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Inside this Issue

Page Article

- 1 "Scope Creep" Kills Information Technology Projects
- 2 Assessing Security Vulnerabilities in Election Networks
- 2 Colleen Sealock Leaves OR State Elections Division
- 2 TIDBYTES Tip
- 3 Web Site Accessibility
- 3 County Voter Records On The Internet
- 3 What's New— Campaign Finance Reports Online
- 3 Keep Us Posted

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ELECTION TIDBYTES

Quarterly Newsletter of Election Technology "Tidbits"

"Scope Creep" Kills Information Technology Projects

To some it is called the "Christmas Tree Effect." The tree looks nice with a few pleasant decorations. So it will look just great with a lot of decorations. However, the same approach to implementing information technology projects helps end 85% of those projects in budget overruns, very late delivery schedules, or outright failures.

That is the research conclusion of an intense article in the February 2000 issue of **The Systems Thinker**. In their article, "Large-Scale Projects as Complex Systems: Managing "Scope Creep," Andrea Shapiro and Carol Lorenz, two organizational change specialists with affiliations to Nortel Networks, point out how to recognize expanding project scope and how to manage it. The article has some good advice for any of you who are about to put in a new computer system in your election administration work.

We know one instance where an election administration system originally planned as a \$7 million dollar effort lasting between 18 months and two years now stands

as a \$9+ million dollar project that is already two years late on delivery. Two independent assessments cited *scope creep* as an underlying reason for the project's problems.

Before you start an information technology project, it is critical to have your **needs, business requirements, and design criteria documented and approved** by the highest level of political management. Tell the programmers to take a hike until after you have clear system design specifications agreed upon and approved by the highest levels of management in the organization. (At this stage of the project, all programmers should be required to wear boxing gloves at work. It will limit the amount of damage they can do to the system before starting a program before thinking through the business requirements.) When the programmers start their work, make sure every program module can be traced back to meeting your organization's needs and business requirements.

Assessing Security Vulnerabilities in Election Networks

Here is how information technology security should work:

Step 1: You analyze your election office's work to see what would happen if your computer network's security is compromised.

Step 2: You implement security controls to minimize the risk.

Step 3: You assess the effectiveness of those controls in improving network security.

But it usually doesn't work that way. Typically, you implement security



controls, such as firewalls, passwords, and rules about giving out

information. Then, you review these controls under two circumstances: after a security catastrophe or after the auditor schedules an appointment. It shouldn't work that way.

InfoSENTRY has trained and experienced consultants to help you prepare a [risk analysis](#) for your critical systems. If you have done a risk analysis, we can assist in implementing [security policies and controls](#) to protect your systems. Finally, we can work with you to conduct a [network vulnerability assessment](#) to see how effective the current controls and policies are in protecting your vital election information assets. Our assessments include recommendations for the most important security improve-

ments. We write them in terms your managers and/or commissioners will understand. We also avoid the trap of focusing too much on security problems caused by "hackers." Industry estimates are that 70% of network security incidents have their origins inside the organization.

In most election offices, you have three main assets. They are your people, your reputation, and the information you use to conduct elections. InfoSENTRY will help structure your election information technology's security to enable these crucial assets to work for you.

Colleen Sealock Leaves OR State Elections Division

Here's the good news. Colleen Sealock is going to head up Operations for the Department of Administration in the State of Oregon. That means state government keeps a great administrator.

The bad news is that the elections community has lost one of its strongest leaders. By now, many of you have heard that Colleen has left the Elections Division in the Oregon Secretary of State's Office. Colleen is now the Director of Operations, Oregon Department of Administrative Services.

We at InfoSENTRY had the great pleasure of working with Colleen and former Secretary of State Phil

Kiesling in 1998 and 1999 on a statewide voter registration requirements analysis. We extend best wishes to Colleen and Lynn Rosik, her successor as Director of the Elections Division.



TIDBYTES Tip

Keep anti-virus software updated and activated.

The Computer Security Institute recently passed along this warning: *Don't let your guard down... computer viruses have a long shelf life and don't go away.* CSI cited the example of "Laroux", the macro virus that infects Excel spreadsheets, first detected in 1996, but is still around. And you remember "Melissa." — she's back! After her initial \$80 million cyberspace spree through corporate and government agency Web sites, she has returned with a new disguise, "Resume – Janet Simons."

So don't be naïve, and follow these tips at work:

- 1:** Use only authorized software.
- 2:** Do not download unnecessary and non-work related software or other files from the Internet.
- 3:** Do not open executable files (.exe) received via e-mail unless you know who you received it from and what the files are.





Web Site Accessibility

Issues of accessibility extend beyond the ballot and the polling place. Advocates for citizens with disabilities increasingly expect public agencies to use available technology to make the Web more accessible.

Excessive use of frames and graphics and failure to label images with text can discourage use of your Web site by visually impaired citizens.

Market research indicates that approximately 29% of America's disabled citizens use the Web. So, here are some resources you can use to be sure your Web site reaches this active group of Americans.

Reading Material:

"Helping the Disabled Navigate the Net." By Roger O. Crockett. **Business Week**. April 3, 2000. p. EB22.

Web Resources:

Visit www.cast.org to have your site evaluated for accessibility.

At www.austin.ibm.com/sns/accessweb, you can find an accessibility checklist for Web sites.

County Voter Records On The Internet

The April issue of **ELECTION TidBYTES** included a note about an Internet site just going online. It contains the complete publicly available voter registration records of everyone in the county. There is a great follow-up to that note. The county is Wake County, North Carolina, with about 400,000 registered voters. The Internet site now has been available continuously through two statewide primary elections. Typically, county staff refreshes the Web site's database on a monthly basis. The site will be updated more frequently toward an election.

A local television reporter found the site and ran a story with a beginning to the tune of "So you thought your voter registration information was confidential." After interviewing a couple of new arrivals in the county who were upset that their names, addresses, birth dates, registration affiliation, and voting history was on the Internet, the reporter interviewed a county Board of Elections Member. The Member, who is thoroughly familiar with the system, gave a great explanation of why the information was available and how the availability was in full compliance with the North Carolina Public Records Act of 1995. The site also contains a "Why this information is available" explanatory note. The story and the note suggested that persons with concerns about the site contact legislators who enacted the requirements for public access to information such as voter registration records.

In the couple of days following the story, the site recorded many thousands of hits--and generated only 20 complaints to the County Board. So, the system has withstood heavy "spike-level" pounding by the Internet public and served to backup the production system during a down period. Several registered voters have located changes needed to their voter registration record, notifying the Board staff of the needed updates.

You can check out the site at <http://www.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec> and selecting the "Voter Search" option near the bottom of the page. Search on HELEN (first name) and SIMS (last name) to get information on a Wake County voter—or use the wildcard search feature to look up any other name in the county.



What's New

Look for the upcoming release of a new application for posting online the campaign finance reports filed in your office. More details will soon be announced, but if you are interested or have questions, please contact **InfoSENTRY Services, Inc.** at 919-838-8570 or info@infosentry.com.



Keep Us Posted

There is always something happening in the elections community. If you would like us to help you get the word out about some technical bit of news in your state or office, please let us know.

