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Patrick Novotny

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# From Polis to Agora

## The Marketing of Political Consultants

Patrick Novotny

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Political campaigns have borrowed from the latest in advertising, public relations, and marketing, especially since the 1952 Eisenhower campaign. There has been a tendency for those who have honed their expertise in the trenches of campaigning for elected office to offer their services on behalf of clients in the business world. Firms accustomed to working on campaigns now provide a range of services to businesses, including polling, television production, and the buying of advertisement time. Consultants assist corporations in writing op-ed columns, scheduling television interviews with business spokespeople, and placing advertisements in local markets to target the desired audience. This article addresses the shift in political consultants' working with businesses and corporations, considers specific cases of their involvement with private clients, and offers some thoughts on the blurred distinctions between private businesses, corporations, public relations, the campaigns of elected officials, and political consultants.

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The locally oriented, multimarket, regionally based approach to political campaigns, which has prevailed since the late 1980s, is now desirable to corporations that want to move beyond traditional government relations efforts narrowly targeted to Washington, D.C. "The occasional print ads aimed at opinion leaders or legislators in *Congressional Quarterly*, the *National Journal*, *Roll Call*, or the *Washington Post* as part of a lobbying campaign," writes *Advertising Age's* Ira Teinowitz, "have turned into much more sophisticated efforts" (1997:28). Utility, pharmaceutical, tobacco, and long-distance telephone companies have all expanded their budgets for advertising, media buys, and polling by political consulting firms.

The convergence of public relations, advertising, and political consulting is marking a new chapter in the history of political campaigns in the United States, which James Barnes of the *National Journal* refers to as the "privatizing of politics" (1995:1330–1334). Pollsters accustomed to assisting candidates on the campaign trail spend their afternoons and evenings convening focus groups, testing advertisements for products, helping to craft commercial spots, or searching for just the right wording for public relations materials. Experienced campaign staff and campaign consultants now regularly contract with some of the nation's largest corporations. Some well-known political consultants have left politics altogether to work exclusively with business clients in a field whose

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potential for growth was recently described by one observer as “endless,” as more businesses turn to consultants to run their advertising, marketing, and public relations (Persinos 1995:35).

During the past several years, subsidiary or in-house operations have been created by firms in the political consulting industry to work with corporations. The change has been dramatic. In 1995, National Media, a longtime Republican firm, decided, in the words of its president, Robin Roberts, to become “semi-autonomous” from political campaigns and to pitch its services to businesses.<sup>1</sup> Its staff now devotes a larger share of its work to producing television advertisements for corporate clients, buying time to air these advertisements, and tracking them through satellite and local market analysis. The partnership of Shandwick/Murphy, formed by Republican consultant Mike Murphy and the public relations firm of Shandwick Public Affairs, is one of the latest examples of this merging of political consulting with business-oriented advertising, lobbying, and government relations. Many of the leading Washington-based consulting firms now have their own subsidiary outfits that specialize in bringing their expertise to bear for businesses in a variety of ways.

## **Early History of Marketing and Public Relations in Politics**

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the rise of an industry of campaign consultants drawn from the fields of marketing and advertising displaced an earlier partisan culture and altered the nature of politics in the United States. With changes in transportation, advertising, and journalism at the turn of the century, an industry of consultants supplanted the parties in dealing with everything from financial bookkeeping and the scheduling of appearances by candidates to the writing of campaign literature and the placement of advertisements in newspapers and, later, on the radio.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, major figures bridged the world of campaigning with that of advertising. In the ensuing decades, it became more difficult to distinguish the campaigning of elected officials from that of commercial advertising. For the 1920 Republican ticket of Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge, advertising executives Albert Lasker and William Wrigley Jr. lent a hand in the election, holding events at Harding’s Ohio home, including an exhibition baseball game with the Chicago Cubs and visits by silent motion picture actors and actresses, including Al Jolson. Ten years later, Democratic National Committee Chairman James Farley used the latest in polling to keep a watchful eye on the movements of the Depression era. The White House scoured the speeches, radio addresses, and literature of groups like the Share Our Wealth movement and the radio broadcasts of Father Charles Coughlin. In the 1936 race against President Franklin Roosevelt, the radio ads by Republican nominee Alfred Landon were by most accounts the first use of regionally

tailored advertising techniques in the era of radio broadcasting, a development that was extended shortly after the rise of television in the early 1950s.

