

# **INNOVATION AND INERTIA IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING:**

**DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THE REPUBLICAN  
AND DEMOCRATIC PARTIES, 2004-2016**

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# **AGENDA**

**Technological change, innovation, and inertia**

**Methods**

**The differences between the Republican and Democratic Parties**

**Field crossings and firm founding, 2004-2012**

**Prototypes, culture, and party networks**

**The 2012 Obama and Romney campaigns**

**The landscape post-2012: cultural work and fragile infrastructures**

**Networked ward politics**

# **TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, INNOVATION, AND INERTIA**

# CONTEMPORARY ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNING

“I was like what is the plan because at that point I knew he (Obama) was going to run and you know he asked me to help come up with a plan, right. Like what should we be doing, how should we be thinking about it, what is different, should we just stand up ‘08 and do it all over again? The answer is really no - **there were things about the campaign that weren’t perfect the first time and the world moves on us and so we need to sort of be thoughtful about setting up a campaign to win 2012.**”

Michael Slaby, Chief Technology Officer Obama 2008, Chief Integration and Innovation Officer Obama 2012

# SHIFTS IN MEDIA AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Dave Karpf (2012):

**“The Internet is unique among Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) *specifically because* the Internet of 2002 has important differences from the Internet of 2005, or 2009, or 2012....The Internet's effect on media, social, and political institutions will be different at time  $X$  from that at time  $X + 1$ , because the suite of technologies we think of as the Internet will itself change within that interval.”**

# SHIFTS IN MEDIA AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

From “group-based society” to “new emotional and identity processes around self-expression and lifestyle” (Bennett and Mannheim, 2006; Castells, 1999)

Media production and circulation taking shape outside of organizational contexts (Hermida, 2014; Rainie and Wellman, 2012)

Mass media fragmentation, loss of mass audience, variance in political knowledge and attitudes (Prior, 2007; Stroud, 2011)

New desires and expectations among citizens to shape their own forms of civic participation (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl, 2013) and new models of “connective action” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012)

# NETWORKS AND INNOVATION

John Padgett and W.W. Powell (2012,3):

“We often observe organizational innovation triggered by **unanticipated transpositions of people from one domain to another, who carry with them production skills and relational protocols that mix with and transform skills and protocols already there.** Organizational invention, following such innovation, is usually the slower process of the new innovation percolating around the networks in which it is embedded, tipping them into new typologies and interactional forms along the way. More radical episodes of this process lead to ‘innovation cascade.’ Restructured biographies are the medium through which network spillover is transmitted.”



# COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

De Vaan, Stark, and Vedres (2015):

“In this study we have found that teams in the video game industry are built from groups. Moreover, the analyses indicate that **creative success was facilitated when cognitively distant groups were socially folded**. Yes, something must be shared. But it is not necessarily mutual understanding. In the dynamics that we suggest are at play, social intersections between groups do not immediately resolve a tension or create an instant comprehension. It creates a workable space where some misunderstanding is tolerated in the interest of creating a new creole that can escape the limitations of the mutually untranslatable.”

# CULTURE AND TRANSPPOSITIONS

Isaac Reed (2011, 137):

“Motives and mechanisms push the social world forward. Yet there remains a fundamental problem with this picture of social life, with which so much post-positivist social theory is occupied: it impedes the historicization of what sorts of motivations, and what sorts of mechanisms, are effective at a given place and time...that **mechanisms and motivations have to emerge upon landscapes of meaning.**”

# INERTIA

Sydow, Schreyogg, and Koch (2009, 696):

“The proposed theory conceptualizes an organizational path as a tapering social process. Starting (Phase 1) with **contingency, a critical event (decision, accident, etc.) favors a solution leading unpredictably to a critical juncture**. If it triggers a regime of positive, self-reinforcing feedback, this solution progressively gains dominance (Phase II). This pattern is likely to become persistently reproduced and to crowd out alternative solutions to an extent that it gets locked in (Phase III) and is accompanied by immediate or future inefficiency. In short, organizational path dependence can be defined as a rigidified, potentially inefficient action pattern built up by the unintended consequences of former decisions and positive feedback processes.”

