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THINK PIECE

Debates are for dinosaurs and people who watch PBS. If you want to get elected, get on 'Millionaire'



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Has anyone else noticed that both presidential candidates surged in the polls the week when they appeared on Oprah? Actually, CNN's Larry King said it best to George W. Bush, "Let me get this right, Al Gore kisses his wife and surges 18 points, and you kiss Oprah and you surge back?"

Oprah, Larry King, Regis, Letterman and Leno are now key appearances for candidates. There are those who think that the presidency is demeaned somehow by the two main candidates doing these shows. But as anyone who has created a successful media campaign to sell a product or service knows, these types of bookings are vastly under-used by candidates.

In fact, it seems that there are two truths that every good PR person has been forced to learn that political strategists have yet to pick up on.

First, with so many things to grab its attention you can no longer wait for your audience to come to you, you must go to it. Your odds of reaching and motivating a critical mass of targets with a single story on the 6 o'clock news are slim. In order to sell anything we must piecemeal together a quilt of different types of media placements, each one creating an emotional bond with a segment of our target.

The point is, placing your candidate on all of the news shows in the world might be standard operating pro-

"Placing your candidate on all the news shows in the world might be standard procedure, but people aren't watching"

cedure, but people aren't watching. Standard political PR is being run on the premise that an election is emotional and will therefore connect with the public. Not anymore. Today, you must bring your message into the emotional outlets that the public is already familiar with. *Meet the Press* can do a hundred stories on the value of reading, but it's Oprah's Book Club that sells books.

The second truth is that quantity and variety are better than quality. There are very few media outlets that you can count on to reach and motivate a large group of Americans. Everything is so targeted and diluted by options and offshoots that whether you are selling a candidate or a can of soup, if you think you can build a publicity strategy through "big bookings," you might as well quit and start planning your library. Today, candidates must be able to get their message into entertaining forums.

Here is a PR lineup that could win the election: *Oprah*, *Emeril Live*, *People*, *Latin People*, guest spot on *Sex and the City*, *ESPN Sunday Night Conversation*, *Larry King Live*, *The Iron Chef*, guest character on *The Simpson's*, *The Howard Stern Show*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, *Industry Standard* and *TV Guide*.

And that's the making of a president in the year 2000.

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