Through the late 1940s, polling and public opinion techniques grew by leaps and bounds, paralleling the rise of television. In the 1952 presidential election, a new political era dawned. Television, in the words of historian Joel Silbey, “sharply broke with a partisan presentation of reality” (Silbey 1991:242). The election marked the emergence of the media consultant, as the Eisenhower campaign drew from the latest in professional advertising and television production. The Republicans employed the advertising firm of Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn as well as writers with *Readers Digest* and even cartoonists with the Walt Disney Corporation. Professionals purchased time from local television stations, checked the lighting and the sound for Eisenhower’s television appearances, supervised his makeup, wrote text, and arranged sets.

The Kennedy presidential campaign in 1960 took polling to new heights, commissioning dozens of polls and retaining the services of professional media consultants, including the Simulmatics Corporation. Working with the Roper Public Opinion Research Center in Connecticut, Simulmatics’ political scientists broke the electorate down into 180 different voter types. Their typologies presented a detailed portrait of the American electorate. “A single voter type,” wrote Ithiel de Sola Pool and Robert Abelson of Simulmatics, “might be Eastern metropolitan, lower-income, white, Catholic female Democrats. Another might be border-state, rural, upper-income, white, Protestant male independents” (1961:168). The Democratic ticket went on to use these typologies in new ways, including ad spots featuring Jacqueline Kennedy speaking in Spanish, which aired heavily in media markets in Texas during the 1960 race.

Whereas the political parties of the nineteenth century rallied around what historian Joel Silbey describes as “Organize! Organize! Organize!” (1991:46–71), the parties repositioned themselves by the middle of the twentieth century around what is described here as a political culture of “Advertise! Advertise! Advertise!” Today, this is being supplanted by a new political culture in which campaigns must adapt to what Joe Andrew, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, recently described as “Customize, Customize, Customize” (Milbank 1999:25). The period from the late 1800s to the present, then, marks a time of far-reaching change in the parties and the rise of newer forms of campaigning, collapsing the distinction between commercial and political advertising even further in the 1990s.

## **The Health Insurance Association of America**

One of the most fascinating trends of the past several years is that of political consulting firms’ setting up subsidiaries to contract out work with businesses. Political firms have merged with Madison Avenue advertising shops or have created their own operations to tap into this lucrative market. In the midst of the

Clinton administration's push for health-care reform in 1993, a little-known trade association in the insurance industry changed forever the work of consulting with private-sector clients. The Health Insurance Association of America (HIAA), opposing the Clinton administration's plan to overhaul the nation's health-care system, began a campaign to sway public opinion against the White House's proposal. In July 1993, the trade association debuted a series of advertisements depicting a fictional suburban couple expressing their concerns with the administration's health-care proposals.

Months before this, the HIAA had retained the services of Ben Goddard and the Malibu, California-based agency Goddard-Claussen/First Tuesday to shape its ads, settling finally on those depicting a husband and wife seated at their kitchen table. The ads themselves were masterful. The anxieties of this suburban couple played out in the settings of their living room and kitchen. The now-famous series of television ads, starring actor Harry Johnson and actress Louise Clark, highlighted what the commercials claimed were specific passages in the White House's reform proposal, such as community ratings, price controls, and, in the words of the fictional character Louise, "rationing, you know, long waits for health care and some services not even available."

Though several ad formats were tested with focus groups, including one using celebrities discussing problems in the health-care system, from the beginning the familiar suburban couple at their kitchen table "resonated very powerfully with people in focus groups around the country," according to Ben Goddard.<sup>2</sup> Inasmuch as the intended audience for the commercials had been targeted as women over the age of thirty, explained Robin Toner of the *New York Times*, "it was not an accident that Louise was so dominant."<sup>3</sup> The actress playing Louise was depicted discussing the health-care plan with her coworkers in the glass-doored offices of a business emblazoned with the name Harry and Louise Enterprises. A schoolteacher, Louise's fictional sister, is shown in her elementary classroom, with the words *health care* dimly visible on the blackboard in the background, an ambitious lesson plan for a classroom of elementary school students. This advertisement series ended with a fifteen-minute ad depicting the fictional characters Harry and Louise engaging in a question-and-answer session with William Gradison, president of the HIAA and a former Ohio congressman.

