



Primer on Using U.S. Voter Data

By Andrew Marcus, Media One
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Voter Data vs. Consumer Data...understanding the difference

Andrew Marcus is CEO/Partner of Media One, a database marketing and email service provider.

With the Iowa caucuses just months away, the 2012 Election Season is at our front door and ready to make itself at home in the direct marketing arena.

If the previous major election years are any indication, this will indeed be a busy time for all of us involved in database marketing. So it's important that we, as professionals, fully understand the nuances of actual voter registration records as opposed to overlaid consumer files.

U.S. Registered Voter Data

U.S. Registered Voter Data, is just that, it is the actual voter registration records associated with each state. These files are not universally available on the data market, and are only provided by a handful of data providers who have been pre-approved individually by each state.

This data is only available for use by political candidates, registered PACs (Political Action Committees), or special interest groups involved in political ventures. While all states require that the user certifies themselves as qualified to use the data, in the states of California, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Hawaii prior approval must be obtained prior to each separate mailing.

Overlaid Consumer Data

For those seeking to relay a political message, who do not qualify to use U.S. Registered Voter Data, consumer data can be a great alternative. A consumer is a constituent. They are a person with an address in a voting district that has a demographic and lifestyle makeup of interest to politically-minded mailers.

However, using a consumer file for political ventures gets complicated because you need to be very adept at selecting an audience that will be receptive to the message. You can narrow down demographics, geo, gender, income, home ownership, age and do a pretty good job on ethnicity. Lifestyle and interest selects become a finessed quality best left to experts who can pinpoint those who would be receptive to a candidate, PAC, or special interest message. As with many different types of database usage, political mailing is a back and forth of multiple "touches" with a lot of scrubbing for removals.

How to understand the Differences

Here's a good way to understand the difference between the uses of a U.S. Registered Voter Data file as opposed to a consumer data file. If the message is actionable within a voting booth it qualifies.

Let's say you have a client that is a special interest group looking to target Parents to get their message out. If they are directly promoting an actual candidate or upcoming amendment, referendum, or similar that Voters could go into a voting booth and cast a vote for in that state or area, then they can use U.S. Registered Voter Data. If they are just doing so to get their own agenda and point of view out to the audience, then they would not qualify to use the file and would have to use a consumer file to reach their audience.

As database marketers, in order to guide our political clients, it's essential that we as industry be on top of the laws associated with voter data as well as the available options.