

## 2008 CERC Post-Election Summit

Competitive Edge hosted its 2008 Post-Election Summit on the beautiful campus of the University of San Diego on November 6<sup>th</sup>. Coming less than 48 hours after the polls closed and with more than a third of the votes still to be counted, there were a few tired and frazzled faces among the 14 distinguished campaign professionals on the panels. The consultants were grilled by Matt Hall of *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, Scott Lewis of the *Voice of San Diego* and radio host Mark Larson in an effort to dissect the entrails of San Diego County's highest profile campaigns. The Obama victory was also put under the microscope by USD professors Casey Dominguez and Del Dickson.



Panelists discuss the campaigns they helmed in '08.

Some choice remarks emerged:

*"When you're running an underfunded campaign sometimes you have an advantage that people don't know you have and that is to be underestimated."* -- Jennifer Tierney, the Gemini Group

*"The strength of the Obama wave in the City . . . was difficult and it was increasing turnout among the people who were least likely to vote for us."* -- Duane Dichiaro, Coronado Communications

*"We had endorsements from key public safety leaders. . . and in our polling, those endorsements, together with the message of clean, safe beaches, really was the winning message and they provided the credibility to deliver that."* Tom Shepard, Tom Shepard & Associates

*"We had no money for polling. We did everything gut level. I'm a big believer in polling and I preach it to my clients, but nobody would put up the money for a poll so it was all by gut and kitchen cabinet and that's always a recipe for failure."* -- Bob Glaser, the La Jolla Group

*"The reason we did well . . . was extraordinary message discipline. We were determined not to deviate. The message that we had on November 3<sup>d</sup> was the same message that we had when [the candidate] announced."* -- John Hoy, Schuman/Hoy & Associates

*"They [Schuman/Hoy, Goldsmith's consultants] did an extremely good job of painting Mike Aguirre into a box. . . . It [all the obstacles] was just too much to overcome. I mean I couldn't undo in four weeks what he [City Attorney, Mike Aguirre] had done in four years."* -- Chris Crotty, Crotty Communications

Kudos go to CERC Research Analyst Liz Sheld who arranged the Summit. We deeply thank our incomparable sponsors – fundraiser Carolyn Dorsee of **Dorsee Productions**, campaign treasurer Nancy Haley of **Scott & Cronin**; fundraiser Kelli Maruccia of **KM Strategies**, and **The San Diego Lincoln Club** for helping make the Summit a huge success.

Video of the entire Summit can be seen at [www.cerc.net](http://www.cerc.net). **Γ**

## Got Participants?

Recruiting qualified focus group participants is key to the success of the discussion. Since "one bad apple spoils the bunch" getting the right people in the room and -- keeping the wrong ones out -- is critical. Project Manager, Ronald Zavala ensures that CERC gets the right respondents by employing the **CRAFT** method he's honed during a dozen years in the survey research industry.

**Check** that all qualifying screening questions are "blind." For example, if you are in search of participants who consume Wonder bread, you will not simply just ask "Do you consume Wonder Bread?" Instead include Wonder Bread among a list of similar products and ask "Which of the following products do you consume?"

**Reject** generic employment titles such as "Manager." If the moderator cannot use anyone involved in the grocery business, your "Manager" could turn out to be a supermarket supervisor and ruin the proceedings.

**Articulation** questions are a must. If potential participants are unable to speak impromptu for a minute, they will not do well in a 90 minute setting.

**Follow-up** with participants 24 to 48 hours after recruitment. Qualifying questions should be re-asked and potential problem participants must be politely un-invited.

**Turn away** potential participants, even fully qualified ones, if there is a sense that the person is disruptive or hard to understand. For example, a respondent who sounds inebriated during the recruiting call will probably show up drunk for the group itself. Not good!

In short, look for reasons to screen-out rather than screen-in. It costs a little more, but Competitive Edge incorporates these five best practices and seats qualified respondents every time. **Γ**



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## CERC Welcomes New Research Assistant

Sasha Tobin has joined the Competitive Edge team as an assistant to Research Manager Tracy Duben. Sasha comes to San Diego from The College of William & Mary, having earned a Bachelor of Arts in Government last May. She is fluent in Spanish, having spent a semester abroad in Seville, Spain and can lay down a little Arabic. Well-versed in SPSS and PowerPoint, two workhorses for the research team, Sasha is well-suited for her new position. "I'm really excited to put what I've learned to work here at CERC," says Sasha. **Γ**

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## On CERC's Nightstand . . .

### ***What I Saw at the Revolution, A Political Life in the Reagan Era* by Peggy Noonan**

Recommended to me by friend and colleague Kevin Reikes, this book had been sitting on my shelf for a decade by the time I picked it up. Although overwrought in spots, this is definitely not your average political tell-all. Noonan treats her subject (the years) and her hero (Reagan) with probing reverence. She admits to admiration, but seriously asks herself "why?" The winding search for the answer to that question is rewarding. Standout quote: ". . . *Atwater's aggression keeps depression at bay, except for one moment three days before the ['88 New Hampshire primary] voting when he ruffles his hands through his hair, elbows on knees, and says, 'We're gonna lose this thing, we're gonna lose it, I can feel it.'* No one replies. He shakes his head as if to shake it out, and does. The next day he is his fighting self." Even great ones doubt themselves once in awhile. **Γ**

# Client Feedback

Here's what some recent CERC clients are saying . . .

**Client:** Gregg Robertson, PA Landscape and Nursery Association

**Service:** Activist Recruitment and Patch-throughs

**Gregg says:** *"We enjoy working with the CERC team! I appreciate your quick response and all your help, and I hope we'll be able to work together again in the future. Thanks for all your help."*

**Client:** Samantha Sam, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor Consulting

**Service:** Live voter contact calls

**Samantha says:** *"Thanks for being able to turnaround those calls on such short notice! We went 7 for 7 on our races."*

**Client:** San Diego City Attorney Jan Goldsmith

**Service:** Polling

**Jan says:** *"During my years in Sacramento as Assistant Republican Leader, I worked with many fine survey firms. In the November election, I worked with John Nienstedt and found him to be the best I have ever worked with. Competitive Edge was instrumental in our 60% win in a tough Democrat year."*

**Winter 2009**

## A Wind of Change Brings Opportunity

*"If there's a new way, I'll be the first in line . . . but it better work this time."* -- Dave Mustaine

That heavy metal meditation on governmental reform succinctly reflects where independent voters -- about 40% of the electorate -- are at this moment. Unhappy with the previous administration, non-partisans and weak-partisans are giving President Obama a chance. If he delivers and Republicans do not, we'll see a serious realignment. If he does not deliver, watch out for a backlash.

But what does "deliver" mean? Surveys and focus groups conducted recently by CERC among independent voters show that they want government to work. More or less government is not their issue; effectiveness and efficiency, now more than ever, are their issues, and we've been advising our clients along those lines for a few months now. The troubling thing for Republicans is that the new President "gets it," at least rhetorically:

*"The question is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works."* -- Barack Obama's Inaugural Address

In this issue we share some quotes that came out of CERC's Post-Election Summit where San Diego's political consultants held forth on what they did right (and sometimes wrong). We also introduce you to Research Associate Sasha Tobin, who is the newest member of the CERC team, as well as to Project Manager Ronald Zavala's method for ensuring spot-on recruitment of focus group participants.