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Candidate for North Carolina Senate

As you built your team, was experience with digital technology something that you considered in hiring them? People that might have worked for digital firms or anything like that?

Oh yeah, there was no question that we were going to use digital technology from the very beginning.

As the leader of the campaign, I know you weren't the one with the fingers on the keyboard, but what is your experience with digital technology – social media, email advertising, online ads?

My personal experience – I'm a consumer of digital technology, and then of course I've posted – used Facebook and web technology for my State House campaigns. I did it myself – I didn't have an expert do it for me.

So during this race for Senate, did you ever post directly, or did that always go through your digital director or someone else?

I posted directly when I was a member of the State House.

As the leader of the campaign, what did you see as your major goals for the campaign when it came to using social media – Facebook, things like that? What were you really trying to do with it?

Well, reach the maximum number of people who could support the campaign, and get involved with the campaign. There was some effort at persuading people toward the end, in particular. But initially, it was to raise my name recognition, have people be familiar with me, and have people support the campaign.

So what about email? I know that a big part of email is fundraising, and that you did quite a bit of fundraising through email. Was there anything else that you were trying to do with email?

We also were trying to update people on milestones in the campaign. Sometimes that was in association with fundraising, and sometimes it just was "hey, we moved up!" or "hey, these are the poll numbers," or something like that. So, we definitely used it to let people know what was going on with the campaign. I had a personal strong desire and a mandate from me to use email to thank people. I'm a big believer that you don't just ask, ask, ask – you have to thank people, let them know that their work or their donations have yielded some kind of result. So, frequently, we would communicate a "thank you" with some kind of update about the campaign, so that people felt invested.

John [Bray] mentioned that you were an important step in the approval process when it came to creation of any sort of digital assets, whether that was social media or an ad, or an email. When you were approving those pieces, what kind of things were you looking for, and was there anything that you did *not* approve of?

Authenticity – I liked a much more positive message. I understand that, particularly at these levels, there are contrast things, and saying thing about your opponent. Because I was a first-time state-wide candidate, it was crucial to me that we let people know who *I* was, what they were getting, who they were being introduced to. I cared a lot about making sure that things were written in a professional

way – everything isn't always perfect, but to the extent that we could get as close to perfect as possible - I cared very, very much about that. I think that there's a different standard for communication today than there was even 10 years ago, and I wanted to have the highest standard for communication. To the extent that we could share personal stories, I thought that was very important. Show energy, and moving around the state – I thought that was very important. And also, honor the history and culture of North Carolina. There are a lot of generic digital things that get sent out by campaigns, because digital firms work for a lot of campaigns. I wanted mine to be much more curated and customized to who I was as a candidate, the message that we were trying to get out, and North Carolina.

I realize that there is such a big difference between a presidential campaign and a campaign for Senate, especially in terms of resources and reach, but I've been looking at the Obama and Romney campaigns of 2012. It seems that the Obama campaign let digital analytics steer their strategy more. How much did you trust the data, and how much did you want to rely on your gut instincts and experience? How did you balance that?

The campaign was very, very data-driven – but, because I was not a new candidate, and had some familiarity with the state, and care about that human connection, we had that aspect as a campaign, as well. I think that made an enormous difference, particularly in the rural areas where we over-performed.

Looking back, with hindsight being 20/20, do you feel that there were any missed opportunities in terms of social media, digital data, analytics – anything like that?

I think we should have been more aggressive earlier. We had to change our digital firm – so we hired the wrong digital firm, a digital firm that was not as good, as the beginning. Then we had to change. I wish that we had made the right decision in the first place, and had done our homework better. In hindsight, I would have tested a few more things, digitally, then we did. I would have taken a few more risks on testing some messages. But, that's hindsight, and I think nobody saw what was going to be happening with the final way that the campaign turned out. So, whether or not testing those messages under a different circumstance would have worked, I don't know.

Going forward, what do you think will change most in terms of the use of technology in politics? How are you seeing that unfold now?

Well, I think the thing that is changing the most is the confluence of this ability to super-target individual voters, and individual voters lack of effort to go beyond their curated world. So, it used to be that, just by living life, you were exposed to a lot of different things because you couldn't customize your news feed and all of these different things – so you were just exposed to everything. Now, people don't feel that they have time to read and see everything, and so what they do is they pick a narrower ideology, and so what's happening is campaigns are exploiting that. So, what you get is a narrower, more entrenched focus, rather than a broader view of things. So I think that campaigns are doing that. At the same time, people are self-selecting to be in that category. That's unfortunate.