The first HIAA advertisements aired in July 1993, months before President Clinton formally unveiled his health-care reform package.<sup>4</sup> Once the ads were on the air, pollsters with Goddard-Claussen/First Tuesday conducted daily and weekly tracking polls to show how the public was responding to the advertisements and to develop a second series of spots. The polling, explained Susan Neely, the HIAA's senior vice-president for public affairs, "was the cutting edge of our whole campaign" (Barnes 1995:1331). The strategists with Goddard-Claussen/First Tuesday used focus groups, surveys, and tracking polls to gauge the public reaction to the advertisements. In its focus groups, the agency found

that many viewers perceived the Harry and Louise characters to be an unsympathetic couple with little appreciation for the difficulties that most Americans have affording adequate medical care.<sup>5</sup> Responding to these early focus groups, the firm released a new series of advertisements with a larger group of family members and neighbors (including Harry's fictional brother, who decries "community ratings" in health insurance, a character described in HIAA literature as "an under-thirty yuppie").<sup>6</sup> An African-American actress portraying a fellow employee at the fictional Harry and Louise Enterprises also became a counterpart to the actress playing Louise, as they discussed the implications of health-care reform for their business.

Ad spots produced by Goddard-Claussen/First Tuesday for the HIAA aired almost entirely in small- and mid-sized media markets, as well as in the Washington, D.C., market. Nearly 90 percent of the HIAA's advertising budget was spent on markets outside of the capital (West et al. 1996:58). Advertisements aired in Montana, North Dakota, Georgia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, California, Missouri, and Louisiana, as well as New York City. "They moved the needle not just inside the Beltway but across the country," explained consultant Carter Eskew (Barnes 1995:1331). Cable television networks, including the Cable News Network and other news-oriented networks, also aired the ads.

In all, the HIAA spent nearly \$15 million on the campaign, using the latest in polling, advertisement production, and media buying, which, as the association's Susan Neely explained later, "allowed a little old trade association to have an impact way beyond its size" (Barnes 1995:1331). Its advertisements, writes Barnes, "sold many companies and trade associations as never before on the value of expert political advice" (1995:1331). The advertisements also were thought to have compelled the White House and congressional Democrats to withdraw their proposed reforms only weeks before the November 1994 election and to prompt the Democratic National Committee to initiate an unprecedented series of early advertisements in July 1995, well over a year before the 1996 presidential election.

From the collapse of bipartisan support for the administration's health-care proposals, the White House was reminded of the importance of shaping public opinion on legislative issues through television advertisements, a lesson also not lost on a host of businesses wanting to further the techniques of issue management and public relations. "As he struggled to come to terms with the 1994 Republican sweep of Congress," wrote Alison Mitchell of the *New York Times*, "President Clinton made one point to anyone who would listen: he had lost the fight to overhaul health care, the centerpiece of his agenda, because his opponents went on television and defined his program."<sup>7</sup> Vowing not to allow this to happen again, the White House went to work with the Democratic National Committee to tout the accomplishments of the Clinton administration on the

nation's airwaves with a series of commercials in July 1995 that would be used to help shape the election contest months before his Republican rivals began airing their own advertisements.

## The 1996 Election and the Marketing of Political Consultants

Millions of dollars are spent annually by corporations to chart the forces moving that most elusive of creatures, the American consumer. Billions more are spent on advertisements to sell everything from health insurance to prescription drugs to mouthwash. With the average household in America watching television nearly seven hours a day, businesses realize that they must know with greater accuracy the needs of their customers and how to reach them through advertising.

Political consultants make up an industry of literally hundreds of firms, employing thousands of people and annually bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars. Nearly every campaign retains the services of these professionals. A growing number of firms offer all of the consulting services under one roof, combining public opinion research, advertising, and strategy into a form of consulting that has come to dominate contemporary American politics. Simply collecting and keeping track of the advertisements of a rival is now a large part of the work of a campaign. Where candidates once coveted relationships with voters in their districts, they now purchase lists of these same voters on CD-ROMs and data files on the Internet as part of the new arsenal of consulting and campaign technologies.

