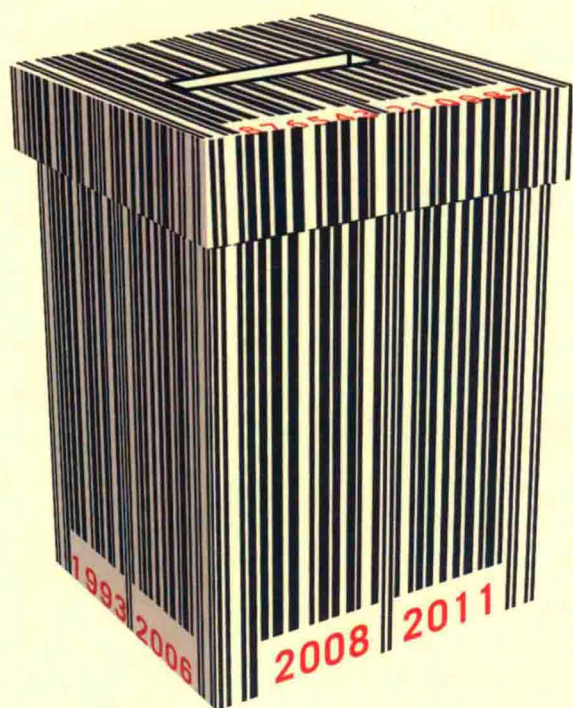# POLITICAL MARKETING IN CANADA

Edited by Alex Marland, Thierry Giasson, and Jennifer Lees-Marshment

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UBCPress · Vancouver · Toronto

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Preface

The sophistication and dissemination of communications and research technology, and the competitive pressures to reflect the needs and wants of the electoral market, are changing Canadian democracy.

Although the application of business marketing principles and techniques to politics is nothing new, the progressive complexity of those strategies and tactics is significantly changing how political actors behave. At one time, it was good enough to simply offer a commercial product or service, or to declare oneself a candidate for election, with little need to communicate because sufficient demand already existed in the marketplace. But competition brings pressures to edge out rivals, necessitating product differentiation, salesmanship, mass communication, and perhaps hyperbole. Some products and services find niche markets, as do political parties and politicians, and intentionally differentiate themselves from the demands of the mass market – think of high-end or community-oriented coffee shops or, in Canadian politics, the Bloc Québécois. Those seeking to attract the custom of the plurality or majority of the mass market, and hoping to remain or become market leaders, nowadays must rigorously research the marketplace, understand consumers' preferences, and attempt to appropriately shape the image and market positioning of themselves and their competitors – think of Tim Hortons and Starbucks, and of the Conservative and Liberal Parties. Some organizations, such as the myriad second-tier franchised coffee shops or the New Democratic Party, are market followers given that they successfully service a smaller but loyal customer base. In the consumer marketplace, there are, of course, always alternatives, such as brewing coffee at home or not drinking it at all, just as in politics there are alternatives, such as getting involved with interest groups or choosing not to follow politics and not voting. Moreover, just as consumers' preferences are subject to change, so are electors' – most recently with the 2011 election, when support for the Liberal Party

continued to erode and many Quebeckers switched brands from the Bloc to the NDP. A diligent commitment to aspects of political marketing is one reason that the Conservative Party won a majority of seats and why New Democrats – for the first time – became the market challenger in federal politics.

Political marketing is narrower than brokerage politics and it is changing the way political actors operate in Canada, as it already has in other democracies. Yet, we must be mindful that public opinion research and mass communication are merely technological tools, for they alone cannot spur innovation or big ideas, are not enough to excite people and capture their imaginations, and are unable to reshape the marketplace or consumer landscape. Politics is, after all, about people and competing ideas, and even the cleverest sales tactics and marketing strategies cannot disguise a bad product for long. Fortunately, competitive pressures help foster the emergence of viable alternatives. In this way, political marketing is responsive to the electorates' preferences, making it a tool that strengthens democracy, though this assumes that it is used altruistically, that mistakes don't happen, and that the voter is always right. The increasing sophistication and availability of technology does mean that political elites have the opportunity to make more informed, more responsive, and more efficient decisions than they would otherwise.

Patrick Muttart, a Conservative strategist and former deputy chief of staff in the office of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, is often mentioned in this book and elsewhere as a pioneer of political marketing in Canadian politics. He observes that during an election, Canadian political parties battle a number of campaigns simultaneously:

- The earned media campaign (e.g., news coverage), which tends to be centred on the leader's tour;
- The paid media campaign (e.g., advertising), which has two distinct but important components: creative and media buy. A well-designed ad needs to target appropriate audiences, and there must be sufficient repetition within the limits of the campaign spending cap;
- The direct voter contact campaign (e.g., voter ID, voter-specific direct mail, voter-specific messaging for canvassers, get out the vote), which is one of the most unreported aspects of electioneering;
- The local campaign, which increasingly is a fused effort between national campaigns and the party's candidates in electoral districts; and,

• The social media campaign (e.g., web and mobile technologies), which is centred on peer-to-peer contact and engagement.

The views of such practitioners illustrate today's methodical, interrelated, and centralized approach to politicking but also a lingering penchant for market intelligence to foremost inform communication decisions and win votes, rather than for designing policy. In theory, political marketing is about developing and promoting political goods and services that the broader electorate wants (see Glossary for political marketing concepts); in practice, it is a competitive tool to win power by targeting segments of the electorate. "Close campaigns are decided by the least informed, least engaged voters," says Muttart (2011). "These voters do not go looking for political news and information. This necessitates brutally simple communication with clear choices that hits the voter whether they like it or not. Journalists and editorialists often complain about the simplicity of political communication, but marketers must respond to the reality that undecided voters are often not as informed or interested as the political and media class are." Given such businesslike pragmatism, readers of this book are advised to balance scholars' idealism of political marketing with its actual practice by party elites.

