

Foreword

by Joe Trippi

In retrospect, the thing that is most amazing to me is how the political press, who could never figure out what the Dean campaign was, now feel they are somehow qualified to define whether or not what all of us did was a success. They didn't know what was happening, they still don't know what it is and it is a mistake for anybody to buy into the spin coming out of the broadcast media on this campaign and what we've done.

We're at a pivotal point in our country. Broadcast politics has failed the country miserably. There's no real debate about the war, about 9/11, about the politicization of intelligence, about the social cost of third world health care in the US. There was a never real debate about the Patriot Act. That debate isn't happening anywhere in the country except on the Net. What are we even allowed to say and learn and share with each other? Where is the Digital Millennium Copyright Act being discussed? Not in the mainstream media.

The Dean campaign was about bringing real change to the American people and that means changing a system that's rotted, corroded, and rusted. It's a system based on the lessons of the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debate even though it was not obvious at the time; it took five to ten years to realize that was the moment when television was going to change everything in American politics. What no one could have predicted was that politics would become a race for money, a race to own a one-way communications tool that would take the American people essentially out of the process. It was no longer about average Americans, it was about, "How do I find a rich guy to write me a \$2,000 check and then how do I take that money and buy television with it?"

That is what the Dean campaign and all of us ran smack into. We were trying to change a system that is locked in place. There is only one tool, one platform, one medium that allows the American people to take their

government back, and that's the Internet. That is an absolute fact. It will not happen on TV or the newspapers. It's going to happen as soon as millions of Americans decide to act in concert to change America's politics. There is a reason we do not have first world health care in this country and it has nothing to do with whether Dick Gephardt has a good health care plan or Howard Dean has a good health plan. It has to do with the interests in Washington that will step up and knock that plan down and make sure it's not implemented. That's what the lobbyists are for: thirty-three of them for every member of congress.

Some of the anecdotes tell the story better than the statistics. The Internet encouraged amazing things to happen. There was a woman at Penn State who sent out an e-mail saying, "I sold my bike for democracy." It was a very moving e-mail and it talked about how she had gone out and sold her bike, I think for \$79, and had taken the check and sent it to Howard Dean. That e-mail to this day is rolling around out there. The campaign had nothing to do with it. The number of people who sent that campaign money saying, "I sold my bike for democracy," the number of young people who do that is absolutely amazing. Now I don't believe that they've all sold their bikes. But that happened in this campaign. It happened because of the Internet.

We put fifty signs up on the Internet one day saying "Iowa for Dean", "New Hampshire for Dean", etc.; you could download it and print it out. And about three minutes after those posters went up on the 'Net the first comment on the blog was, "Hey you guys screwed up; you forgot Puerto Rico." Puerto Rico votes for the nominee. So great, take one of them down, cut, paste, stick Puerto Rico in there and put it up and two minutes later Puerto Rico is up and we get eight thank-yous from Puerto Rico but we also a get guy from London on the blog saying, "Hey, I'm a Democrat abroad, I'm living out here for three months before I am reassigned and I would love an Americans Abroad for Dean sign," so cut, cut, paste, put that up and the thank-you comes from a woman in Spain. "I'm in Spain. I've been reassigned for six months, but I'm coming back and I thank you for putting the American's Abroad for Dean sign up on the site."

I've been in five or six presidential campaigns before this one. Most everybody in the States wouldn't know were to get a poster. They would be trying to drive to the L.A. headquarters where we ship ten thousand posters. Most of the people in the state wouldn't even know...no one in Puerto Rico would even have a clue that there were Dean signs and certainly not London or Spain. This all happened in ten minutes.

At the Bryant Park Sleepless Summer Tour we were doing about a ten thousand people crowd, ten to fifteen thousand people in Bryant Park and we had a goal of raising a million dollars by the time the governor hit the stage at Bryant Park with the contribution bat on our Internet website. Nicco Mele, our webmaster, calls me up and says, "Joe, there's this cool idea on the blog. If we hit a million dollars by the time the governor goes on stage, they want him to carry a red bat on stage and say, 'You did it,' because on the web we'll be hitting a million and he'll be on the stage and he'll carry the red bat

up.” And I thought that was a pretty cool idea so I turned to the hapless staffer who happened to be standing next to me and said the simple words, “Go get a red bat.” And it's night in Manhattan and he goes to find a red bat somewhere. A half hour later, as Senator Lowell Weicker is saying, “Ladies and gentlemen, the next president of the United States, Howard Dean,” out of my peripheral vision, I see this kid waving a red bat running down the sidewalk like a crazy person. Just as the governor is hitting the top of that stage, he throws the bat up, the governor catches it with one hand, walks up on stage and says, “You did it!”

