Second Draft White Paper on

Nerd-Serviced Political Campaigns in Canada

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28 April 2005

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Introduction and Executive Summary

While the Liberal Party may be able to hold off an election for a few more months, the government is presently (28 April 2005) unstable because of its minority standing. With the onslaught of damaging testimony coming to light in the Gomery inquiry, the opposition parties are becoming impatient to force dissolution of parliament and a new election.

Nerds On Site, with its ever-growing network of independent contractor Nerds, is uniquely positioned to form relationships with politicians, students, business and community leaders, and the general public by providing exemplary service to the campaign teams who are hard at work in their communities to make their voice heard in government. Nerds across Canada have a lucrative opportunity to provide a wall-to-wall technical service solutions package to riding associations in each and every one of Canada's 308 ridings.

Possible services that could be rendered include (but are not limited to):

- Computer workstation leases
- Mobile computer leases
- Mobile communications hardware, service and integration
- Telephone (POTS) network installation
- Broadband internet setup
- Customized user training for campaign executives and volunteers
- Software development
- Development of user training materials
- VoIP and automated dialer systems
- Blackberry services
- Auditable data security services, Kricket
- Automated system backups
- Web communication tools such as internal/external blogs
- Callblasting - broad electronic calling campaigns

Time is of the essence. In order to make the greatest impact on this market, preparations must be underway immediately, relationships must be fostered today and planning must be taken seriously.

All of the contents of this document are open for revision. Many consultations must take place between the various stakeholders in an endeavour as broad as this one. Most importantly, **we as service providers must focus on listening** to the specific needs of those we aim to serve so that we might serve them as effectively as we can.

History

Traditionally each riding association has had the assistance of a local technician who troubleshoots computer problems as they arise. In a typical environment this technician is available on call, and will usually respond within a few hours, generally on the same day. Most offices do not have a fulltime staffer who has the skills, time, or energy to serve as full time technical liaison.

In many cases the computers being used are used hardware, lent to the campaign by a supportive local business or leased. In many cases these computers are unreliable and are a grab-bag of legacy components. Keeping the budget for computer equipment to a minimum often results in a frustrating environment for the volunteer and the campaign staffer and results in lost productivity and morale. Conversely, providing a reasonably priced lease package of reliable, supported computers will help improve productivity, enhance morale, and provide a positive computer experience for the volunteer and campaign staffer.

Mobile communication devices held by the candidate and VIP members of the campaign team are bought on an individual – as needed – basis. Coordination of data and communication between Blackberry devices, cellphones, notebooks and the office is rarely handled in an effective manner.

A carefully designed and fully implemented security regime has not yet found its way into the majority of campaign offices. Because of the lack of integration of techincal partners, this sort of end-to-end security has been impossible. More than ever, security is not something that political figures can afford to gamble with.

In short, an integrated data and communications rollout has not been available in the past, and is **urgently needed**.

Human Needs Assessment

The campaign manager is the primary client in each riding association. This individual is the CEO of this short-term operation (not the candidate as many believe) and this individual calls all the shots. Our job is to communicate to the campaign manager as clearly as possibly the immense benefits that a coherent, wholistic IT approach can have on the efficacy of a campaign.

The riding association that the campaign manager is mobilizing is made up of all segments of society: small business owners, homemakers, students, retirees, city councilors, teachers, steelworkers, and everything in between.

All of these are volunteers donating varying amounts of time and each brings different skills to the table. Many of these volunteers will have a technical involvement such as database entry, email correspondence, or even simple office tasks like printing, scanning documents and doing web research. Each individual volunteer brings value to the campaign, but technical problems will reduce their efficacy, diminish their sense of accomplishment, and discourage their further involvement.

What NOS can do:

NOS can provide specialized training materials tailor-made for campaign volunteers and staffers.

NOS can provide onsite, live coaching for every member of the team.

NOS can make communications more secure, giving a further sense of security to all the members of the campaign team.

NOS can remove headaches, keep the team running smoothly, and gives the team the competitive edge they need to win.

