

Dean Raises Mountains of Green Online

By Kristen Bremner

Former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean has embraced the Internet as a fundraising tool for his Democratic presidential campaign, bringing in more than \$5 million online this year — the bulk of that raised last month.

“We raised over \$800,000 in one day on June 30 to meet our end-of-quarter deadline,” said Nicco Mele, Webmaster for deanforamerica.com. “We raised \$3.4 million online for the quarter, and \$3.2 million was in the month of June.”

Mele claimed Dean’s June total was more money than any political campaign had ever raised online, though he admitted that after Republican presidential hopeful John McCain won the New Hampshire primary in 2000, McCain raised a lot of money via the Web. But McCain’s total then was \$2.7 million.

It is unclear how much other presidential hopefuls have raised online to this point as most published totals include offline and online donations.

So how did Dean get 60,600 individuals to make online donations totaling \$5 million with an average gift of \$74?

The campaign has used the Internet as a political and fundraising tool since the beginning of the year, Mele said, but launched a new Web site in May with a new service provider.

“We want to provide a real community for people online and a narrative for them so they can see that this is building and make them want to get involved,” he said. “Then, if they want to get involved, we want them to do things online like start their own pages and offline like go to a physical meeting in their neighborhood.”

The campaign’s fundraising service provider said a big part of the campaign’s success online is that its commitment to the Internet is stronger than most others.

“It’s not just the fact that it’s a political campaign and that Dean’s created a buzz about himself, but that the campaign has done things differently from a strategic perspective,” said Vinay Bhagat, founder and chief

strategy officer of application service provider Convio, Austin, TX. “They have really realized that the Internet is core to any strategy to brand the candidate and fund-raise.”

The head of the campaign, Joe Trippi, has a high-tech background and is integrally involved in the online strategy, he added.

The Dean campaign uses the Convio system to post content, process credit card contributions and manage its e-mail list.

At the start of June, Dean was sending e-mail messages to 50,000 constituents. Through viral marketing the campaign raised the number to 130,000 by the end of the month. Of those, 59,000 people donated, Bhagat said. The list exceeded 209,000 by July 25.

Though Convio is working with two other presidential candidates whom he could not name, Bhagat said Dean’s online fundraising outpaced them by far.

“[The others] are raising hundreds of thousands of dollars, but I would say that the key difference is the degree to which they have embraced the Internet and the degree to which they communicate does not match Dean’s,” he said. “There’s no doubt that he has played his strong message to his advantage just by the frequency of his communications he’s had with his constituency. He doesn’t just ask people to raise money. He asks them to forward messages to friends.”

The campaign sent more than 1.5 million e-mails in June, and each time the e-mails contained some call to action, Bhagat said.

Donation sizes are another notable aspect of Dean’s campaign.

“If you look at Dean’s fundraising mix, 71 percent of his dollars raised have come from small contributions,” Bhagat said. “Typically, in a Democratic or Republican campaign it’s the reverse, where less

than 30 percent of funds come from small contributions.”

Convio also powers the individual Web pages that users can set up within the Dean site. That feature went live in late June and lets Dean supporters become what the campaign calls “Dean Team Leaders.” The feature lets constituents raise money from their families and friends through their personal pages within deanforamerica.com.

So far, 1,000 people have signed up. A goal of \$1,000 per Team Leader has been set for Aug. 31. Bhagat predicted that the Team Leaders would grow to several thousand, with some extremely active in fundraising and others who use the page as a platform to get the word out about Dean.

The campaign sent an e-mail to all its members the week of July 14 asking them to become Dean Team Leaders. As a further incentive, Team Leaders who raise \$1,000 by the deadline will receive a miniature Dean for America baseball bat as a premium.

“The personal Web page feature went live at the end of June, and we didn’t really push it very hard,” Mele said. “We’re really pushing it this quarter.”

Mele would not say how much the Dean Team Leaders had raised so far.

“A year ago, most people really didn’t know who Howard Dean was, and now he has recruited 1,000 people to act as fundraising agents for him through the Internet,” Bhagat said. ■



Howard Dean



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