# **METHODS**

**Pairing FEC and LinkedIn data (n=626)**

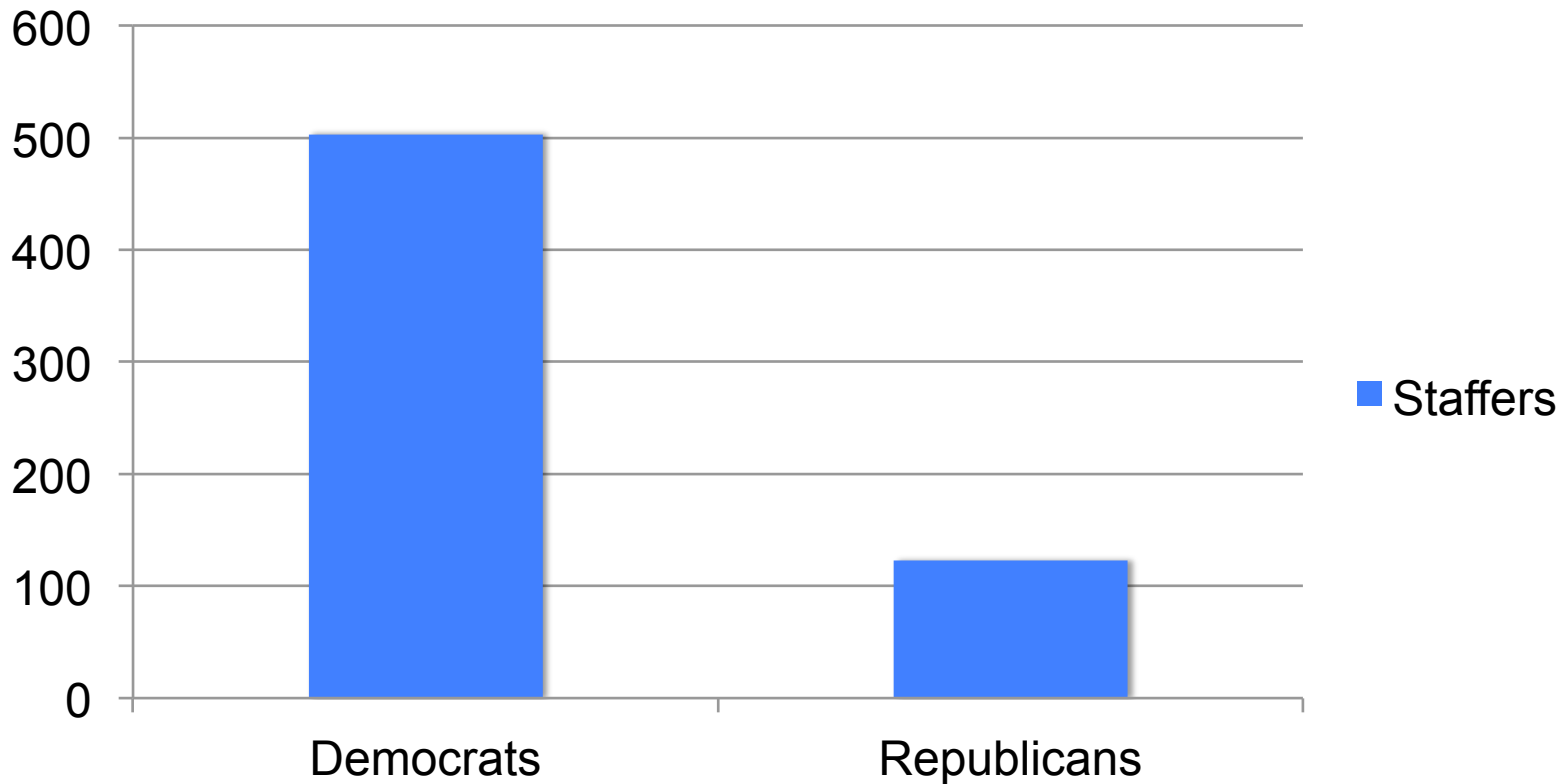
**Qualitative interviews (n=62)**