Public relations, advertising, and polling work for private clients and businesses has been a growing part of the landscape of Washington-based political firms. Having long taken on business clients to solve what is known as the off-year problem, political professionals have marketed themselves more aggressively to corporations and businesses in the past decade, blurring the lines between political consulting, advertising, and public relations. "We also try to make life safer for corporate America," Republican consultant Bill McInturff explained to *BusinessWeek* (Fitzgerald 1996:10). Each year for the past several years, *Campaigns and Elections*, the *National Journal*, *Advertising Age*, and related publications have documented the growing use of political consultants by businesses.

The recent connections between political consulting firms and private-sector clients can be attributed to many different factors. New restrictions on lobbying, particularly the gift ban passed by Congress in 1995, have prompted some of the nation's largest businesses to shift to advertising and public relations. As John Stewart of National Media Incorporated, a Republican consulting firm that works with dozens of businesses, explains, "It is harder to lobby in a traditional sense" (Teinowitz 1997:28). Businesses have also realized that issues must be won in the congressional districts before they can become more important in

the context of lobbying and government relations. One consultant explains, "What corporations are beginning to see is that advertising sets a context to prepare the ground for a lobbyist's visit. You have to get a critical mass of the public interested to get on any politician's radar screen" (Teinowitz 1996:28). Corporations, for these and other reasons, now regularly include large expenditures of advertising, polling, and public relations dollars in their lobbying budgets.

Although the bulk of political consulting firms concentrate nearly all of their efforts on working with the campaigns of elected officials, a small but growing number of consultants have offered their polling, media buying, and public relations services to a new group of business clients, a trend that began in the early 1980s and became more pronounced after 1995. In the aftermath of the 1996 election, as reporters and journalists directed more attention to evaluating the Clinton reelection effort, journalists began to uncover the continuing trend of political consultants' plying their trade with businesses. Although ethical issues and questions of conflict of interest between these consultants and their business clients became the center of much of the journalistic coverage, less remarked upon was the extent to which the distinction between political consulting, advertising, and corporate lobbying had become even more indiscernible in the wake of the 1996 election.

The White House polling team of Mark Penn and Doug Schoen, as well as the firm of Squier, Knapp, and Ochs Communications in Washington, were involved in Clinton's reelection effort. Penn, Schoen, and their staff carefully analyzed the electorate for all discernible trends of possible relevance to the campaign. Working late into the evening, the pollsters interrupted weary suburbanites, using questionnaires on issues ranging from their opinions of the presidential candidates to their favorite magazines and music and their television viewing habits.<sup>8</sup> Meticulously analyzed, these polls formed a startlingly accurate portrait of the electorate, one dissected into lifestyle cohorts and message clusters.

Aided by technological innovations, the White House and the Democratic National Committee shifted many of its resources to advertising in local markets. QRS NewMedia, a firm operating in conjunction with the Clinton reelection staff in Washington, used databases to analyze the audiences of local news broadcasts, allowing the campaign to pick a station or program in a market for interviews with the candidates or their spokespeople based on the makeup of its audience. Although such media tours have been a commonplace practice over the years, QRS coupled this with careful analysis of the audiences in these local markets to help shape the new terrain of political campaigning.

In the wake of the 1996 election, several of the figures associated with the White House found themselves under more scrutiny for their work as consultants with some of the nation's largest companies. The access of these consultants to the Clinton administration after the 1996 election became a story in the

White House inasmuch as these consultants and pollsters continued to keep many of their private-sector clients and appeared unwilling to disclose publicly the full extent of their activities on behalf of their business client portfolios.

