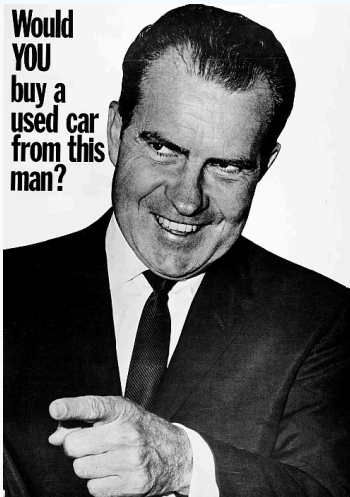


How to Fight Back Against FUD



In 1960, just in time for the Republican National Convention, Democrats rolled out a new attack line against presidential candidate Richard Nixon. It was a simple ad that said, “Would you buy a used car from this man?” and then had a picture of the grinning Nixon. **The ad’s purpose was not about facts or policy but to attack with FUD: fear, uncertainty, and doubt.**

In the last [Winning Edge](#), we explained the origins of FUD. In this edition, we are going to talk about how to fight back when it’s used against you. And the best teacher is Nixon himself. **Because eight years after that used-car ad and other mistakes, he figured out how to beat FUD. But he didn’t do it with facts.**

1960: Fighting Emotion with Facts

The 1960 election was a unique election. You had the young John Kennedy versus the older Richard Nixon. It was the first campaign that was waged on television, and visuals outweighed policy. The message of “Would you buy a used car from this man?” was a visceral appeal to the voter’s gut, asking do you trust this man.

Nixon tried to focus on substance and answer with policy. He famously refused makeup before the first televised debate and then looked sweaty and uncomfortable. Nixon treated TV like radio with pictures, and it didn’t work. Kennedy won a very close election.

Nixon went on to run for governor of California and lost, too. After the results he famously crashed out and said, “You don’t have Nixon to kick around any more, because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference.”

1968: Out-FUD the FUD

Time heals all bruised egos, and by 1968, Nixon was ready to run again. But this time with a different strategy. 1968 was a year of turmoil that saw Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy both assassinated, riots, and Vietnam grinding on.

This time, Nixon used the emotions created through TV to speak to an anxious nation.

He hired Madison Avenue television ad men and was labeled the “New Nixon.” His media advisers created a campaign around his strengths. Because he looked stiff reading speeches, they instead had him do more off-the-cuff Q&A and town hall style events. And they leaned heavily into emotion in their TV ads.

Ads that focused on [Vietnam](#), [crime](#), and [order over chaos](#) all ended with the same message: “This time vote like your whole world depended on it.”

The new slogan didn’t argue with the fear voters were feeling. It accepted the fear and gave the voters something they could do. Their vote mattered and their vote was something the world depended on. With these higher stakes, the old car salesman lines seem trivial.

The campaign messaging worked so well that after he’d won, [Time Magazine](#), while reviewing a book about the campaign, wrote: “A ‘new Nixon’ appeared on television with the kind of polish that could sell a used car to an Amish elder.”

How to Fight Back Against FUD

When someone attacks you with FUD, the natural reaction is to fight back with facts. Set the record straight. Prove the smear is wrong. But that usually loses like Nixon in 1960.

Why? Because FUD is an emotional appeal. The only thing that reliably beats an emotional appeal is a bigger emotional appeal: a story larger than the fear someone is selling. When you need to fight FUD, focus on two moves: Hold the Line, then Move the Line.

① Hold the Line



② Move the Line

Don't let the attack land in the first place.



Prebunk it.

Instead of debunking an attack after it's been said, you know attacks will come, so get ahead of them. You don't need to address a specific potential attack, but point out the tactic: "This fall you'll hear a lot of wild claims about me from outside groups with out-of-state donors. Here's the truth..."



Dismiss and reframe it.

Call the attack what it is, a campaign designed to create fear, uncertainty, and doubt. Then pivot back to your main message and what you're working to do if elected.

Don't debate the smear. Change what the election is about. Make it about something bigger than the fear.

Nixon's 1968 closing line did this. The election wasn't a referendum on whether you liked Richard Nixon. It was about how you felt about your whole world.



Replace the fear with a bigger emotion.

Give voters an emotion that's bigger than the fear the other side is selling. It could be hope that things can return to normal. Pride that their vote can cause change. Or urgency that we must act now.



Find your memorable line and repeat it

Nixon repeated "vote like your whole world depended on it" in ad after ad until voters carried it into the booth with them. (See [Winning Edge #60](#) on memorable lines.)

The Bottom Line

FUD is designed to create an emotional response. Hold the Line by getting ahead of the attack and naming what it is. Then Move the Line by giving voters a bigger emotion to follow than the fear your opponent is selling.