**Public documents and archival materials**

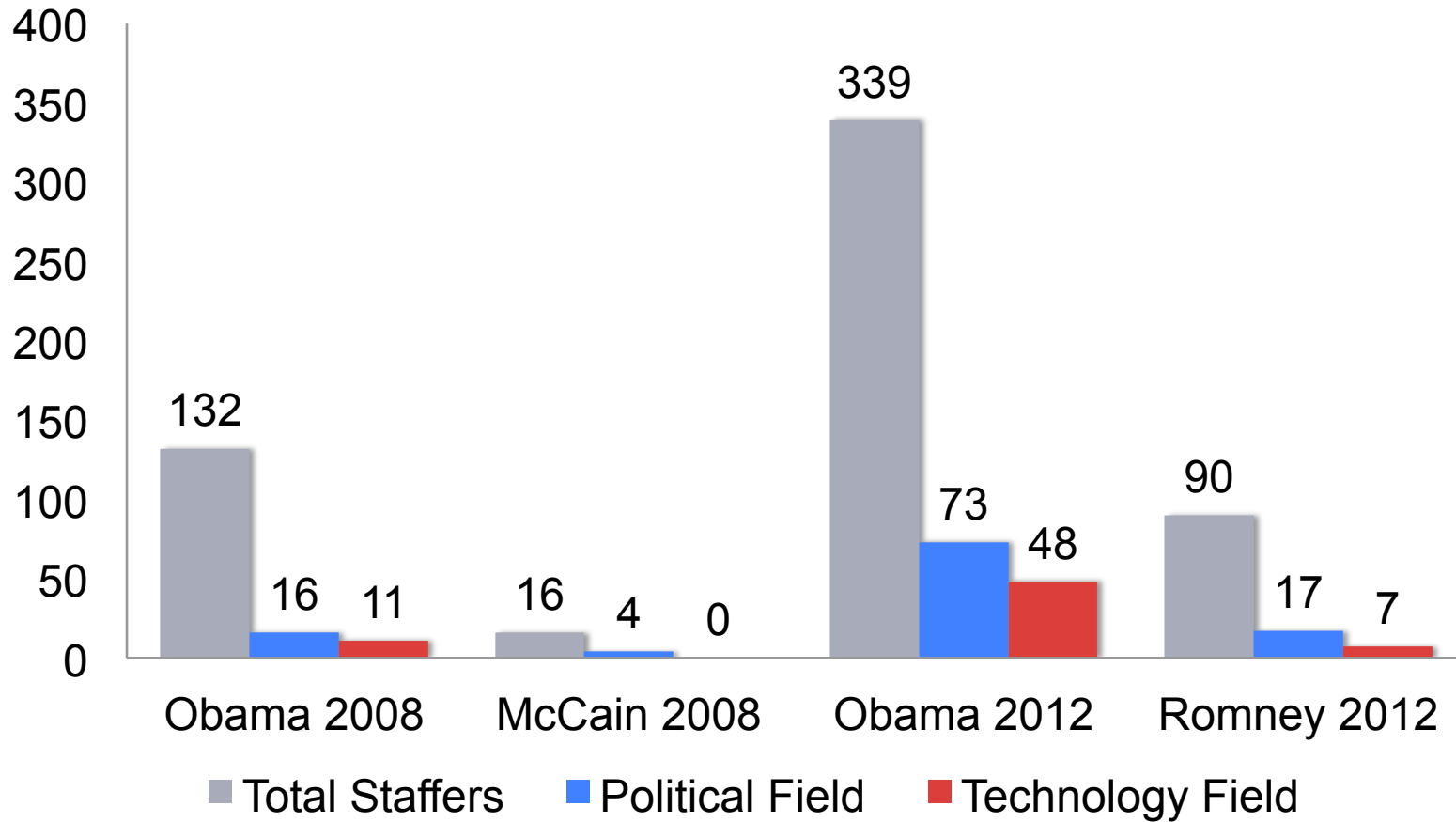
# **FIELD CROSSINGS AND FIRM FOUNDING, 2004-2012**