Now, what was going on at that moment was real ownership of the campaign by the grassroots. They knew who had made that suggestion forty-five minutes earlier on the blog. Our blog traffic was amazing that night. Thousands and thousands and thousands of people were watching this both on TV and following it on the blog. They knew that they had suggested this forty-five minutes earlier and lo and behold, here's ownership of their campaign, because it's happening. And it's not just Joe Trippi or Zephyr or Nicco, it's the governor himself saying, “Look, you did it, and I know you told me to do this and you know you told me to do this.”

And that is a totally new thing. This campaign was the first campaign owned, really owned, by the American people and now what we have to do is to build a larger movement that's owned by them. Regardless of what happens in this campaign, you are the folks who are going to come up with the tools. So many people in this room helped us develop tools that we didn't even know we needed: we didn't know what we were doing half the time. We were doing things that were being tried for the first time in this country's political history. Did it all work? You know what? A surprising amount of it worked amazingly well. Did SMS text messaging work? No. We tried everything; it's just not there yet. It's not mature enough here.

I've heard people say the Dean campaign was a dot-com crash. Wrong. The Howard Dean campaign was a dot-com miracle. Let's break it down. We start in January 31, 2003 with seven people, \$157,000 in the bank, 432 known supporters nationwide. That's where Howard Dean started. He was an asterisk, an absolute asterisk and not even an asterisk in most of the polls. In Iowa he was at zero. It is a miracle that Howard Dean moved from nowhere to \$45 million, more money than any Democrat in history has raised. The previous third quarter record for a Democrat was set by Bill Clinton: \$10.3 million. But Clinton didn't do it as the governor of Arkansas. He did it as the sitting president of the United States of America. The following quarter, the fourth quarter, after setting that record he raised \$6.6 million.

Let's look at Howard Dean. He's not president of the United States. He breaks the third quarter record by raising \$14.8 million—almost 50% more. In the next quarter he raises a million more—\$15.9 million not \$6.6 million, and he wasn't the sitting president of the United States when he did this.

Actually, Howard Dean didn't do it. I didn't do it. You did it. And not just you, but the hundreds of thousands of Americans out there who understood

what this was about. This wasn't about one guy. This was about understanding that no one is going to change America for you—you have to change it yourself—and that finally the American people, after being held hostage by the system for 40 years now have the beginnings of the tools and the platform to take it back themselves; to demand that the American peoples' voice will be heard, and that there will be debate in this country again.

People forget how many things went right. We tried everything. Where did Meetup.com come from? Well, Meetup.com...I just happened to read a blog. It's a MyDD blog, Jerome Armstrong's blog. It's a small little blog. About two years or maybe a year and a half before Dean was even thinking of running I was reading that blog and I read on it that Jerome Armstrong thought I was an idiot, so he was first person to figure that out—a lot of people are trying to figure that out today—and I commented back on it trying to get him to understand my thinking and over time I came to read that blog quite a bit. And one day in January of last year, Jerome had this thing saying, "Hey, there's all these Dean people trying to meet up, and trying to use Meetup.com."

Well that came from a blog. The fact that the campaign had any clue... now within a week Meetup would call us, so I'm not saying but I'm saying that the first instance of us finding out Meetup.com came from a blog, not even one that was followed by a lot of people, but it was an interesting idea; we looked at it, and that was a time when there are a couple of hundred people around this country; I took a look at it; it was interesting. One person in Seattle was trying to meet up, one in person L.A., one person in San Francisco, one person in New York. There were three or four hundred people trying to meet up; they were all in different cities and I wasn't exactly sure how that was all going to work out. But the campaign decided immediately to embrace it and today nearly two hundred thousand people are registered at Meetup.com for Howard Dean. They meet the first Wednesday of every month in their city and towns, and I think it's now over a thousand cities and towns in the country. This was the Internet getting people to do something offline.

One of the most important lessons of the Dean campaign is that it's not just the online tools that have now been provided for Americans to meet and discuss things together and to work together. It's the tools online that help the people fulfill that energy offline and to go out in their neighborhoods and their community. One of the things I've always thought about the Dean campaign was that the other campaigns and the press never understood where the campaign was happening, it was not happening on the Russert show. It was happening over the water cooler at work, over the kitchen table at home, over the neighbor's fence and it was really hard for the other campaigns and the press to jump into that conversation, to jump up to the water cooler and say, "Don't listen to Blaze, he's out of his mind...he's wrong about Howard Dean," because you're talking to people at such a credible level and that's the same thing that was happening on the Internet as we grew throughout the campaign.

MoveOn.org is a real pioneer of the movement. They taught us quite a bit. Just watching them from their early days was an amazing thing and they were basically best practices. It was another thing that happens on the Internet in the community. They weren't really interested in helping any one entity....one candidate. They wanted to share their best practices with everybody that wanted them. At the time the only campaign that took them up on the offer was the Dean campaign and they were instrumental. Their help and instruction and advice of Zack Exley from MoveOn was instrumental in our early success and later success as we took what they taught us and moved it forward and built a stronger, more focused community.

