

---

---

# Here Comes the JUDGE

---

---

## *Online Success in Local Races*

By Hal Dash and Matt Klink

**R**unning a down-ballot race in California always presents challenges when it comes to getting voters' attention and getting them to the polls.

In Los Angeles County, a sprawling geographic area where voters read and speak multiple languages and usually see long lists of state, county and city offices and initiatives on their ballots, it's often difficult for local candidates to establish even the basics – name identification – much less actual votes on Election Day. This is especially true for candidates running for Los Angeles Superior Court.

This past June, with attention focused on free-spending candidates in the California's Republican Gubernatorial and U.S. Senate primaries, the challenges faced by our clients, Deputy City Attorney Chris Garcia and Deputy District Attorney Valerie Salkin, as they ran for separate seats on Los Angeles County's Superior Court were pretty stiff.

The top-of-the-ticket primary contests not only dominated earned media but also took most paid media – television and radio – in Los Angeles. Media, never cheap, was harder to earn and more expensive to buy this year.

Our firm, Cerrell Associates, pioneered the field of judicial campaigns in California. We've run 400-plus judicial elections, winning more than 95 percent of them. Typically, judicial campaigns are very predictable. Get the right endorsements, work diligently for editorial support from Los Angeles' mainstream and judicial newspapers and buy traditional paper slates.

For Garcia and Salkin, the June primary began as our other judicial campaigns typically do. The attorneys developed their websites, began speaking at important legal events, prepared for Los Angeles County Bar evaluations and worked feverishly to raise money to buy slate mailers. However, we sensed early on that something was different this year. To cut through the clutter and reach voters, we knew that our "traditional" campaign model had to be updated. We turned to Spot-on and used its "virtual slate card" for both judicial candidates.

The virtual slate card is an excellent choice for down-ballot contests or any race where money is tight and exposure needs to be concentrated. Like a slate card mailer, the virtual slate allows candidates to share an online banner ad buy. That way, each gets each more spending power than they'd have on their own and, consequently, more eyeballs on their website – think name identification and more voter information. Unlike a slate card, however, candidates can have their “own” banner ads, each with their specific message as part of the campaign.

We chose to split Garcia’s and Salkin’s buy 50-50 and to divide the number of impressions purchased evenly between the two campaigns. “That’s not a requirement,” says Spot-on founder Chris Nolan. “Different campaigns have different budgets. The beauty of online is that we can buy in bulk and divvy up ad impressions to fit a campaign’s spending or targeting needs.”

In counties like Los Angeles where media of all sorts can be prohibitively expensive for all but the most high profile races, virtual slate cards allow down-ballot races – even judicial candidates – an opportunity to advertise. In areas where spending limits keep budgets low, virtual slate cards let like-minded campaigns and candidates stretch their ad dollars without violating spending limits.

Added Nolan, “Many outlets have minimums – the amount a candidate has to spend to get in the door. With the virtual slate card we get around that requirement by grouping like-minded candidates and causes together so more voices can be heard.”

The Garcia and Salkin campaign ads began running during the last week of April and continued through Election Day. With a tight budget—less than \$50,000 – we aimed for a thin but persistent placement on pages carrying local news and events. We used a “share of voice” metric—taking a small percentage of the ads publishers expected to show over a long period of time. Across the buy, a total of roughly 2 million impressions, the share-of-voice for Garcia and Salkin’s ads was about 3 percent of the ads shown by each outlet.

The goal was to find potential voters who care about their community and to introduce them to both candidates and, ultimately, to remind voters, over time, about Garcia’s and Salkin’s candidacies. And just before Election Day, we changed the creative to include a “Don’t Forget to Vote” message.

Since the campaigns did not do any direct mail or buy search advertising, we realized in television and radio we had a unique opportunity to test the effectiveness of online banner ads. We would know—early and clearly—if the banner ad campaign

was working and how effective it was. So we took advantage of that, making sure to record (via Site Meter on each, separate site) the traffic results.

The display ads—a 728x90 pixel banner for the top of page and a 250x300 box – appeared on the *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, *South Bay Daily Breeze*, *KNBC.com*, *CNN.com* and *Foxnews.com* sites, as well as a number of smaller LA County publications. For the websites with a reach greater than Los Angeles County, we geo-targeted to only users in the county.

The results were clear: Banner ads are a good way to get voters to your candidate or campaign website. Across all metrics, traffic to the website increased by at least 400% for both Garcia and Salkin.

The two charts below tell the story of how the online ad buys successfully raised the candidates’ profiles and brought potential voters to their websites, where they were exposed to biographical information, judicial qualifications and endorsements. In short, it provided votes with information they needed to increase name recognition. And it wasn’t a force feeding since voters chose to click on the ads to learn more about the candidates.