# TOTAL NUMBER OF STAFFERS IN DIGITAL, DATA, AND ANALYTICS

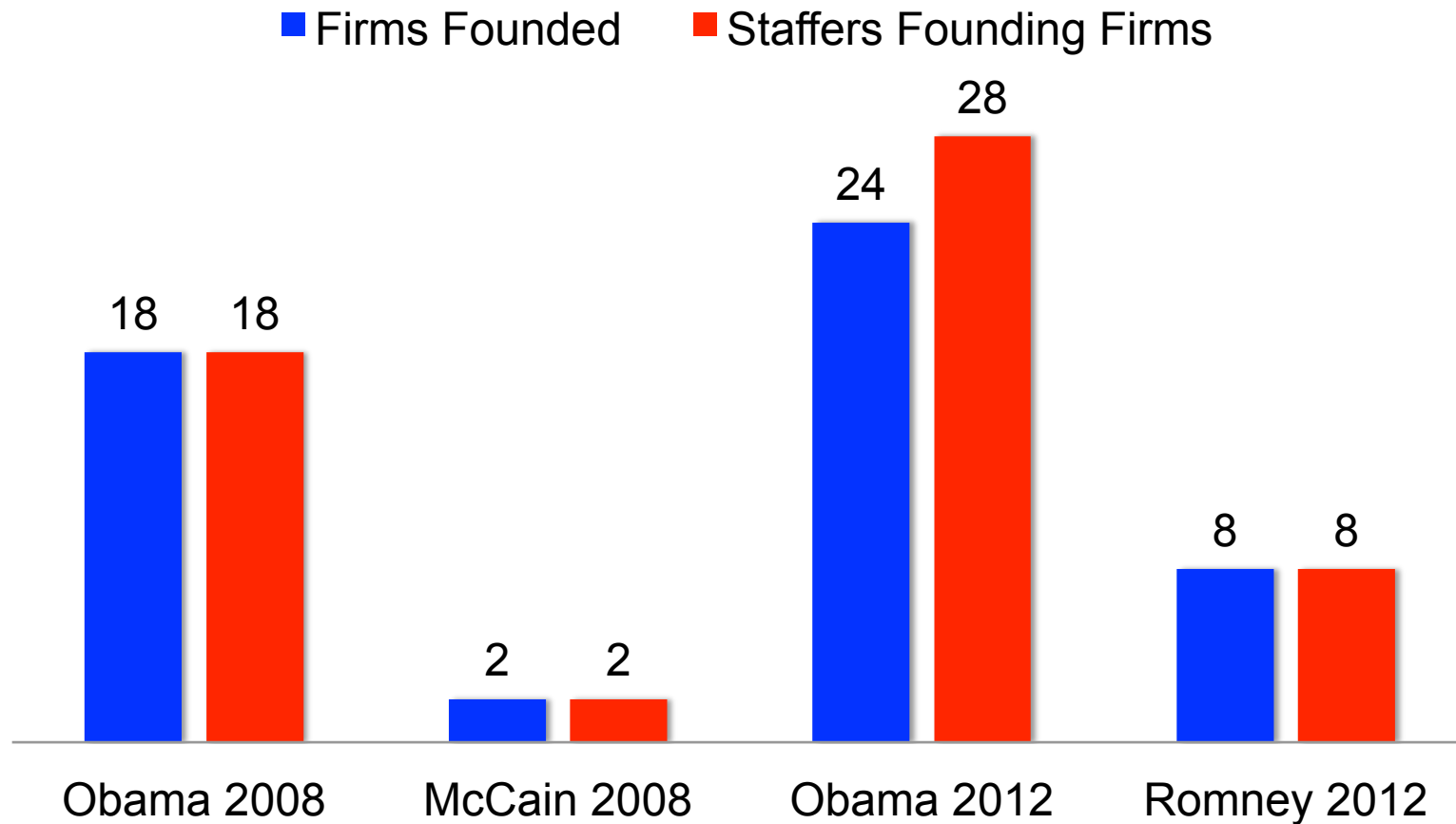
2004-2012



# FIELD CROSSING BETWEEN DOMAINS



# FIRM FOUNDING





# **CAMPAIGN PROTOTYPES AS TRANSFORMATIVE EVENTS**

All new design

Thinnest smartphone ever

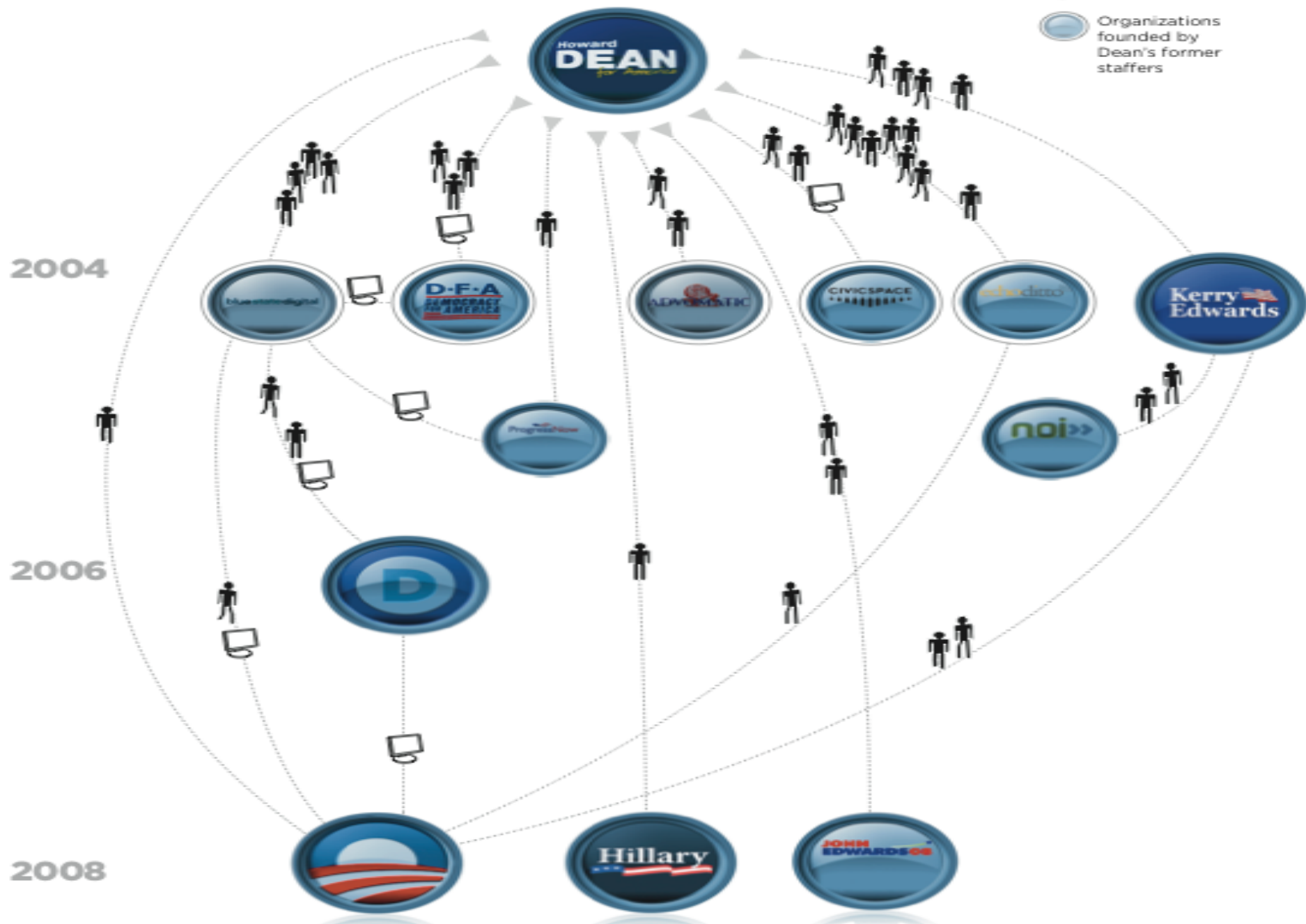




“We never really had, I felt like it should have been more of an effort to kind of go after and just talk it up: this being kind of a central aspect to the win or at least very highly valued in sort of the integration with the field operations being something that was a contributing factor... **A lot of the history gets written, and is driven by the public marketing of these efforts, and by the marketing of what the results mean.**” Patrick Ruffini, president of the Republican digital consultancy Engage, RNC eCampaign Director 2005-2007, and Webmaster for Bush-Cheney 2004

# **PROTOTYPES AND PARTY NETWORKS**

-  People
-  Technology
-  Organizations founded by Dean's former staffers



“By ‘08 which was kind of ironic to me there was not the risk taking culture in place anymore where from a business perspective the vendors weren’t investing anymore, they were reaping, and **from a RNC party apparatus you know the leaders that...drove that risk-taking, innovative mindset were not necessarily the drivers of ‘08 and they weren’t driving the party any longer....**” Chuck DeFeo, former Chief Digital Officer, Republican National Committee, eCampaign manager, Bush 2004

“And, they went out and invested aggressively in various institutions and planted a number of seeds [after 2004] which I think have come to fruition like the Analyst Institute, the New Organizing Institute, and Catalyst. **I point to those three institutions as kind of the pillars of this liberal data analytics ecosystem that were really the key drivers behind the success of 2012, if not directly then at least indirectly in the buildup to 2012.**” Alex Lundry, senior analytics staffer, Mitt Romney 2012



# **CULTURAL MODELS AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COLLECTIVE INVENTION**



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# **PARTY NETWORKS, FIELD CROSSERS, AND CAMPAIGNS**

**ROMNEY 2012**

# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

“So whether it was a tweet, Facebook post, blog post, photo – anything you could imagine – it had to be sent around to everyone for approval. **Towards the end of the campaign that was 22 individuals who had to approve it.** Not everyone had to say the thumbs up but it would go through an email chain where it would say ‘this is the tweet we are sending,’ ‘here is the Facebook post,’ ‘here is the blog,’ and people would say yes or no. The digital team unfortunately did not have the opportunity to think of things on their own and post them....The downfall of that of course is as fast as we are moving it can take a little bit of time to get that approval to happen.” Caitlin Checkett, Digital Integration Director, Romney 2012



# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

**“We had planning meetings where this data was discussed and shared. Sometimes decisions were made in those rooms and sometimes decisions were made at some other point by other people.** And, you know, I think the role of data in those decisions is; sometimes decisions were made in that room that I think were not executed on because of people who felt differently about how they should go.” Alex Lundry, senior analytics staffer, Romney 2012

# PROTRACTED PRIMARY AND LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

“I think people really unfairly judged the Romney campaign in comparison to us from 2012. **What they should be doing is comparing the Romney campaign of 2012 to us in 2008 because they fought through a long protracted primary with no time to plan and uncertain resources. No big deep engineering team internally. Basically no party infrastructure so they were in a very similar position that we were in 08** and if you remember so they got all this attention because ORCA failed and then...We had the same system in 08 and it totally failed and nobody yelled at me because we won. But if you say the word Houdini to people from the 08 campaign they are like throw up in their mouths a little bit. It is basically the same.”  
Michael Slaby, Chief Technology Officer Obama 2008, Chief Integration and Innovation Officer Obama 2012



**OBAMA 2012**



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1:29 AM - 31 Aug 2012

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## Carol Davidsen

### Organized Data Lover

Greater New York City Area | Computer Software

Current Cir.cl, Rentrak

Previous Obama for America, Navic Networks / Microsoft Advertising, Comverse Systems

Education Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Connect

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#### Background



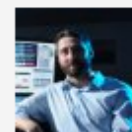
#### Summary

Results-oriented executive and technical manager. Strong background in product development, deployment, and operations.

A product owner who has the capacity to make business, product, technical decisions, and to take authority and be held accountable for the success or failure of the overall service. Specializes in cultivating strong relationships and demonstrated success at delivering high-quality products under tight deadlines while managing changing priorities. Skilled at leading cross-functional teams in the development and integration of software and hardware products. Advanced user of prevailing business analysis tools, including SQL (relational DB), Cypher (graph DB), Excel and data warehouse reporting platforms. Specializes in cultivating strong customer relationships. Demonstrated success at delivering high quality products under tight deadlines while managing fast paced dynamic priorities. Whiteboard Enthusiast.

Specialties: • Requirements analysis, functional design, release scoping, and resource planning.