We have a communications problem. The political press in this country has no clue what the Internet is, or what this community is, or what we're trying to do, and they have no way to write about it or to understand it; they put it in their old context. The Internet community in a lot of ways doesn't really understand the hard cold realities of American politics, and that's the disconnect that's happening right now.

Let's take the tape, the "scream" tape. That thing ran 933 times nationwide over and over and over again. By the way it wasn't news, it was entertainment. It was the heat-seeking missile footage hitting its target that they run over and over and over again when they want to get America all excited about that stuff. That really was damaging, not what the governor did, but the media's portrayal of it out of context over and over and over again and now they're all apologizing. ABC has apologized, CNN has admitted and apologized saying they ran it too many times, but they're now the same people saying, "Hey, this didn't work. What happened to the Dean thing?" Well it did work.

We totally energized the party. We had record turnouts in state after state, more young people voting Democratic in the primaries than any time. That's because there's an energized Democratic party that's taking on the President with confidence.

Who did that? What would have happened if Howard Dean decided to retire after he stepped down as governor, took some board seat, had been golfing all last year and we had never built this? Where would the Democratic party be? Where would our democracy be today? It would be not where it is. There's a reason George Bush is vulnerable today and it's because of the blogs. It's because of Howard Dean. It's because tools were out there that let hundreds of thousands of Americans get involved and start a debate in this country again that wasn't happening. And it made the other candidates decide they had to get into that debate, they had to get where Howard Dean was; they had to get their own blog going. They had to copy as many of our Internet tools as they could, some of them just pure rip-offs. You just look at the page and all they did was change the name.

And that is something that is real important because this isn't going to stop. Broadcast politics is on the wane. The media jumped the shark first time on

the war and they jumped the shark on the Dean campaign and the Internet and what is going on in this country. And what's going to happen now is something that must happen. Our democracy is really threatened right now in ways that the American people just haven't really grasped yet. You cannot have a system that's all about the big money.

The most important thing that changed was the Democratic party's contribution patterns. Which party historically raises more money in contributions under \$100 and you know who that is? It's the Republican party. Under a thousand dollars? The Republican party. Under ten thousand dollars: the Republican party. Under a hundred thousand dollars, Republican party. You know which party raises more money from contributions of a million dollars and below? The Republican party.

Do you know what party historically raises more money—gets more receipts than any party—a million dollars and above? The Democratic party. For a party of the people over 40 years to get to that point is a betrayal of our birthright as a party. And the Dean Internet campaign turned that on its head. The Democrat who raised more money from \$25 people and \$75 people than any Democratic campaign in history. That's returning the party in this country to where it belongs, to the hands of everyday Americans.

That's something that's really hard for the Internet community to understand. Politics, unfortunately, is only about the money. When you have powerful interests fighting over the energy bill and fighting over the healthcare bill and fighting over the Medicare bill and you have the pharmaceutical companies writing the Medicare bill and the energy companies and oil companies writing energy legislation, and Haliburton getting no-bid contracts, there's a reason behind all that. And there's a reason when you are locked into that system that nothing is going to change very much.

Like software, cultural revolutions come in versions. We had revolution 1.0 in the 1700s. We are in the beta stage of the American Revolution 2.0. It's the American people finally having the tools to say, "Enough!" This is not over. This is just the tip of the iceberg that is underneath the water, if we reach deep enough and hard enough and keep working to make the big change that we need. And unfortunately it is going to be about the money.

It's a small thing. I have said this over and over during the Dean campaign, that what this is about is, "When is the day?" The day isn't that far off. It only takes a couple of million Americans. Two million Americans waking up one morning and contributing a hundred dollars to change their country changes the entire thing. That's two hundred million dollars. That's what George Bush and his people are going to put together. Less than 1 percent of two hundred eighty million Americans.

As soon as two million Americans decide, "Hey, I've had enough of this stuff. We're going to change this country. We're going to have real debate. The people are going to be heard. And it's not going to be the special interests that are writing that bill. We're going to demand healthcare, or real campaign finance reform." Two million Americans. Now, Howard Dean got

to this. The Dean campaign clicked with six hundred and seventy thousand people, a third of the critical mass. I believe it can happen in this cycle because the energy is out there and the tools are out there, they're all coming into place. This engagement couldn't have happened earlier. The Internet wasn't mature enough as an entity.

Back in 2000, Meetup.com and the "Get Local" tools that were built around Dean, hadn't been modeled sufficiently. You needed that many more Americans to buy books at Amazon.com or to participate in eBay in an auction, to get to that point where they were prepared to use their credit card and to be comfortable with making contribution on the 'Net.

