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## Obama's convention crowd: Biggest phone bank ever

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Those 75,000 supporters who will pack an American football stadium for Barack Obama's convention speech will not be there just to cheer their candidate on television. They will form the world's largest phone bank to boost voter registration fired-up supporters using computer targeting the campaign has spent months putting together.

The move to the Invesco Field at Mile High stadium for the Democratic National Convention's final night next month at an additional cost of \$5 million will capture a huge crowd the Obama campaign plans to put to work. They will be armed with data gleaned through "microtargeting" unregistered voters the campaign believes are ripe to back Obama if pressed to get on board.

"This convention is going to look different and feel different and be different," says Steve Hildebrand, the Obama adviser overseeing the effort, during a recent visit to Denver. "We're here to win an election, not throw a party."

One key to Obama's victory plan is to expand the electorate, bringing in more young voters, minorities, suburban women, seniors on fixed incomes and people who have been disaffected by politics and might respond to the freshman Illinois senator's message of change over the more experienced Republican John McCain.

President George W. Bush also used microtargeting techniques to find potential supporters among likely voters in 2004. Obama's focus is more on finding people who are not registered to vote and figuring out how to persuade them to sign up and back him.

Hildebrand said the campaign has identified 55 million unregistered voters across the country, by comparing registration lists with lists of potential voters gleaned by mining consumer databases the same way credit card companies track people's spending. They say their research estimates more than two-thirds would vote for Obama if they were registered and motivated.

"If we do this right, we'll be unbeatable," Hildebrand says optimistically.

The campaign is already holding voter registration efforts across the country, and the convention will be followed by a big drive on the following Labor Day holiday weekend in early September.

The campaign is convening the 4,439 convention delegates in state-by-state meetings during the next couple of weeks, and they will be asked to commit hours each week before the Nov. 4 election to register voters and persuade them to back Obama. That includes delegates who supported Hillary Rodham Clinton, some of whom still have hard feelings from the primary but are being asked to work diligently for the ticket.

The delegates will be part of a massive audience expected at Invesco on Aug. 28, when Obama becomes the first black presidential nominee of a major political party. The campaign wants to use the hype surrounding the historic moment to build a volunteer force in all 50 states.

The Democrats plan to hand out 60,000 stadium tickets to state party leaders, with instructions to distribute them in a way that helps drive up Obama's support. That might mean rewarding local organizers who are volunteering their time for voter registration, or perhaps identifying independent or Republican voters who

might be persuaded by hearing Obama accept the nomination on the 45th anniversary of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech.

Not all states will be treated equally. Battleground states where voters are being targeted and Western states within driving distance of Denver will be given more tickets, with host Colorado getting the most. The Obama campaign sees the convention as a chance to put him on top in a state that has not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1992.

The campaign has identified more than half a million unregistered potential voters in Colorado one-fifth of the state's eligible population. The numbers are even higher in some other battleground states.

Hildebrand points to Georgia as a prime example, where nearly a third of the voting-eligible population is unregistered more than half of those being black, Hispanic or under 24. He says Obama could win the state with a muscular drive to enroll them and with McCain losing Republican votes to Bob Barr, a former Republican congressman from Georgia running for president as a Libertarian.

The campaign recognizes that people who live in battleground states will be more effective at persuading their neighbors than the traditional advertising campaigns, which is why it's important to send the masses who will be in Denver out with instructions and training to bring in votes.

In the past half-century, technology has replaced peer-to-peer, ground-game politics with the broader weapons of hitting opponents in television commercials and other mass advertising. The Obama campaign wants to use technology and microtargeting techniques to return to the political roots.

"What has won elections for 200 years is a neighbor talking to a neighbor, some peer talking to a peer," said Obama campaign manager David Plouffe. "People need other people to do their validating, especially young voters who are more resistant to ads and mainstream media reports."

Enter the 75,000 people who will have to come hours early for Obama's acceptance speech to get through security, most carrying cell phones. As they settle in their seats, campaign aides will be on stage asking them to text message their friends and use call sheets to get people to register. "There will be a lot of idle time. We put idle people to work," Hildebrand said.

The campaign effectively used similar organizational tactics in the Democratic primary, such as when tens of thousands gathered to see TV talk show host Oprah Winfrey campaign with Obama in Iowa and South Carolina. But this will be on a much larger scale and focus on voter registration besides persuasion.

The Obama campaign is using microtargeting not just to identify voters and their chief issues much as Bush did but as a way of going after the untapped resource of unregistered people.

"New technologies and the data that's available to us makes me fundamentally believe that we do not need to accept the electorate as it is," Plouffe said. "It can be greatly expanded."

The campaign has found about 8.1 million unregistered yet eligible blacks, another 8 million unregistered Hispanics and nearly 7.5 million unregistered people between the ages of 18 and 24. Officials also are looking at more women versus men, more highly educated voters, people on fixed incomes and those who have moved across state lines in recent years and could change the voter makeup.

Obama benefits from a highly motivated group of supporters more than 2 million people living across all 50 states have volunteered to help elect him and a record-breaking fundraising operation that can fund these efforts nationwide.

"This is not smoke and mirrors," Hildebrand said. "We're just the first campaign with the capacity to do it."

He compares Obama's potential to change the party to former President Ronald Reagan, who remade the Republican Party for a generation. "If we do it right, we can be the dominant party for the next decade," Hildebrand said.

On the Net:

<http://www.demconvention.com>

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