Daniel, keep up w



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ZIP Code

Join Dashboard

## Your window into the campaign

On Dashboard, you'll get the latest campaign news. You can join in the national conversation with campaign leadership and local supporters alike to see exactly what's going on in your state.



# INCUMBENT ADVANTAGE

**“So this was the first time ever for an incumbent to have this level of competitive advantage that is time based.** That people are expecting all of these digital tools to help them now – get out to vote, donate remotely, donate through your phone – and it was very challenging for the team to keep pace with that. So much so that whenever we would beat Obama to the punch on like a Facebook feature such as ‘Commit to Romney’ Obama released his literally 3 hours after we did because he already had it made you know, or his team already had it made, and they just did not release it yet and they released it in response to that. So, that is a huge luring point as someone who works in Silicon Valley - it is a very logical thing but to many people in politics it is not. They think that they can continue to be transactional in every 2 or 4 year election cycle.” Aaron Ginn, Growth Hacker, Mitt Romney 2012

**2012-2014**

“Another consistent theme that emerged from our conversations related to mechanics is **the immediate need for the RNC and Republicans to foster what has been referred to as an “environment of intellectual curiosity” and a “culture of data and learning,”** and the RNC must lead this effort. We need to be much more purposeful and expansive in our use of research and more sophisticated in how we employ data across all campaign and Party functions. No longer can campaign activities be compartmentalized or ‘siloed in a way that makes sharing resources and knowledge less efficient.” Republican National Committee, Growth and Opportunity Project report, March 17<sup>th</sup> 2014

“I think coming out of 2012...Republicans finally you know our side finally took it on the chin again and learned our lesson where in 08 it happened people maybe thought it was a bad year an anomaly we will get them back in 2012, we thought all momentum was on our side but had to **basically after all these stories about the Obama digital and data operation came out I think a lot of people in our party especially the higher brass, the people who are going to need the convincing to maybe and have been doing this a long time weren't sold on these tactics and this game of campaigning really said 'ok just make a serious investment'** in this and I think you saw it at the RNC, their 'opportunity project', I think we saw that across all sectors a lot of the Super Pacs, 527's, smaller campaigns, senate races - basically they were, like we need to be heavily invested into the RNC, brought-in a lot of talent...I think a lot of guys like me who are on the sidelines in 2012 kind of watching - more people, take the private sector, were tackling 'how do we do this differently, how do we do this properly the next time around, where do we go from here?'” Matt Oczkowski, Chief Digital Strategist, Scott Walker 2014



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## What's New

### Topics

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### Employment Opportunities

Now Hiring: Data Scientist  
Now Hiring: Product Manager  
Now Hiring: Applications Developer  
Now Hiring: Marketing Manager  
Now Hiring: Data Specialist  
Now Hiring: Database Developer

### Data Trust, i360 Announce Historic Data Sharing Partnership

Arlington, VA (August 28, 2014) — The Data Trust and i360, the two leading right-of-center data management companies, are announcing a historic data sharing partnership that will allow Republican and Conservative campaign resources to be spent more efficiently than ever before.

"For the first time, the Data Trust and i360 will work together to reduce duplication and make right-of-center voter contact efforts more efficient, resulting in our partners having access to more and better data," said John DeStefano, president of The Data Trust. "We are very excited to work alongside i360 on this partnership designed to provide the foundation for Republican and Conservative victories in 2014 and beyond."

Through this partnership, voter contact information gathered by clients of either The Data Trust or i360 can improve the data shared with all clients. For example, if a client of either company conducting voter outreach



# FRAGILE INFRASTRUCTURES

“I stopped collecting the paycheck the Friday after the election. I am not just going to hangout. Like, I love the Democrats, I am a Democrat, I want all of this to happen but you can’t do it for free so you move on to your next thing and so does everyone else.” Carol Davidsen, Director, Integration & Media Analytics, Obama 2012

# FRAGILE INFRASTRUCTURES

“There is basically no staff left to the DNC. There is no one to continue to work on the technology. The Organizing for Action team is like very separate from the party and will remain so I think. And so I think what you are seeing is us sitting on our ass thinking that we figured it out which is not at all true because no one is asking the right questions about what we should be doing next and we are going to get passed badly. I think, I think we are going to regress.”  
Michael Slaby, Chief Integration and Innovation Officer,  
Obama 2012, personal communication, September 4,  
2013



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## SmartVAN

### What is SmartVAN?

NGP VAN and TargetSmart Communications have teamed up to provide the best enhanced voter data and the best software at the best price. SmartVAN combines the most frequently updated and most robust voter data with NGP VAN's market-leading VAN field campaign software, which is used by the Obama campaign and virtually every Democratic candidate, as well as most national progressive political organizations and unions.