In May 1997, the *Washington Post* detailed Penn and Schoen's work with some of the nation's largest corporations, including AT&T and Texaco.<sup>9</sup> The pollsters continued to have access to the White House while working for a growing roster of corporate clients, including Avis, Eastman Kodak, Honeywell, Nynex, Procter and Gamble, and Sony. Penn, Schoen, and Berland Associates have worked as consultants with the White House, the Democratic National Committee, congressional leaders, and prospective candidates, including with Hillary Rodham Clinton in her Senate campaign, and, until October 1999, with Vice-President Al Gore in his presidential campaign, while continuing to expand their portfolio of corporate and foreign clients, including Microsoft, the Personal Communications Industry Association, and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration.

In February 1997, Alicia Mundy of *MediaWeek* documented that the advertising and media buying team from the Clinton campaign was also plying its skills with some of the largest businesses in America, most notably as part of a multimillion-dollar public relations campaign for Procter and Gamble (Mundy 1997). The former White House advertising team used its expertise with buying advertisement time in local markets as part of a public relations campaign by Procter and Gamble. As a representative of Squier, Knapp, and Ochs Communications explained to *MediaWeek*, "That's why political firms are geared up for this kind of image battle, we can do faster turnaround on ads, respond quicker, we know all the media markets, we know which interest groups have more power with the press, and we know the media" (Mundy 1997:26).

The Communications Company, a subsidiary of Squier, Knapp, and Ochs Communications, signed on a roster of corporations in the months following the November 1996 election. The firm used the same advertising and media buying team from the 1996 Clinton campaign, led by Jamie Sterling, to buy television time for businesses, including Procter and Gamble. The Communications Company also signed on with America Online, Florida Crystals, and Ameritech.<sup>10</sup> That these pollsters and media buyers are on retainers by large corporations is only the latest of the traffic across the lines of campaigning and industry in the 1990s.

The Democratic firms described here are not the only political firms involved in working with both those holding elective office and private businesses. In 1995, National Media, a Republican consulting firm with close ties to the 1996 Dole presidential campaign, decided to become semiautonomous from political candidates and to work more carefully with businesses on advertising, polling, and public relations. Market Strategies, a Michigan-based political firm

with a long record of work for Republican candidates, also opened an office in Washington in 1995 to work exclusively with business clients. In February 1995, the Republican consulting firm of Gannon, McCarthy, and Mason in Washington was retained by the Competitive Long Distance Coalition as a part of its two-year lobbying effort on telecommunications legislation, "a reinforcement," in the words of John Persinos of *Campaigns and Elections*, "of a new trend whereby industry groups enlist pollsters and media consultants to wage political campaigns over legislative issues" (1995:34). From utility deregulation to global warming to computer encryption technology, Republican firms have been as active as Democratic firms in seeking out clients in the business community.

The so-called media tours are yet another area in which political consultants have marketed their expertise with businesses and private clients. Mark Steitz, former communications director of the Democratic National Committee, founded QRS NewMedia in the 1996 reelection effort of the Clinton campaign to arrange interviews with the candidates and their spokespeople in local markets. QRS NewMedia is now expanding to include clients from private businesses. Describing its work as "targeted efforts in a fragmenting media market," QRS offers its services to businesses interested in working with local television producers in markets across the country. "There are a lot of people in the [business] world that spend a lot of time trying to get on television. Up until now," explains Steitz, "they have focused on getting on national television. But local television is exploding. We have an opportunity to help them get on better" (Teinowitz 1996:24). Using what is known as the System for Targeting Earned Media, QRS has worked with a small but growing number of business clients, including the Body Shop, Disney, and Polo Ralph Lauren, as well as USA Engage, a coalition of businesses and agricultural interests that lobbies for free-trade legislation.

The convergence of political consultants and marketing and corporate public relations is one of the most important trends to reshape advertising not only in the United States but also around the world. The techniques of marketing in politics are of interest to parties abroad, which in recent years have turned to the kinds of techniques innovated in the United States. In the 1997 U.K. general election, the Labour Party turned for assistance to Penn and Schoen's team and other American campaign strategists and political consultants. Experts in polling, campaign strategy, and advertising from the United States have plied their skills to political candidates around the world, from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to Israel, Mexico and Latin America, and Asia. In 1999, Democratic consultant James Carville played a part in the Israeli parliamentary elections. Pollster Stanley Greenberg and advertising specialist Robert Shrum worked closely with Labour Party candidate Ehud Barak, who was elected prime minister of Israel. In the weeks that followed, Israeli businesses, including a leading cellular telephone company, were reported to have approached Carville for strategic business and marketing advice, a seemingly ir-

refutable indication that the intermingling of political campaigning, advertising, and private-sector marketing is now an international phenomenon.

