



Marketing in the New Millennium: Mistake #2) Mistaking the purpose of social media

by David Saxby

Recently Calgarians experienced one of the most stunning upsets in the history of Canadian municipal elections. The morning after Election Day everyone started speculating on how Naheed Nenshi moved from obscurity, to top three, to Mayor. Many attributed it to his savvy use of Social Media to mobilize voters. My contention is that he had an exceptionally well integrated marketing strategy that effectively used social media as one of the tools.

In the final months of the election campaign, with 12 candidates running for mayor, the race came down to a three-way, neck-and-neck race. The front runner, long term alderman Ric McIver, armed with an \$800,000.00 budget, employed many of the traditional veteran campaign tactics, which in past elections had won the race. Barb Higgins, high profile TV anchor, entered the race late, but gained media support quickly and rose to second place. Naheed Nenshi in 3rd place was the underdog. Nenshi was able to move, from less than 10% of the voter support four weeks prior to the election, to over 30% of the votes. Not only did he come from 3rd place to win the race but it was reported that voter turnout was the highest (54%) in Calgary in three decades.

The headlines read "New media strategy gave Nenshi big win." Many people are attributing Nenshi's win to social media. In comparing their statistics I attribute Nenshi's victory to a powerful strategy and smart spending. View the statistics here:

 [nenshicampaign.pdf](#)

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David Saxby is a co-author of 4 books: Sales Gurus Speak Out, Customer Service Goldmine, Quantum Success and Foundational Success and numerous ebooks.



Yes social media was a key element in the success of the campaign. With 13,000 supporters on Facebook, emails to 800 volunteers on the day before the vote, Tweets about press releases, YouTube videos, sometimes funny, sometimes personal, the Nenshi campaign was different from every other campaign, not because of the social media aspect, but because of the strategy behind the campaign.

Successful marketing is about strategy not the tools or tactics.

What were the keys to success?

1) Influence the influencers - Nenshi's campaign team engaged the "hyper-engaged" voter early on in the campaign by creating conversations, both online and offline. The website created two-way conversations with supporters. The Nenshi campaign team engaged people in discussing policy every week for 12 weeks getting feedback and ideas about core issues (a technique called "Crowd Sourcing"). Even "Boomers" got engaged on-line.

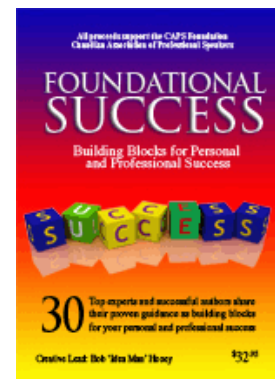
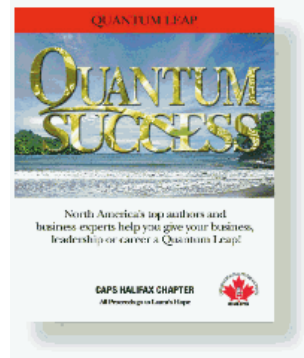
Many of the other candidate's websites and social media communications were used simply to push information out to the public. *The purpose of social media is to create engagement.*

2) The campaign was de-centralized -- the public could host their own discussions with friends, without central authorization or coordination. There were at least 40 coffee parties as well as other public forums organized by supporters, not the campaign head office. He didn't just post policy suggestions and campaign slogans and wait for the masses to discuss them. Nenshi continuously and directly communicated with voters online, responding to their comments on Twitter and Facebook.

3) Give power to the public; let them create their own promotion. The Nenshi campaign still used traditional media but with a twist. With a limited budget (initially \$200,000.00 - later it was \$320,000.00), the campaign team could not afford to print and distribute the quantity of collateral material that some of the other front runners could. They took a "Do-it-yourself" approach: supporters or "Boosters" could go to the website, download and print their own brochures and signs.

4) Just-in-time media - ads on TV, billboards, and city buses were purchased much later in the campaign (after nomination day) than those of other candidates. To make best use of traditional media, the Nenshi Team was also very good at mobilizing media attention making Nenshi available for a wide range of interviews, forums etc.

5) Creating a unique brand. Many of the other candidates used traditional colors (red and blue) - the Nenshi campaign used the color "purple".



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David Saxby, President of Spark Communications, is an international speaker with over 30 years experience in the areas of innovation, sales and marketing. His thought-provoking and inspiring presentations provide insights into how business can achieve unparalleled success...even in today's marketplace.

6) "Operation Purple Dawn" email campaign

(This slogan didn't come from the campaign team, it came from a supporter). The aim of the email was to create a visible movement of supporters at a critical time. Over 800 volunteers were mobilized the day before the vote. At 10 pm the night before election day 130 volunteers, dressed in purple, took to the streets posting hundreds of purple signs in downtown apartments and writing slogans in chalk on the sidewalks in high traffic areas.

7) **Nenshi was the only candidate with an iPhone/iPad Application** that consolidated all the facets of the online campaign, including Facebook, Twitter, news releases and photographs into a single page.



The "Nenshi for Mayor" campaign is a prime example of an **Integrated Marketing approach**. Policy platform didn't win the campaign, traditional media didn't win the campaign, neither did social media. In today's marketing world everything must work together.

To learn more about Integrated Marketing read the chapter on Integrated Marketing in *Sales Guru's Speak Out*.

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