Technical Needs Assessment

In each riding, for each political party's local riding office, a temporary office space is rented in an accessible part of the district.

Between 5 and 25 desktop computers are set up and networked together. Redundant broadband internet (often both DSL and Cable) connection is established. The candidate and sometimes a couple of other VIPs (campaign coordinator, chief financial officer, etc) are setup with notebook computers.

Multiline phone service is installed and phones rented and plugged in. Mobile phones are issued to the candidate and possibly other VIPs for the duration of the campaign. Blackberries and other PDAs are setup to work together.

A VPN connection is established with the party's data headquarters to manage all of the CRM work. Usernames and security information are processed. Firewalls are inspected for efficacy and security.

All of this is done at lightning pace, the moment the election is called.

What NOS can do:

NOS can streamline this process with a wall-to-wall technical rollout including leasing workstation computers, leasing notebook computers, providing PDAs, VoIP telephones, multiline POTS systems, broadband connectivity, printing, VPN maintenance and everything in between.

NOS can provide specifically trained professionals to ensure smooth operation of all the campaign's technical equipment.

NOS can design and implement security regimes that reflect the sensitivity of the data and communication involved in a campaign.

NOS can develop customized software that will allow improved access to existing databases, that can coordinate volunteers, that can publish blogs, or mobilize the support community.

Technical support will be designed to let each campaign worker work to the best of his or her abilities and will therefore visibly enhance worker morale and team strength.

Financial Assessment

There are 308 ridings across Canada, 106 in Ontario alone. Each riding will see several candidates vie for its seat in the legislature. Each candidate is promoted by a riding association associated with a political party and each riding association has the financial resources necessary to operate a major project that lasts approximately 36 days.

For a better idea of the fiscals at work here, the average spent by each Liberal riding association during the 2000 election (2004 data not yet available online) was $48000. The average for Conservatives is identical: $48000. The average for the NDP is just over $13000. Keep in mind that this is for each campaign office in each riding. These are averages. These numbers also do not include expenditures that occur before the election is called (prewrit expenditures).

Virtually none of this money is spent on wages; instead, the money is spent on services required by the campaign, and by various promotions and advertising.

The keyword in any election campaign is "NOW." Soon, tomorrow, and a little later each serve to hamper the momentum of the work in progress. Providing NOW service and streamlined products that help to get the work done will be rewarded.

Nerd Needs Assessment

A qualified eNerd working in such an environment would need to show complete dedication to the task at hand. This would require at minimum fulltime (i.e. 40ish) hours per week for the duration, with significantly more during the first and last week of the campaign.

The Nerd(s) involved would need to be on-call 24hrs per day for the duration of the campaign.

A qualified Nerd would be familiar with the specific VPN arrangement in the office he would service.

A qualified Nerd would be able to manage security issues for sensitive data such as email and databases.

A qualified Nerd would be an excellent listener and quick on his feet to resolve issues as they arise with and for the users that engage the office's computer systems.

Formal training on the specific CRM software used may need to be pursued.

While service contracts and team expectations will certainly vary, one aspect will stay constant. The most effective Nerd will not merely be a service provider who fulfills the demands of his contract, but will be a real member of the team. This valuable team member will share the same goal as the rest of the team - to get their candidate elected - and will employ all his Nerd skills to meet that end.

Sample Proposal

This space has intentionally been left blank as brainstorming space where ideas about concrete proposals can be worked out. No proposals can be drafted until intensive listening and learning has been done with experienced campaign leadership staff.

Conclusion

Time is of the essence! With Parliament Hill in constant turmoil, dissolution of parliament is possible at almost any time. Riding associations across Canada are gearing up for the official call to battle. Nerds On Site must work diligently to determine how it might best serve each of these diverse groups of dedicated individuals.

Steps forward:

- Intensive listening to the needs of riding associations
- Consultations with campaign coordinators
- Consultations with party leadership
- Research into optimal hardware, software, and human solutions
- Nerd training and certification
- Sales and marketing development
- Development of Campaign Service Contracts
- Effective rollout across Canada