### The Best 50-State Voter File

The 50-state voter file, which is available for the first time to organizations other than the Obama campaign and Democratic candidates (but not to Republicans or those primarily dedicated to



# **NETWORKED WARD POLITICS**



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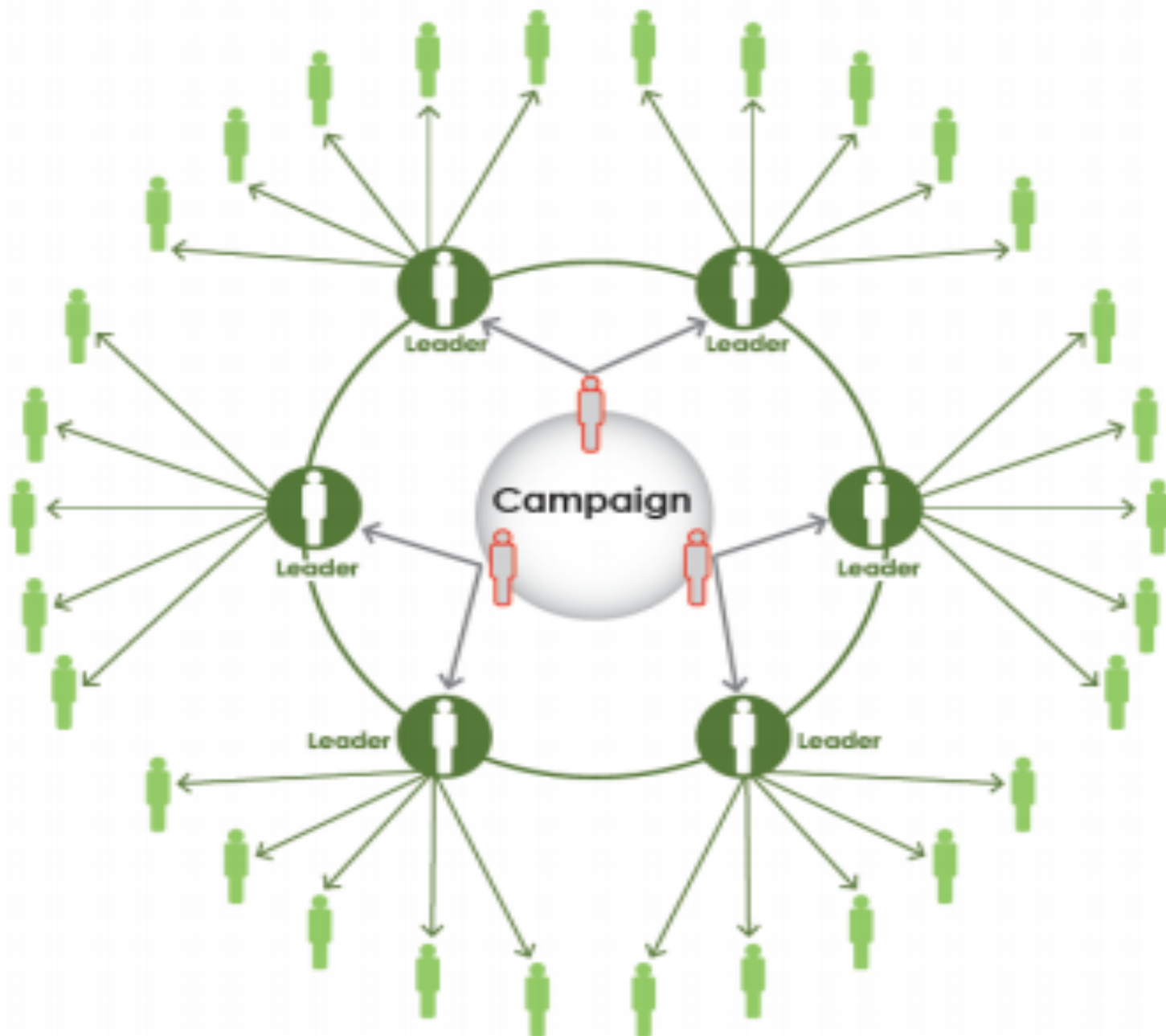


INTRODUCTION BY ARTHUR MANN

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“Tammany Hall is a great big machine, with every part adjusted delicate to do its own particular work...Every district leader is fitted to the district he runs and he wouldn't exactly fit any other district....Take me, for instance. My district, the Fifteenth, is made up of all sorts of people, and a cosmopolitan is needed to run it successful. I'm a cosmopolitan. When I get into the silk-stockin' part of the district, I can talk grammar and all that with the best of them. I went to school three winters when I was a boy, and I learned a lot of fancy stuff that I keep for occasions....” Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, 1905



Source: NOI

# “RETAIL POLITICS AT A DISTANCE”




Mike Liddell

My Campaign ID  
101830612

Standard

Script

Form



Addresses

My Campaign ID


Vital Stats

Districts

Scores

Also in Household

Actions

 [Save All](#)

