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## SendTec: Dems, Reps Fall Short on Search

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The 2008 presidential hopefuls are blowing it when it comes to search marketing.

At least, that's the assessment of a new report issued by the search-centric direct marketing firm SendTec, which has been analyzing the search advertising behaviors of the various Democratic and Republican candidates since primary and caucus season kicked off last week.

According to Janel Landis, SendTec's head of search development and strategy, most candidates have purchased keyword ads for their specific names, and in some cases the names of their competitors. But in terms of using search more strategically, "They are really falling short," she said.

Particularly, candidates are missing out on attaching their campaigns to particular themes – or at least capitalizing on user's heavy interest in specific issues. For example, according to Landis, no candidate has purchased the phrases "war on Iraq," "health care," or even the word "change" – which has emerged as the theme du jour for 2008. Only Senator John McCain seems to have caught on, as his campaign has purchase several ads tied to searches related to immigration.

More glaring of a missed opportunity is reputation management, said Landis – an area where candidates could exert some control over what messaging Web users encounter when conducting searches on them. For example, on Jan 8, the day of the New Hampshire primary, democratic candidate Hillary Clinton erred by not using search to diffuse negative news about her, found SendTec's report. A search on Google for "Hillary Clinton" yielded several negative news stories about her campaign, including the headlines "Clinton's White House Hopes Unravel" and "Hillary Clinton allows raw emotion to show."

"Does it get any worse than that?" asked Landis, who claimed that search ads could have nudged those headlines out of the top spot on Google. "She could have at least pushed those down."

Even when candidates do run search campaigns, they don't always budget enough dollars to specific keywords. "Budget capping is hurting them too much to be impactful," added Landis.

So why are presidential candidates – who have certainly not been shy about spending media dollars – holding back on search?

"It is a sophistication thing," said Landis. "Four years ago, they weren't doing anything. It's still a young industry, and there are only so many educated search professionals out there."

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