



## **Phone tactic worked: pollster**

Michael Gordon, National Editor  
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Those recorded telephone messages from John Howard might have attracted negative publicity during the campaign, but they proved effective and will be used in future elections, Liberal pollster Mark Textor revealed yesterday.

Mr Textor said the practice was used "very, very extensively" by the Liberals, with the message tailored to particular audiences.

While most of the recorded phone messages were from Mr Howard, they also came from Treasurer Peter Costello, local candidates and even local candidates' wives.

"We know, measurably, that those calls had a very positive effect and people appreciated the fact that they got a direct and unfiltered message from a political leader in a new, innovative way," he said.

Speaking at the annual Australian Market and Social Research Society conference in Melbourne, Mr Textor gave a rare glimpse inside the Liberal bunker, revealing the role of polling and focus-group testing.

National polls with "very large" samples were conducted nightly, with rolling data from 20 or 30 seats being constantly processed, he said, resulting in instant direct mail, telephone and advertising responses.

With polling and media teams working on 24-hour cycles, the unusually long six-week campaign was more like 16 weeks. What used to be a three-or-four-person tactics group now comprised up to 30 people.

"At 4.30 in the morning you might say, 'OK, we went down in Eden-Monaro among women because of an increase in the salience of a dis-equity issue like health . . . or we went up in a seat like Deakin because of a rise in the salience of interest rates'.

By 10 o'clock you're having conversations with state directors about how they might respond in direct mail hits in both areas."

Mr Textor also shed light on Liberal research on Labor leader Mark Latham, asserting that his troops-home-by-Christmas promise was a "watershed" reinforcing concerns that he "just made up stuff because it was exciting and got him a headline".

He claimed Labor's forest policy in the final week was devastating because it aggravated this concern, suggesting Mr Latham was erratic. "It wasn't just his inexperience that people were worried about. It was his character, that at critical times he'd make bad judgement calls, or he'd do things they simply couldn't understand."