

Feedback Phones Help Achieve Victory in New York First

by Joel C. Bradshaw

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The Campaign Design Group designed and implemented a feedback phone system that is widely credited by both the client and the Congressman as playing a key role in his 1986 election victory.

The program was designed as an independent expenditure for the American Medical Association Political Action Committee (AMPAC) on behalf of George Hochbrueckner, the Democratic candidate for Congress in the 1st Congressional District of New York. The program included elements of voter identification, persuasion mail and Get-Out-The-Vote follow up.

In the First District, the dominant issue had been the Shoreham nuclear power plant. Hochbrueckner ran for the seat in 1984 and lost narrowly to three-term incumbent Republican William Carney. The major issue in the campaign was Carney's support of Shoreham. With opposition to Shoreham in the district increasing, Carney retired, setting up an open-seat contest between Republican Greg Blass and Hochbrueckner.

Blass, who had run a primary against Carney in 1984, was also opposed to Shoreham. Also in the field were a Conservative Party candidate and a Right-To-Life candidate.

There were two principal problems to be overcome in the design of the program. First, it had to be designed and executed without any contact with the candidate, any party committee or anyone else involved in the campaign. Second, there was very little lead time. The program had to be designed and executed in the six weeks immediately prior to the election.

To provide maximum assistance in persuasion to the campaign, we chose to conduct the phone bank with mail follow up to the undecideds and other non-committed respondents. The first question to be answered was, "Who should be called?"

In selecting the target for the phone operation, we were able to take advantage of Voter Contact Services' flexibility by choosing all voters with telephones who were *not* registered as Republicans or Conservatives. This number totaled 38,500 households, and was the broadest possible target of potential Hochbrueckner supporters.

The biggest problem in executing the phone bank was the very short timeline. The key here was to design a system that allowed the follow up mail to be done in a timely way. This required a system that eliminated keypunching phone bank results and posting them back to the file. Hand addressing of the mail was also unacceptable. VCS' two-up gummed phone bank labels were chosen to make the calls and processing of the follow up mail as simple and rapid as possible.

With this product, you can get two labels for every voter household that has a phone number. The phone number is printed on the left label. The right label is used to send an immediate follow up mail piece to the contacted voter, and the left label can be used for a follow up phone call or a GOTV blitz.

Using the professional phone bank at Penn and Schoen in Manhattan and the two-up labels, we were able to complete 36,545 preference identification phone calls in 11 days. In the calls, we stressed the following:

1. That we were calling from AMPAC in support of George Hochbrueckner.
2. That we were totally independent of the campaign.
3. Hochbrueckner's *long-time* opposition to Shoreham.

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While the first two points are required by law, we feel that the independent nature of the call was a key ele-

ment in the persuasion effort. The independent nature of the call was enhanced because, while we were calling for AMPAC, we did not talk about medical issues.

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All those who indicated to the callers that they were undecided received a three-color self-mailer stressing not only in more detail Hochbrueckner’s opposition to Shoreham, but also his other qualifications. The fact that the mailing label was physically next to the label used to make the call facilitated the timely processing of the mail and permitted mail to go out in the same order that calls were made.

In the initial phase, from October 17th through the 28th, 36,545, or almost 95% of the 38,500 households received from VCS were contacted and coded in one of nine response categories. *Only 4% of the phone numbers were not working, and another 11% had been changed.*

The phone bank classified respondents into nine different groups:

1. Hochbrueckner supporter—8,285
2. Blass (the Republican candidate) supporter—1,864
3. “other candidate” supporter—139
4. undecided—15,797
5. refused to discuss preference or terminated call—3,938
6. not eligible to vote in specified election—4,153
7. wrong number—1,465

8. non-working number—685

9. language barrier—219.

The mailer was sent to the following response categories:

3. “other candidate”,
4. undecided,
5. refused,
9. language barrier.

A total of 20,093 pieces were mailed over a period of three days, October 29, 30 and 31st.

A second phase of calling commenced on October 29th. These calls were made to all Hochbrueckner supporters to reconfirm their support and remind them to vote. That was completed on October 31st. In this phase of the calling, 6,104 (74%) of the first-round-identified Hochbrueckner supporters were re-contacted.

In the third phase of calling first round undecideds were re-contacted with one last attempt to persuade them to support Hochbrueckner. These calls were conducted between October 31st and November 3.

With these calls, 8,587 (54.36%) of the undecided voters were re-contacted and re-identified. Of these, 5,766, or 67.15% had moved to support Hochbrueckner, 2,480, or 28.88% moved to support Blass, and only 4% said they were still undecided.

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Applied to the total number of undecideds identified in the first round (15,797), this 67.15% results in 10,608 converted Hochbrueckner votes. The margin of Hochbrueckner’s victory was 11,726 votes.

The fact that this complete phone and mail program was executed at the end of the campaign when about half of the likely voters were still undecided was clearly a key factor in Hochbrueckner’s victory. It is clear that we had the right program, the right target and the right technical tools to make it work.