## The Future of Politics and Marketing

For the past decade, technology has been reshaping the landscape of political campaigns. Cable television, satellite uplinks, cellular telephones, facsimile machines, and related communications and software applications offer ever more sophisticated ways of reaching voters. With each passing month, the advertisements in *Campaigns and Elections*, the trade journal of consultants and political professionals, are filled with new applications of this technology.

In the 1990s, political consulting firms were likely to work more closely with businesses, as pollsters and consultants with years of experience in campaigns broadened their clients beyond those of elected officials. Some political consultants attribute this to the erratic nature of working on political campaigns, whereas others express the lure of new challenges, the desire to shape policy issues, or simply the desire for money as their reason for taking on more nonpolitical clients. Whether the motive is a more stable salary or a desire to shape policy in some way other than working on elections, consultants have flourished in an era of helping out candidates. Whatever their motive, consultants now spend their days using the techniques honed in the work of political campaigning for business-related advertising and public relations.

From a business perspective, the hiring of political consultancies brings with it not only expertise honed in the trenches of campaigning, but also contacts with lawmakers and officials who are already in office. In the midst of an election, pollsters and strategists can forge close relationships with candidates and elected officials, writes James Barnes of the *National Journal*, "giving them the kind of access that most Washington lobbyists can only dream of" (1995:1330). Businesses that retain the services of political consulting firms, in short, benefit from both the years of experience of these firms in helping candidates win elected office and the prospect of retaining firms that may continue to work for those same officials after their election.

Political consultants, for their part, believe that their desirability to businesses and private clients stems from their fast-paced and often aggressive use of the media, particularly newer avenues, such as the local television market, cable networks, and other outlets. Not only do corporations want to use these local markets in the way that political campaign professionals have been learning to do for the past decade, but they are also drawn by the much more immediate turnaround time of political consultants. National Media in Alexandria, Virginia, according to *Advertising Age's* Ira Teinowitz, "has made a business out of the increased expenditures, going after corporations that require the heightened activity usually seen during the last days of a political campaign, policy developments at 10:00

a.m., a media plan by 3:00 p.m., an ad aired that night or the next day” (1997:28). “It’s a turnaround time,” concludes Teinowitz, “traditional media buying finds difficult” (1997:28).<sup>11</sup> “It’s a lot like a political campaign without the candidate,” explains National Media’s Robin Roberts. “It’s in and out of the market real quickly, a lot of media weight very quickly” (Teinowitz 1999:S10). Mark Mellman, a prominent Democratic pollster, explains that “every year, there seems to be more work for us. We are the masters of the punch-counterpunch environment. For better or worse, the corporate world is becoming more that way” (Fitzgerald 1996:10). The quickening pace of communications and new technology is likely to force businesses to rely on an ever-widening circle of consultants, advisers, and media staff, including those with experience in political campaigning.

The success of the HIAA in 1994 and its series of advertisements against the Clinton administration’s health-care reform, as argued in this article, led to a remarkable upsurge of political consultants, advertisement experts, pollsters, and media buyers all interested in working with corporations. Pharmaceutical companies, utility and telephone corporations, the tobacco industry, and most recently the computer industry have all spent hundreds of millions of dollars to produce and air advertisements with the help of some of the most well-connected Washington consulting firms (Bell 1998a:26; Bell 1998b:4; Rosin 1998:12–13; Stone and Sandberg 1999:57).<sup>12</sup> Ben Goddard, the Goddard-Claussen consultant who produced the advertisements for the HIAA in 1993, continues to market his firm’s work to corporate and business clients, including the Business Roundtable, the Chlorine Chemistry Council, the Coalition for Asbestos Removal, and the National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts (see [http://www.goddardclaussen.com/workfor\\_content.htm](http://www.goddardclaussen.com/workfor_content.htm) for a list of clients). Political advertising and consulting firms are now taking on work for businesses, helping to shape their strategies in lobbying, government relations, litigation, and even new product placement. “The opportunities for political campaign consultants and vendors,” concludes John Persinos of *Campaigns and Elections*, “are endless” (Persinos 1995:35). They offer a more fast-paced approach to media buying that features a flexibility lacking in most advertising firms.

