

State Leadership Idea Exchange
Utah Association of REALTORS®
President Chris Nichols

The Utah Association of REALTORS® recently completed a strategic ad campaign to help support the re-election of Utah's governor, Gary Herbert, who is a REALTOR® and past president of our association.

Facing a hard-hitting challenger from within his own party, Herbert was likely to have a difficult party convention and primary election. Because Herbert is a REALTOR® Party champion, we wanted to do our best to support his campaign.

With help from NAR's REALTOR® Party program, we created a two-part campaign designed to get Herbert supporters to attend their political party caucus and the primary election. One of our challenges, in particular, was getting Utah voters to affiliate as Republicans (Herbert's political party); otherwise, they would be unable to vote in the closed primary election.

It's important to note that Herbert is very popular among most Utahns and has a high approval rating. Nevertheless, we were concerned that voter apathy among mainstream voters and the reluctance to affiliate with a political party would keep Herbert supporters from the polls. Thus, we developed predictive modeling that would identify likely Herbert voters. Knowing who those people were, we could use a very targeted approach to advertise to them and encourage them to vote.

While it was easy to recognize likely Republican voters, it was more difficult to identify mainstream Republicans and unaffiliated voters who we believed would support Herbert. To do this, we surveyed Utahns to get their stances on key Utah issues such as education and Utah's new elections process — controversial topics in the state. Using that data, we created models on where people stood on those key issues to determine the likelihood that someone would vote for or against Herbert.

Once we determined our voting groups, we focused on driving Herbert supporters to the primary election. In particular, this part of the campaign focused on 1) getting unaffiliated voters who were likely Herbert supporters to affiliate and participate in the closed Republican primary, and 2) focusing on a get-out-the-vote campaign for all Herbert supporters. We sent messages to these target groups using robo calls, live phone calls, online ads, mailers, and pre-roll video ads.

It's important to note that through our voter identification efforts, we were able to send the ad campaign messages directly to these likely supporters. While we used traditional methods such as phone calls and direct mail, we also used cutting-edge online tools. Using voters' matched IP addresses and individual social media profiles, we sent online messages directly to our target audience.

In the end, our efforts led to the largest primary election turnout in Utah history.

The election was a huge success with Herbert ultimately taking more than 70 percent of the vote.

We are sharing our experience because we believe other associations could benefit greatly from employing these research and communication methods when they want to help key REALTOR® Party candidates, support or oppose ballot initiatives, and conduct consumer education campaigns. Associations throughout the country would benefit from a better understanding of their supporters and opponents and knowing how to effectively reach and engage them.