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Let's Party!

As much as I have talked about the importance of doing useful things for liberty with our current resources vs. simply focusing on growth, it is true that membership growth is important. Or at least, it is important that we find some way to replace the members we are losing by attrition. Unfortunately, given the current financial status of the party, we need to find a way to reach those people that costs less than direct mail.

I have had a few experiences that indicate a possible solution, but first a bit of theory (or rationalization, if you prefer).

In order to reach people cheaply, in either time or money, it helps to pre-filter the general populace to focus on those most likely to listen to and enjoy our message. I would suggest the following criteria as a start:

1. People not strongly committed to either of the major parties.
2. People who believe fun should be legal, even if it is a bit dangerous.

The first criterion indicates that candidate forums are not a good recruiting ground. It also suggests against advertising on news programs or talk radio. Those who are not committed to the major parties are likely not (currently) politically active. The second criterion indicates communicating with people in a non-serious venue. Once again, not advertising on the news and not reaching out at candidate forums.

If we are relying on volunteers vs. donors, that means person-to-person outreach vs. advertising. This suggests a couple of other criteria.

1. Venues where people are particularly open to talking to strangers.
2. Venues with a large number of people.
3. Venues where people are not rushed.

The first two criteria speak against door knocking. The third speaks against strongly against accosting people in front of grocery stores and post offices, and somewhat against working malls and county fairs.

A Bit of Data

OK, now for some of my personal experiences that may be generalizeable. I have noticed two places where the people were particularly open to talking with me about the Libertarian Party and were quite favorable. In both cases, the local affiliate was not equipped to fully take advantage of the situation.

The first was a large alternative rock concert in Washington DC, the "HFStival" put on by WHFS. Both the Virginia and Maryland parties had booths

there. There were thousands of teenagers with varying degrees of piercings and tattoos who were nearly 100% friendly to our pro-pot message. Abel Ashbridge of Northern Virginia came up with the simple, yet powerful approach of simply repeating “Do you think weed should be legal?” as people passed by. Many positive conversations were generated this way. My “Legalize Hemp” signs also proved to be effective. People stopped just to read the sign; many asked to take a sign into the auditorium to wave.

Unfortunately, for the Virginia booth, most of the people at the festival were from Maryland, so we did not get that many petition signatures (which was our goal). We were able to direct some of the people we reached to the Maryland booth (which was in an inferior location) so it wasn’t a total loss, but to a significant degree the opportunity was wasted.

The second experience was campaigning for the “Asheville Freedom Team,” two city council candidates and a mayoral candidate. Asheville has a large number of festivals put on in downtown during the summers. This provides large groups of people on public property waiting to be politically accosted.

“Alas,” for the candidates on the “Freedom Team” at least half of these people were from out of town; Asheville is a major tourist destination. Even “worse,” the people from out of town were the ones most willing to talk to us. While this was a good opportunity for general Libertarian outreach, our goal was to get votes for our local candidates. Thus, an opportunity for outreach was wasted.

The Insight

The big insight here is that a great way to reach freedom-lovers is at party events – “party” not as in political party, but party as in fun party. The Libertarian Party is *the* party party! We are the ones who want to legalize/keep legal sex, drugs, naughty music, and big toys. We need to reach our people where the action is.

The secondary insight is that the best places to reach our people are away from their homes. If my observation holds up under further experiment, people are more open to talking to strangers when they are well away from home.

And herein lies the crux of why we don’t take full advantage of these situations:

- This kind of outreach needs to be done by local affiliates.
- The people reached are not in the districts of those doing the outreach.

Thus, we have a “public goods problem”. The LP affiliates who benefit from the activities are not the ones who pay the price.

Therefore, we have a situation where we need the national party to work with local volunteers to get an optimal solution. Somehow, local affiliates who are in tourist destinations need to be “paid” to work events where there are thousands of LP friendly people from out of town. This payment could be in the form of a bounty to the affiliate for the contacts generated. Or, it could be simply providing subsidized/free outreach materials for those working these events. Or, it could be simply recognition in LP News for those affiliates to do such outreach for the good of the whole party.

Some example events could be:

1. **Rock concerts.** What could a better place to reach out to dopers? We especially need to hit those multi-band festivals, which allow outreach booths of all sorts.
2. **Racing events.** Fun and danger! What better place to find those who despise the safety nazis! And this could go with Libertarian Party sponsorship of Dave Goree's racing team.
3. **The Mall in Washington DC.** Each day, buses bring in thousands of high school students whose minds are focused on the subject of government. Talk about a target-rich environment! For years the Hare Krishna's maintained a booth in front of the Smithsonian Space Museum. Even our weirdest members look normal by comparison. And what impudent high school student wouldn't want some pro-hemp literature to take back on the bus?

Conclusion

I have *not* proven that this approach to outreach is more effective than direct mail. It could be that the people reached may be friendly to our message but unwilling to actively support the cause. However, some experiments to find out would be relatively cheap, especially given the large volume printing of the new outreach tabloids at LPHQ.