

Target Audience

This Campaign Isn't About You

Unless the campaign goal is to fundraise or mobilize the base, your target audience will likely consist of people who are on the fence or mildly unsupportive of your issue. The campaign needs to be about *them*, using imagery and messages that appeal to them, with ad placements in media that they read, watch, or listen to.

What works for you and what works for your target audience are likely two different things. You may want your dad to understand that Hummers are an environmental travesty. However, if he simply rolls his eyes and continues on to the dealership, then you've encountered a typical mistake in communications campaigns. If your dad primarily cares about his pocketbook, are you prepared to forgo your environmental argument and talk about how much the Hummer will cost him? Would you rather be *right*, or would you rather prevent your dad from buying a Hummer?

The General Public Isn't a Target Audience

Chances are you have a limited budget. This means you can't reach everyone, since the more people you try to reach, the more money it costs. Decades of marketing research shows that unless a message reaches an audience three or more times, the message goes unheard. That means you have to focus your campaign if you want to avoid the drop in the ocean effect. The question remains: How do you narrow your target audience?

Five Ways to Narrow Your Target Audience

You can narrow your target audience using age, ethnicity, gender, geography, political or religious views, current level of support for LGBT issues, and so forth. Whatever criteria you use to narrow your audience, consider the following five things:

1. **Which audience best helps you meet your specific campaign objectives?** Your campaign objectives will determine the target audience. For example, if you want to mobilize the base, only reach out to people who are already supportive. (If someone isn't sure they even support your cause, they sure as heck won't rally for it!)

"Before taking the Arizona Together television ad public, we showed it to a few donors. They hated it. I said, 'Good, I hate it too. If we all hate it, it's probably pretty effective.'"

—Representative Kyrsten Sinema, Arizona House of Representatives, former Chair of the Arizona Together campaign

The most creative ad campaign in the world isn't going to get a member of Hell's Angels to roll into a biker bar wearing a pastel-colored polo shirt. Similarly, some people will never embrace LGBT issues, no matter how good your campaign.

On the flip side, if you want to *grow* your base, reach out to fence-sitters and the moveable middle.

2. **Is this audience persuadable?** The most creative ad campaign in the world isn't going to get a member of Hell's Angels to roll into a biker bar wearing a pastel-colored polo shirt. Similarly, some people will never embrace LGBT issues, no matter how good your campaign. If you target the extreme right, recipients will likely shred your mailer without ever reading it—and you'll have wasted postage and killed a tree. Conversely, a strong supporter may feel great after getting your mailer, but you haven't moved anyone who was undecided. We generally recommend you target the moveable middle, that is, those who don't currently support your issue, but may be persuaded given the right messaging. The moveable middle is also referred to as the "mushy middle," "greys," and "independents." It includes:

- People with moderate political views (about two-thirds of the moveable middle)
- People aged 35 to 55 (about two-thirds of the moveable middle; youth are generally supportive while older Americans tend to oppose LGBT issues)
- Women (about two-thirds of the moveable middle)

Tip: Before you do any form of public communications, clarify your target audience. Do you want to reach the base or the moveable middle? Remember, communications to member lists won't get you new supporters. Preaching to the choir might feel good, but they're already singing your tune. Unless you're trying to mobilize the base, your money's better spent reaching out to the moveable middle.

- Hispanic audiences (tend to be fairly supportive of LGBT issues, but may be less supportive on marriage)
- Democrats or unaffiliated (only about a quarter are Republican)
- Suburban dwellers

See *Mindset of the Moveable Middle* for a more complete definition of this audience. Note that you may need to do a local poll to better define this segment for your particular state or region.

3. Which segment has the most influence and impact? Even after you define the best target audience to support your issue, you may still find it's too large for your budget. If you face this predicament, think of easy ways to further narrow the scope. For example, eliminate those who aren't registered to vote (unless, of course, the campaign is a get-out-the-vote effort). At a more nuanced level, consider focusing the campaign on opinion leaders and influencers, such as community leaders, business leaders, or progressive clergy who can "bring others with them" if you win their support.

4. Can you realistically reach the target audience? Define your target audience in a way that allows you to actually reach them. While some market research firms like to break the target audience down into psychographic segments, we generally don't recommend this unless you're willing to spend a lot of time and money figuring out how to reach and track them. While it may be interesting to know there's a target audience segment called "shapers" who like to set trends on public issues, this information isn't always practical. For a campaign to be successful, you need to actually reach your target audience as cost-effectively as possible—and that means understanding their demographics and media consumption patterns. If you want to reach

30-year-old men, you might consider an ad in a car magazine, while to reach college-age women, you might run an ad in *Cosmopolitan*. It's much more difficult, expensive, and time-consuming to figure out how to reach members of a psychographic segment.

5. Have you applied a ruthless focus? "No man left behind" does not apply to your target audience. Your target audience should be large enough to make a difference, but small enough that you can influence them. By definition, when you focus on one audience, you ignore another. This is good—corporations do it all the time. You may personally love the new iPod shuffle, but if your grandmother doesn't own a computer and thinks rocking out is a gardening term, she won't give a hooey that the iPod comes in five different colors. The point is that Apple doesn't expect (or even want) its ad campaign to resonate with Grandma. They're willing to sacrifice Grandma to reach 20-something urban hipsters. Reaching one audience effectively means not reaching another.

What creates added pressure for social advocacy groups is that to grow the base, you need to speak to those outside the base. Messages that effectively sway moveable middle voters likely won't resonate with your supporters. In fact, if your base can't relate to your campaign messages, it means you may have it right. That said, we recommend you spend some time helping your supporters understand the reasoning behind your communications approaches. That way, they'll understand why the messages don't resonate with them—and be more invested in the campaign's success.