Relationships

Person	Relationship	Added By	Date	
<a href="#">Winikates, Robert</a>	Recruited By	API User, P.	7/8/14	<a href="#">Delete</a>
<a href="#">Michelle Stephenson</a>	Recruit	Liddell, Mike	7/10/14	
<a href="#">Bill Cushing</a>	Recruit	Liddell, Mike	7/10/14	
<a href="#">Michael Kenneth Gehrke</a>	Friend	Liddell, Mike	10/1/13	
<a href="#">Richard Carlton Bell</a>	Friend	Liddell, Mike	9/12/13	
<a href="#">Troy Michael Goode</a>	Coworker	Liddell, Mike	10/24/13	
<a href="#">Victoria Kinton</a>	Friend	Liddell, Mike	11/18/13	
<a href="#">Tobias Thomas Quaranta</a>	Friend	Liddell, Mike	1/24/14	

Source: VAN

Rising Tide Interactive

CallFire

270 Strategies

BlueLabs

Bully Pulpit Interactive

Civis

Blue State Digital

JetDial

**Vibrant Ecosystem**

Attentive.ly

Unionware

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DNC

Clarity Campaigns

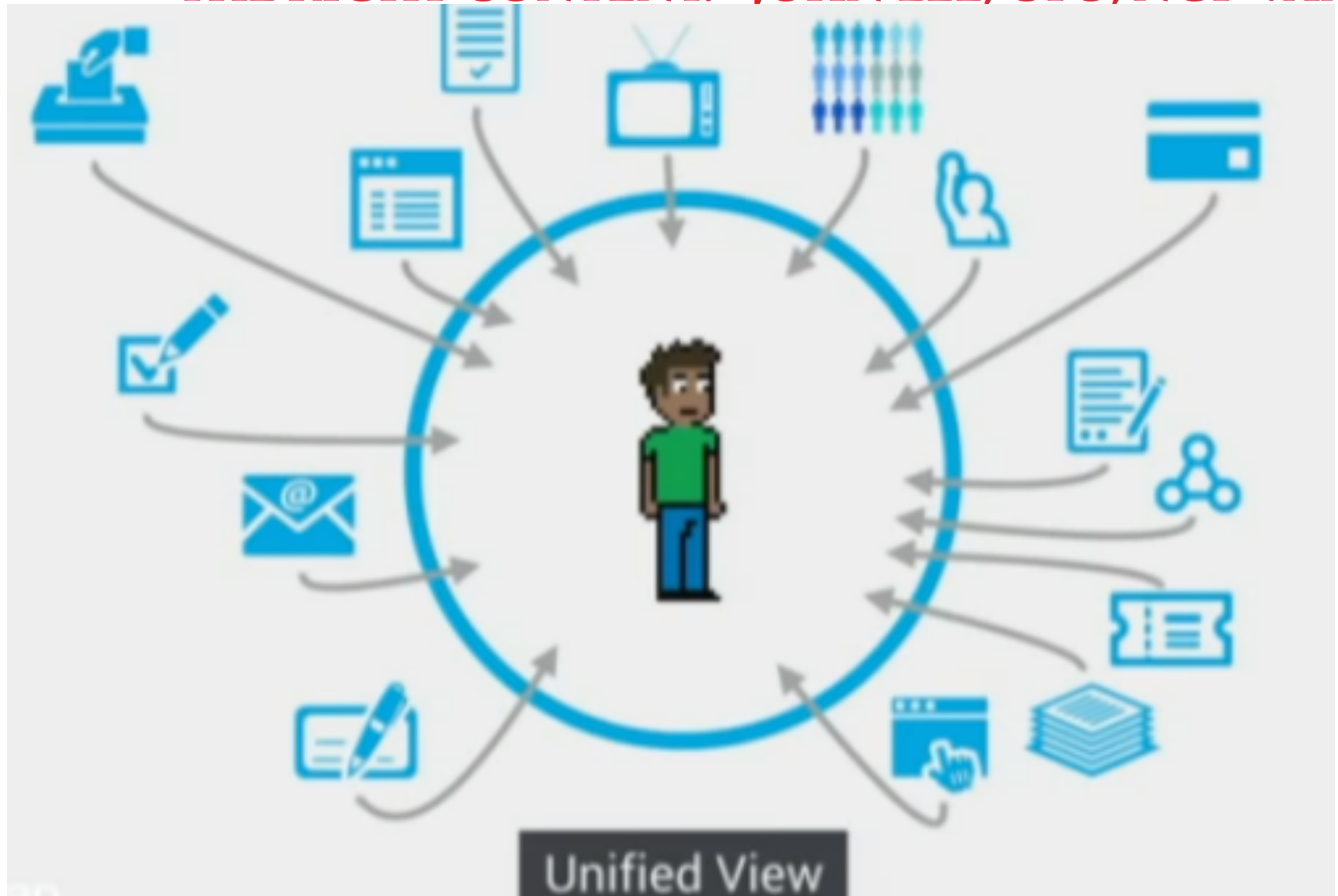
TargetSmart

Revolution Messaging

Catalist

COOP

**“THE RIGHT MESSAGES, TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE, WITH THE RIGHT CONTENT.” JOHN LEE, CTO, NGP VAN**



**QUESTIONS**