Finally and suddenly in 2003 we're at a place where it's mature enough to alter the Democratic party and that's really what it has done. It took a party with no message and gave it a message that energizes and mobilizes people. It took a party that was moribund in terms of how it raised its money and where it got its money from and redirected that and now every candidate replicated the tools, best practices, really, to attract small-dollar donations over the Internet and build a community over the Internet.

Dinosaurs don't die quietly. We used new and different ways to come from nowhere to get out in front in a way that's impossible under broadcast politics. And then we ran straight into broadcast politics because the dinosaurs woke up when Al Gore endorsed Howard Dean: alarm bells went off in every newsroom in the country and in every other campaign in the country. In the Gephardt campaign, the Kerry campaign, the Lieberman campaign, the Clark campaign, the Sharpton campaign, that alarm said, "Kill him now; kill Howard Dean right this second, because if we don't kill this son-of-a-B right now, he's going to be the nominee." For the press corps, that alarm bell said, "This guy is about to be the nominee of the party. We've got to hammer him, we've got to put him through that ringer that every future nominee goes through and we've got to hammer the living daylights out of this guy. That's our job."

Those two forces went on for three or four weeks, every candidate hitting him, every medium in this country going after him. The media doing it because they think that it's their responsibility to do that. And I mean that, they really do think that's their responsibility. They're wrong I think, but that's how it works. You have Dick Gephardt say "Hey, I have to win Iowa. I have to win it or I'm dead." His own campaign manager and consultants called what they did in Iowa a murder/suicide pact, that they decided they were going to murder Howard Dean and then commit suicide because they had to risk that to have any chance of winning—11 percent in Iowa for Gephardt was suicide, wrecking the Dean campaign with broadcast media attacks—TV ads scaring old folks about how they're going to lose their Medicare if Howard Dean is elected president of the United States. How were six hundred thousand Americans contributing money, caring about things, out there going door-to-door talking to their friends going to stop that in Iowa? It was a failure of the Internet in a rural state with a lower than average Internet penetration, but only for this cycle.

It wasn't a dot-com crash. It's a dot-com miracle being shot down. Now there's a need for them to go out and say "Geez. The Internet campaign failed." But why do they want it to fail? What's so scary about the American people actually getting involved in their democracy again?

So now the press starts the narrative now that this was a dot-com crash because it's easy. That's the basic problem you have with the press, they do what's easy. But that isn't a failure of what you've built. God help us if the mistakes of Joe Trippi or Howard Dean or the attacks of Dick Gephardt somehow stop what you've done, or people lose faith in what you've done. You have done something absolutely amazing. It must survive regardless of what happens to Howard Dean in his candidacy. We are, you are, the Internet is the most powerful tool ever put in the hands of an average American. And what the system has taught them is it that they don't count, that their \$25 check by itself doesn't matter; it's ridiculous; it's a waste of time; that working in a precinct for four hours by themselves is a waste of time, that they can't possibly do anything against this system by wasting their four hours. What we have to get over—the biggest hurdle that we have to get over—is that. That system is so rotted, so corroded, so rusted that we have to get over the average American's disbelief that they can't make a difference any more.

The Dean campaign and these Internet tools have taught people a new way of thinking, "You know what? Twenty-five dollars with hundreds of thousands of Americans doing it together, it's the most powerful thing in the world." Look at how it turned the Democratic race upside down. All of us working together in concert, for the common good—the common good which has gotten lost somewhere in our country's vernacular as well in the last 10 to 20 years—but working together for the common good of our country, we are powerful, and that is what is going on here. That is why we are just at the first stages of it if we continue to fight, if we continue to develop the tools that can make a difference.

You have done something absolutely amazing, but it's related to the one frustration I feel. All of us in the blogosphere were partners against a common enemy—a system that's rusted and rotten. We knew we were partners in broadening the debate, winning back the debate in this country, changing the system. We didn't all understand that politics did not afford us the luxury of forking our effort. We might have been Linux in this cycle, but we chose to be Unix BSD.

It was not obvious but it was implicit that we had to ride together on the horse we started with. We didn't have the luxury of breaking up into different camps. We didn't have the luxury to say, "Hey, now that we got this far, maybe some of us should go off and be for Dennis Kucinich," or "Hey, I think John Edwards is a great candidate. I'm going to blog about him and I'm going to go build something for him." Given what we are all up against and what we are trying to do, there has to be a way to get a unified movement going to build the same thing and not divide it into one camp or another camp. Obviously I was building it for Dean, so I'm as guilty of that as

anything. But the point is that we have the tools to give the American people their power back. That's our shared obligation.

No one is going to change the country for us. We're going to have to do it for ourselves. No knight in shining armor on a white horse is going to ride into Washington by himself and change that place. He can be as well meaning as he wants to, but it's not going to happen. There's only one force, it's us, it's the American people, and this is the place, this is the platform. It is the Internet that gives us the power to come together as one community and take our country back.