The traffic between the work of political consultants and their private-sector clients is not without the taint of ethical questions. In July 1999, Vice-President Al Gore announced a reorganization of his presidential campaign team, including the hiring of Carter Eskew, a consultant who, several years earlier, had left his firm of Grunwald, Eskew, and Donilon to form his own consulting outfit with a focus on working with private clients. “Public policy decisions are being waged increasingly through advertising,” Eskew explained in his announcement in April 1995 of a new firm affiliated with the public affairs firm of Robinson Lake Sawyer and Miller. Eskew was instrumental in the lobbying campaign of the tobacco industry in 1998, helping to craft a series of advertisements reminiscent of the HIAA ads. His ads were thought to have played a piv-

otal role in the defeat of tobacco legislation in Congress.<sup>13</sup> The questions raised about Gore's hiring of Eskew are an example of the new kinds of ethical issues that arise as the line between political consultants and private-sector clients is more and more blurred by these political consultants-turned-corporate strategists and troubleshooters. Such questions are likely to continue for both Democratic and Republican candidates in the years to come as consultants more often divide their time between campaigns and their more lucrative business clients and as a small but significant percentage of political consultants weigh offers from the business community to focus exclusively on their private-sector work.

Along with the obvious conflict-of-interest questions that arise when candidates hire consultants who seem to effortlessly glide between running campaigns and managing public relations portfolios for some of the nation's largest corporations, an interesting set of questions remains about the impact of this interaction between political consultants and their work with corporations and private businesses. What possible complications arise, for instance, when private corporations and businesses adopt the fast-paced advertising techniques honed in the trenches of running for elected office? Will the techniques of quick-response, negative advertising already disliked by millions of Americans in the campaigns of their elected officials be more readily adopted by the private sector? How might these techniques and these political consultants undercut the credibility of their corporate clients? How does this group of consultants who glide between the public and the private sectors contribute to larger challenges to traditional lobbying groups and the party system? All of these questions remain as the bond seems to grow closer between consultants, the private sector, and candidates for public office.

Campaigning today is different from even a decade ago, as candidates respond to radio talk shows, cable television programs, and thousands of sites on the Internet, all of which afford candidates new ways of reaching the public that were not available even five years ago (Novotny 1998). With a continuous, twenty-four-hour news cycle marked by the nearly instantaneous coverage of events as they occur, a campaign must be ready to respond to news as it develops, keeping ahead of developing stories and anticipating new ones as they unfold. Direct broadcasting satellites, cable television, cellular telephones, pagers, and the Internet all speed up politics, to the point where news travels at what now seems to be a faster pace than ever. Campaigns now boast of being able to write, produce, and distribute advertisements to air in a matter of hours, using conference calls, cellular telephones, computerized document sharing, and even digital transmission to connect their campaign staffs with pollsters, writers, producers, and time buyers in ways never before possible.

Not only do corporations and businesses want to tap into the expertise learned on the campaign trail, but they also want the fast-paced, responsive style that was a trademark of well-run political campaigns in the 1990s. Accustomed

to working with deadlines in an adversarial and ever-changing environment, political consultants are bringing to bear a new, cutting-edge element to the advertising and polling of their candidates, a use of the latest in software and media technology that is accelerating politics to the point where, in the words of *Campaigns and Elections*, overnight is no longer acceptable. Not only do political consultants and their candidate clients abide by this maxim, but corporations and businesses realize that they, too, must take the initiative in dealing with the media and with their competitors in the marketplace. Careful students of political campaigns should be attuned to the shifting trends of many of those who normally work on the election trail, as the work of commercial advertising, political consulting, and polling intermingles even more in the years to come.