Valerie Salkin	April	May	June 1-8
Unique Visitors	393	1619	2174
Visits	638	2113	2475
Google Search Referrals	204	762	1364

Chris Garcia	April	May	June 1-8
Unique Visitors	329	1342	1579
Visits	499	1661	1859
Google Search Referrals	125	486	1028

Valerie Salkin, by the way, won and was recently appointed to the bench early by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Unfortunately, Chris Garcia missed the November run-off by a small margin, in a large part because he was grossly outspent by two other candidates. Nevertheless, the surge in website traffic from April to May was about the same for both candidates. (Valerie Salkin’s June numbers are higher than Chris Garcia’s; that is in part because she won her race and voters, seeing the election results on TV, on websites and in newspapers, investigated her website after the fact.)



In evaluating the results of the Garcia and Salkin campaigns, Spot-on and Cerrell didn't just look at click-through rates—the number of times a banner ad sent a reader to a site. We also looked at three additional site metrics: 1) the number of visits and visitors to the respective websites—known as “unique visitors” 2) the number of times people came to the site—“visits”—and 3) the number of times a free, organic Google search of the candidates' name brought a voter to the site “Google Search Referrals.”

Spot-on was particularly interested in getting a “holistic” view of traffic to the Garcia and Salkin sites. “Click-through rates are a great measurement for specific tasks—fundraising is the best example. But it's frustrating to use that metric for display, because it groups apples and oranges, pears and grapes in one pile,” added Nolan. “Banners vary in so many respects—art work, messaging, rich media vs. static—that click-through doesn't do justice to their effectiveness.”

**It's a simple equation.  
Smarter Voters = Smarter Politics.**

**Vote iQ** is a nonpartisan social networking site for trusted information. A platform for you to reach a mass audience with micro-targeted messaging — all in one place. Vote iQ connects policymakers, voters, and political causes across the United States like never before. [Go to VoteiQ.com](http://VoteiQ.com) to join and learn more.

**vote iQ**  
join the conversation

[facebook.com/VoteiQ](http://facebook.com/VoteiQ) [twitter.com/VoteiQ](http://twitter.com/VoteiQ) [linkedin.com/companies/vote-iq](http://linkedin.com/companies/vote-iq)

For this reason, Spot-on also looked carefully at Google Search Referrals—Spot-on calls these “GSR’s”—in addition to pure traffic metrics for both Chris Garcia and Valerie Salkin’s websites.

“An increase in visits via a search indicates that a site visitor has some knowledge of the candidate,” stated Nolan. “That’s usually not the case with down-ballot races, so a search surge that follows the beginning of an online banner buy which is what we saw with both Salkin and Garcia is a good indication of the campaign’s effectiveness.”

Others are looking at ways to measure banner ads’ effectiveness. Global Strategy Group, the New York consultants, along with Google and Centro, a Chicago-based media buying firm, have sponsored a study that echoes our findings with the Garcia and Salkin campaigns. The three firms worked together this June on a statewide effort separate from Cerrell and Spot-on.

GSG looked at ads the firm ran on behalf of Democrat Chris Kelly who was seeking his party’s nomination for California Attorney General. Although he spent considerably more money (the

campaign says it bought more than 220 million impressions across California), like Garcia and Salkin, Kelly was running down-ballot in a large field of candidates. As we found with Garcia and Salkin, GSG’s study found that voters who saw television and online ads for Kelly viewed him more favorably than those who only saw television ads.

Online political advertising is still struggling to find the one metric that, like television’s gross rating points, tell us exactly what to buy and how. But looking at performance that’s not tied to click-through rates indicates that banner ads work—and work well—when it comes to motivating voters and getting them to remember and like candidates. **SE**

---

*Hal Dash is chairman and CEO of Cerrell Associates. A 35-year campaign veteran, he has worked on every one of Cerrell Associates’ 400-plus judicial campaigns. Matt Klink, president, heads the firm’s Campaigns & Issues Management practice area. Find out more about the firm by visiting [www.cerrell.com](http://www.cerrell.com).*

## AdvocacyData

political data you can trust

**Advocacy Data means hitting the right audiences at the right times with your key messages. We leverage our great people with the largest, most complete outreach database attached to voter files to help you.**

- Buy or rent already opted-in email lists
- Data match your current list with email, phone numbers and donor history
- Deploy email blasts with maximum deliverability

*Take advantage of our expertly enhanced and processed voter data to communicate effectively.*

**CALL TODAY: 202-737-0060 • [info@AdvocacyData.com](mailto:info@AdvocacyData.com) • [www.AdvocacyData.com](http://www.AdvocacyData.com)**

Campaigns  
& Elections

**DIGITAL  
EDITION**



**It's the same great magazine...  
only without the paper.**

Subscribe today at  
[campaignsandelections.com](http://campaignsandelections.com)