The idea for the book came about after the first Canadian political marketing workshop held at the Canadian Political Science Association conference in May 2009 at Carleton University. Dr. Jennifer Lees-Marshment, arguably the leading academic in the field globally, was an invited guest speaker and the genesis for urging the development of a Canadian book. Until that conference, political marketing was rarely a topic in Canadian academia and usually appeared under its various subcomponents, such as political advertising, opinion research, or electioneering. With the publication of this book we anticipate that will change as Canadian scholars become more acquainted with the nature of political marketing as an exciting, dynamic, and important genre.

All of the contributors to this volume share this excitement. Thierry Giasson and Jennifer Lees-Marshment have been fantastic co-editors who divided and completed tasks with remarkable enthusiasm, speed, and dependability. The chapter authors have impressively followed guidelines, met submission deadlines, and acted on changes requested by the editors and external peer reviewers. As with any production, there have been many others behind the scenes. The timeliness, efficiency, and professionalism exhibited by UBC Press senior editor Emily Andrew in particular, and by her colleagues

at UBC Press generally, including editor Megan Brand and copy editor Judy Phillips, have been emblematic of customer service and product delivery. The editors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for their thoughtful remarks, which improved the quality of the book. Memorial University political science students Sean Fleming and Mark Coombs performed a meticulous proofread to ensure quality control and prepared a thorough index, respectively. Special thanks are extended to Elisabeth Gidengil (author of Chapter 3) for her recommendations about the democracy aspects of the introductory chapter.

The editors also wish to acknowledge a publishing subsidy award. This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The contents of this volume demonstrate that the old model of politicking in Canada has forever changed. For good or for bad, the nature of Canadian democracy is evolving. This book provides a basis for further inquiry into *Political Marketing in Canada*.

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Alex Marland
Lead Editor

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Figures and Tables

Abbreviations

CES	Canadian Election Study
CIMS	constituent information management system
CPC	Conservative Party of Canada
FAA	Federal Accountability Act
GOTV	get out the vote
MOP	market-oriented party
NDP	New Democratic Party
PC	Progressive Conservative (Party)
PCO	Privy Council Office
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
POP	product-oriented party
POR	public opinion research
SOP	sales-oriented party

The Marketplace

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Introducing Political Marketing

Thierry Giasson, Jennifer Lees-Marshment, and Alex Marland

Worldwide and over time, technological advancements change the practice
of politics, governance, and electioneering. Politicians no longer need to
travel by horse to visit a community where they will stand on an overturned
soapbox or a tree stump to give a speech to electors about their priorities. For
some time now, office-seekers have been able to zip across the country, a
province, or an electoral district by train, car, bus, or air, visiting multiple
communities in a single day, and if their speeches attract media attention or
are included in advertising, their messages can effortlessly reach millions.
The most professional of these packaged politicians and their handlers use
market intelligence, such as opinion research, to tailor their political offer to
reflect constituent priorities.

The cost of opinion measurement and of communications technologies
gradually declines even as the tools' sophistication grows, only to be replaced
with newer, more expensive practices. As in commerce, the general diffusion
of mass media and research technologies has increased their accessibility to
those in the political game. The competition for political power is therefore
often a battle for competitive advantages with respect to information collec-
tion, analysis, and dissemination, and for the funds to finance such operations.
Professionals who embody the spirit and practice of information-based
strategic and tactical political decisions are becoming known as "political
marketers."

The application of commercial marketing techniques to politics has its
origins in the United States, the global leader in such matters. The diffusion
of American political strategies and tactics is constant, with the global media
reporting on the latest innovations and political consultants selling their
knowledge. Political actors throughout the world are inspired by the most
recent US campaign, seek to employ successful tactics of American interest

groups, and aim to duplicate American government action and hire American experts.

As an academic field, political marketing has grown in size, breadth, and depth with the establishment in 2002 of its own journal, *Journal of Political Marketing* (Haworth Press), and publication in 2009 of the first comprehensive textbook, *Political Marketing: Principles and Applications* (Routledge). Canada held its first workshop in political marketing at the 2009 Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA) conference at Carleton University, which led to the creation of a national network of scholars and practitioners and to the development of this book. Canadian interest became more prevalent when, after attending CPSA presentations, Susan Delacourt, the *Toronto Star*'s senior writer in Ottawa, initiated a "Shopping for Votes" blog during the 2011 federal election in which some of this book's contributors analyzed Canadian electioneering through a political marketing lens.

Political Marketing in Canada explores the nature of political marketing practices in Canada. Its chapters investigate a range of political marketing activities, including the use of market research, its impact on political decisions and leadership, communications in government, market orientation and delivery, marketing and interest groups, media coverage of political marketing, online relationship marketing, branding, and the impact on efficacy. Additional chapters set out the nature of the marketplace and institutional rules that affect how marketing can be used in Canadian politics. First, though, this introductory chapter explores what political marketing is, looks at how it differs from political advertising and from traditional conceptual ways of looking at Canadian politics, and sets up the debate on the potential implications of political marketing for Canadian democracy.

What Is Political Marketing?

Political marketing involves the application of business marketing concepts to the practice and study of politics and government. Marketing is not a synonym for advertising, public relations, or telemarketing; those are aspects of marketing communications. Rather, as the Canadian Marketing Association (2010) defines it, marketing is "a set of business practices designed to plan for and present an organization's products or services in ways that build effective customer relationships." In other words, when applied to politics, marketing entails a political organization using business techniques to inform and shape its strategic behaviours that are designed to satisfy citizens' needs and wants (see also this book's Glossary).