## Notes

1. Explained Roberts, "We were in the right place at the right time with the right business model when the lobbying laws changed" (Teinowitz 1999:S10).
2. Robin Toner, "Harry and Louise and a Guy Named Ben," *New York Times*, Sept. 30, 1994:A22.
3. Ibid.
4. Explained Goddard, "We wanted to precede his September speech and lay the groundwork to raise people's concerns" (Gilbert 1994:28).
5. Focus groups and polls conducted by Goddard-Claussen/First Tuesday found that viewers were starting to have negative feelings about the advertisements. Explained Goddard, "They began raising concerns that Harry and Louise were a selfish, yuppie, white, middle-class couple, just like [people in] the insurance industry" (Gilbert 1994:28).
6. "The next couple of spots took Harry and Louise out of the house," explained Goddard in *National Underwriter* magazine, "in an effort to avoid people getting bored with the commercials" (Gilbert 1994:28).
7. Alison Mitchell, "Stung by Defeats in '94, Clinton Regrouped and Co-opted G.O.P. Strategies," *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1996:A1.
8. Using a schema to classify voters into four sets of basic traits, the team of Mark Penn and Doug Schoen assembled what it called a "neuropersonality poll," a profile of the electorate reaching far beyond politics into the values and lifestyles of voters. Using the latest techniques in marketing research, the polling team saw it as a way to provide insights into "how Americans lead their lives" (Thomas et al. 1997:233).
9. Peter Baker, "White House Isn't Asking Image Advisers to Reveal Assets or Disclose Other Clients," *Washington Post*, May 19, 1997:A8.
10. Ameritech enlisted the well-known consulting firm for what Trevor Jensen of *Adweek* describes as "its bare-knuckled fight against local and long-distance competitors" (Jensen 1997:3). Though somewhat reluctant to talk about their contract, Ameritech executives volunteered that the retaining of the Communications Company was an "experiment" intended to "use the agency primarily for quick-turn response ads to competitors such as AT&T" (Jensen 1997:3). The three "corporate spots" produced by the Communications Company for Ameritech depicted the company as "a reliable, hometown friend." The work of Robert Squier and the Communications Company, explains Jensen, "first drew the attention of Ameritech chairman Robert Notebaert while the shop was pitching the U.S. Telephone Association account last fall [1996]" (Jensen 1997:3). "The assignment to a firm

- known for its political work,” concludes Jensen, “may signal how Ameritech plans to fight its war with AT&T and other local and long-distance competitors” (Jensen 1997:3).
11. Explains Teinowitz, “The pitch [of political consulting firms] to corporate clients is the quick turnaround time for getting advertisements on the air. Years of political campaigns now could translate to corporate purposes. Media buyers in Washington all contend they are much better than New York buyers at handling the quick turnaround dictated by advocacy campaigns” (1999:S10).
  12. See also Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Harry and Louise Have a New Worry, Encryption,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1998:E1; Rajiv Chandrasekaran and John Mintz, “Microsoft’s Window of Influence,” *Washington Post*, May 7, 1999:A1; Dan Eggen and Craig Timberg, “AOL Tries to Interface with Politics,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 14, 1999:C1; Elizabeth Kolbert, “New Arena for Campaign Ads: Health Care,” *New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1993:A1; and Dan Morgan, “Drug Makers Launch Campaign on Medicare: Industry Wary of Prescription Cost Controls,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1999:A4. In a November 16, 1999, story, the *New York Times* reported that Ginny Terzano, former press secretary to Vice-President Al Gore, had been hired by Microsoft to head its lobbying office in Washington, D.C. Katharine Q. Seelye, “Employees from Microsoft Give Gore an Icy Reception,” *New York Times*, Nov. 16, 1999:A1.
  13. Howard Kurtz, “Tobacco Shows Senate It Can Still Sell,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 1998:A1.

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## Biographical Note

Patrick Novotny is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Georgia Southern University. His teaching and research interests include the history and politics of the media, political parties and elections, and film and popular culture. His book, *Where We Live, Work and Play: The Environmental Justice Movement and the Struggle for a New Environmentalism*, will be published in July 2000. He is currently working on a history of education and civil rights in Georgia during the early 1940s.

Address: Department of Political Science, PO Box 8101, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA 30460-8101; phone: 912-871-1391; fax: 912-681-5348; e-mail: pnovotny@gasou.edu.

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