out, everything was negative on Deborah Ross. She's obviously trying to go negative on us, but she was getting bombarded, and realizing it on her own accord, that she's getting crushed. They made a couple bad decisions. First one was they just kept going on defense. When we came out with [the message of Ross' opposition to] the sex offender registry, her response ad was a former Democratic colleague talking about how she's great.

Well, you've got a former Democratic colleague - I don't believe that shit. Of course he's going to stand up for you.

Then, the other big mistake they had - their data may have been wrong just like the Clinton data, but it was one of the dumbest things I saw all cycle - was, when we were ready with ads for when the Obamacare premiums were going to skyrocket, she at that time put up ads with her and President Obama on broadcast television. President Obama - he got crushed in North Carolina, and all of a sudden she thinks this is a great idea. We were just laughing, we loved it. The minute she did it, it was one of the best days.

The other thing is, their messaging was terrible. It may have been because of their data, it may have just been a poorly run campaign, or it may have been that the candidate said that this is what she wanted to do and that's what everyone had to do.

Romney's digital director, Zac Moffatt said, of their digital content, "we had the best tweets written by 17 people." It was a really rigorous approval process - it had to go through legal, research, strategy - was that how it was with your campaign? Was there a rigorous approval process for social media and email, or were you given a little more autonomy?

Zac's firm - he is the head of Targeted Victory - they did all of our stuff. We had a very small staff. If you look at the average senate campaign, for example, Kelly Ayotte had four or five staffers on their digital team alone. We had a total of four, maybe five, paid staff handling the actual campaign messaging and all that. We had an additional three that handled some of our fundraising and compliance work. But out of the main office there was about four or five of us. Every tweet went through our digital team, it went to me, it went to Paul, and it went through other people like the Republican Senate Committee, and it went through the social media person.

So basically, anyone and everyone involved was in charge of approving things. Obviously if there were certain things relating to foreign policy or something like that, or the Burrs - we had a picture of Mr. and Mrs. Burr and their granddaughter, so that obviously is going through Senator and Mrs. Burr and their son and daughter-in-law, so there were certain circumstances like that. Other than that, it was four or five people out of seven or eight, were approving everything. Presidential campaigns are on a much larger scale, and again, our team was so small - a quarter, maybe a fifth of the size of any other major Republican senate campaign in the country.

So do you think having a lean team was advantageous for you guys? You were able to stay on the same page?

Absolutely. Everyone thinks social media is the end-all be-all, but that's completely wrong. Yeah, great, you get 300,000 people who like you or who are following your page on Facebook. That's 300,000 out of how many million voters? How many of those people are actually against you? How many can actually vote? How many are already with you?

There was this viral video that Ron Johnson put up that was awesome – he chugged a beer, there were explosions, super cool – but you had four people working on that team. That’s four salaries, and that video didn’t earn him 20,000 votes. What would have earned him the 20,000 votes is good digital ads. If you have good people, you don’t need all of that. I think keeping it lean and mean was great, because sometimes that approval process slows things down; sometimes there are too many cooks in the kitchen.

So we really kept it simple. We don’t need everyone out there all the time. Again, the GOP was doing all of our field work, so that helped us save a ton of money, which we were able to put back on the TV. In any campaign, any dollar needs to be spent wisely and put back into TV. If it’s not earning votes, you shouldn’t be doing it.

In terms of digital, we would get supporters calling upset because they weren’t getting our ads, and I would have to explain to them “that’s because we know you’re supporting us, so we’re not going to spend money on you.” That’s ten cents or forty cents that we could spend on someone else that we need to persuade.

Looking back now, do you feel that there were any missed opportunities in terms of digital, social media, email, anything like that, that you would have done differently?

I think we did everything right. I think, in ‘08, everyone put all of this emphasis onto digital and all of that. But, you know, Republicans aren’t going to get this wave of young individuals going crazy – it’s just not who Republicans are. I think, obviously, if we would have had more money it would have been great to go target new audiences and bring in different demographics. We could go and do ads – it would have been great to target African-Americans talking about Deborah Ross defending the KKK – things like that would have been awesome, but it comes down to money, and you’ve got to go with what you know. It’s one of those things, where, if we would have had more money, we could have done a lot more, but you’ve got to put it where it’s in a strategically smart position.

Looking forward, from your experience, what do you think will change the most when it comes to technology, data, targeting in your next campaign?

I think data is going to be the big thing. It’s an ever-evolving program. I mean, there’s new ways to gather data. My wife right now is creeped out by the fact that she texted her friend about something, and then she and her friend both got ads for it from Amazon – so it’s kind of creepy. We got into the whole encryption debate with Senator Burr, and I said, well you’re already giving away all of your fucking data on Facebook and whatever else, so what does it matter? I signed up for the gif keyboard, and now they have access to every one of my text messages. Same with anyone who has a Bitmoji. So I think the more things that come out, the more people are just going to give away data, which means there’s going to be more and more that people can target. So you’re going to see a lot more copy. My whole job – like 90% of it – was just approving and creating copy, because you’re going to have so many different segments that you can use various messages on to try and convince those people to vote or turn out to vote.

You're just going to see a lot more variation in your ads, and you're going to see a lot of variation in your timing of ads. There was just a study done by this group, FP1 Strategies, a Republican consulting firm, and they tested 5- 10- and 30-second ads, and they found that 6 seconds was the best that you could get. So, if you want to do a 5-second ad, great; 10-second, fine; 30-second, you could do it, you're going to pay more, but you've got to front-load your ad with your message because people are going to skip right over it. That's the other thing, is you've got skippable ads now, where you're seeing Business Insider has the ads on your Facebook news feed, and they'll show you part of the video, stop it, and then show you an ad you'll have to see before you can see the rest of the video.

So I think they'll be finding new and more creative ways to get ads out there, but people are going to need to adapt with time. My whole thing is "keep it simple, stupid." If you can't get your message out in 140 characters, just don't bother. The other thing we discovered is using emoji in email subject lines is an awesome way to increase your open rates on emails. We would do "fundraising alert" in the subject line and then have a couple of sirens.