

Obama and McCain Online Stores Case Study

Presidential Frontrunners Accommodate Record Store Traffic with Volusion Platform

Unprecedented Internet Influence on 2008 Presidential Election

The internet played an unprecedented role in the 2008 presidential race, making it critical that each campaign build a strong online presence into its strategy. According to a 2008 report¹ by the Pew Research Center, 42 percent of the 18 to 29 age group utilizes the internet as a source for campaign information, representing a marked 22 percent increase from 2004 and the largest percentage for any news source. Reinforcing the need for each presidential candidate to capitalize on the growing influence of the internet, 46 percent of the same group considers the internet its primary source of election news, a figure that has more than doubled from 21 percent in 2004.

Social media in particular has proven its value as a source of election news, with 37 percent of the age 18 to 24 demographic claiming to have used social networking for campaign information. During the 2008 presidential race, frontrunners Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama harnessed social media platforms such as MySpace and Twitter to connect with supporters and enhance their fundraising activities. Aggressive online campaigning efforts combined with an overall increase in the use of the internet for election news and information led each campaign to anticipate more website traffic than ever before.

With record volumes of site traffic anticipated by both campaigns, the need for reliable hosting and e-commerce solutions was mission critical, as the online store for each candidate served as a major platform for campaign fundraising. Each campaign required expert management of hardware and software to achieve the server load support and reliability that was integral to campaign fundraising.

Backed by its proven track record with other political clients such as Fred Thompson, John Edwards, Al Franken and the Ohio Democratic party, Volusion is proud to have been selected as the online store provider for both Senator Obama and Senator McCain during the 2008 presidential race.



Technical Challenges

Record levels of election interest and use of the internet in unprecedented ways led to forecasts of record traffic to both candidates' stores. Hosting and supporting high demand online stores integral to the fundraising efforts of both 2008 presidential candidates presented some unique challenges:

- ❖ Server demands would exceed the existing Windows² server hardware limitation of 65,500 requests per 30 seconds. Due to the high traffic volume, downtime during critical stages of the campaign would result in significant fundraising losses.
- ❖ By law, purchases made in either store are campaign contributions, which are limited to \$2,300 per individual by the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA). The need to track and limit purchase totals by individual raised the need for advanced business monitoring and reporting capabilities unique to political fundraising stores.
- ❖ Comprehensive technology management was essential to ensuring that each store could reliably handle a large volume of server requests without consuming the time and resources of campaign employees and volunteers.

Reliability and Scalability

With anticipated record traffic to both the McCain and Obama sites, ensuring that each store had a reliable infrastructure equipped for unlimited scalability was critical to fundraising efforts. While the traffic volumes to each store were relatively low at launch, expected record traffic called for custom configurations capable of handling millions of requests.

- ❖ Volusion moved each site onto a load balancer, distributing requests among three dual-chip quad-core servers. This load balancing solution enabled both sites to overcome the limitation of 65,000 requests per 30 seconds and ensured that maintenance or failure of any one server would not affect the uptime of the site.
- ❖ Regular offsite backups ensured that critical data would not be lost in the event of hardware failure.

As a result, both the Barack Obama and John McCain stores served millions of visitors through notable traffic spikes during the presidential race.

- ❖ Senator McCain's online store experienced an over 500% increase in visitor volume from July to August 2008, the month during which he announced Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his vice presidential running mate. The number of orders placed through the store more than quadrupled during the same timeframe.
- ❖ The Barack Obama store supported a similar increase in visitor volume from August 2008 to September 2008 following Senator Obama's victory at the democratic convention. Traffic and the volume of transactions also spiked dramatically following Obama's victory in the 2008 election.

The load balancing solution combined with mission critical hosting gave both the McCain and Obama stores the scalability necessary to reliably process millions of transactions during pivotal fundraising points in the election.

Campaign Contribution Monitoring

Under federal law, the full purchase amount spent on campaign fundraising items by an individual is limited under the Federal Election Campaign Act. Most e-commerce platforms allow unlimited transactions from as many purchasers possible, but proceeds from both the Barack Obama store and the John McCain

store count toward each purchaser's maximum allowable campaign contribution. As such, managing both candidates' online stores presented the challenge of monitoring individual purchase history to ensure compliance with federal law.

- ❖ Volusion engineers integrated with a new payment processor to satisfy custom functionality requirements for the McCain store, which entailed modification to secure systems within the software. Custom fields were configured to capture each purchaser's occupation and employer information while maintaining data security.
- ❖ The Barack Obama campaign utilized advanced reporting features built into the Volusion software to manage its supporters' campaign contributions.

Both stores were able to effectively manage contributions on a large scale to ensure that campaign contributions complied with the law.

Expert Technical Management

Volusion provided comprehensive, hands off technical management for each store, which was essential to ensuring site uptime without burden to campaign employees and volunteers.

- ❖ Volusion provided a comprehensive solution for each campaign including software installation, business continuity planning, e-mail hosting and disaster recovery.
- ❖ Each campaign had access to at least one dedicated Volusion support representative 24/7.
- ❖ Technical managers received regular, automated status updates from each store to ensure early detection and resolution of any potential performance issues.

Manageable Record Traffic

Volusion's comprehensive software combined with advanced technical configuration and management ensured smooth operation of both the Barack Obama and John McCain campaign stores throughout the 2008 presidential race. Both stores accommodated the highest volume of traffic ever by either store, and successfully processed thousands of orders per day to raise millions of dollars in campaign funding.

References:

- 1 <http://people-press.org/report/384/internets-broader-role-in-campaign-2008>
- 2 Windows is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and other countries.

