

## **Bush campaign ran from Noida call centre**

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New Delhi, May 16

The political split in the US over outsourcing notwithstanding, till very recently the fund-raising and vote-seeking campaign for the Republican Party was done partly out of India. And this was handled by two call centres located in our own friendly neighbourhood in Noida and Gurgaon.

For 14 months between May 16, 2002 and July 22, 2003, HCL BPO Services — the 100 per cent-owned subsidiary of Shiv Nadar-promoted HCL Technologies — had some 125 agents working in seven teams soliciting financial contributions for the Republican Party. US presidential elections are slated for November 2004.

The mandate for the teams was to mobilise support for President George W. Bush and solicit political contributions ranging between \$5 and \$3,000 from lakhs of registered Republican voters. The voters' database was provided by the Republican National Committee (RNC), the party's premier political organisation.

The contract for running the campaigns was originally awarded by RNC to Washington-based Capital Communications Group that provides consulting services to government and private clients for cultural and political networking. For cost and efficiencies gains, the company outsourced the work to HCL Technologies that in turn sent it offshore.

When contacted by Hindustan Times, sources close to the deal within HCL BPO Services said, "We work under a non-disclosure clause with most of our clients (barring British Telecom) and hence would not be in a position to comment on any such deal."

According to the deal details, at any point in time, 75 agents worked on a \$9.25 per hour per person billing rate, and contacted at least 20,000 voters through an automatic dialer. Sources confirmed that on a conservative estimate at least 80 lakh registered republican voters have been contacted.

During the period, HCL ran nearly six to seven campaigns on various issues, some in the form of simple 'yes or no' polls on issues like 'Pro Choice Pro Life' that tried to capture the sentiment in the US audiences about abortion.

There were other campaigns that were of the fund raising nature where the voter would pledge an amount to the party. The RNC would do the follow up in the US for fund retrieval. The target for the team was to get a pledge of \$400 per day. Going by conservative estimates, at least funds worth \$10 million were

committed for President Bush through the BPO centres in India.

But the million-dollar question is why was the contract called off? Insiders say the growing resentment in the US audiences against outsourcing to India and strong reactions from Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry were at the root of capping the contract. The anti-outsourcing lobby within the Republicans also had a hand in ending the contract, insiders divulged. But according to HCL sources one consideration was non-viability in the last few months after having covered most voters from the RNC database.

Maybe the Indian political establishment can take a lesson from or two from Republicans in US and outsource its fund raising campaign during next general elections.

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