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# ELECTION TIDBYTES

Quarterly Newsletter of Election Technology "Tidbits"



## Needs Assessment: 1<sup>st</sup> Step in Election IT Projects

**Y**ou may ask: "What is so important about a **needs assessment**? What is it and why do I need one?"

A needs assessment is the most fundamental step in aligning your information systems with your elections operations. It specifies **all** of your organization's unique needs for the type of system you are considering.

Here are the basic benefits of a needs assessment:

- 1:** It provides a clear and detailed analysis of your business operations and workflows.
- 2:** It provides a detailed inventory and assessment of your department's current use of technology.
- 3:** It provides an assessment of the gap between the technology you have and the technology you need to support your current and anticipated elections operations.
- 4:** It provides a realistic project work breakdown and schedule for implementing the technology you need.
- 5:** It provides a basic budget estimate and justification for the hardware, software, staff,

and training your office will require to implement the upgraded or new technology.

- 6:** It supports the development of a **requirements analysis** and **design criteria** which are essential to preparing a **comprehensive RFP**.

**A**ging technology, increasing demand for additional capabilities of existing systems, and expanding voter rolls continue to generate the growing need for development of new voting, voter registration and other election administration systems. Call the **certified** systems professionals at **InfoSENTRY**, who have completed needs assessments for several state and local election offices, if you are considering upgrading or replacing your election systems.



## Keep Us Posted

There is always something great happening in the election 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.

## Just Another Time When Election Technology Matters

Everyone in the election community knows just how much election technology matters. We have all seen how computer failures made it difficult to get computer reports and ballot books printed. We have all seen how a power failure made it very difficult to get results in from the precincts. Those events have been relatively isolated in a few precincts or perhaps in one state.

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**This time it is very different. Now we have "CHADGATE" to show everyone how much information technology affects how elections are administered and managed.**

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The inner workings of the punch-card voting system is on the front page of every paper and the home page of major news Web sites.

**H**ere are a few notes on information technology in the recent elections that you might have missed in the hubbub. Some are good, some are bad, and some are scary.

- ☒ In one of the nation's largest elections jurisdictions, election returns were delivered wirelessly from precincts to election headquarters soon after the polls closed. This technology allowed delivery of returns within an hour of the close of the polls.

- ☒ A hacker attacked the Republican National Committee's Web site early on Election Day and planted a tirade against candidate George W. Bush. The hacking method employed appeared to be a common one, prompting a director of research at a computer security firm to comment that the RNC's Web site "was not well run from a security point of view." Instead of being the work of a sophisticated mastermind, it was probably just a rogue hacker "wanting to cause trouble," commented the security consultant.

- ☒ Pollster Andrew Kohut reported on National Public Radio that his surveys of the American electorate revealed that in 2000 63% of voters reported having access to the Internet. Also, 30% reported they had gone online sometime during the election season to get information about candidates, issues, and other voting information.

- ☒ In the day following the election, the Florida Department of State and the Florida State Technology Office reported a big jump in use. Typically in an election cycle, The Department of State's Web site gets 400,000 to 500,000 hits. They reportedly were expecting over 700,000 hits the day after the election. Late on the morning of November 8<sup>th</sup>, the State Technology's Office's servers reportedly had been the subject of 3.5 million hits.

- ☒ On November 13, 2000, a city in South Carolina completed a revote of a 1999 city council election. Two candidates protested the election over 231

- ☒ lost ballots from a voting machine. In August of this year, the state Supreme Court ordered a new election. The same guy won both elections.

- ☒ In a large number of jurisdictions across the country, voters showed up to vote thinking they had registered to vote at DMV offices. However, many were surprised to learn that their registrations had never been received at local elections offices. In at least one state, a legal investigation is under way by State's attorneys. Other election offices reported receiving substantial numbers of new and changed voter registrations too close to various deadlines to complete verification and confirmation procedures before the election.

**A**nd if that last item did not give you heartburn enough, another problem surfaced in this election. Remember those Web sites that helped people to start the registration process? A person could go on the Web, fill out a voter registration form **online**, print it out, and take/mail it to the election office to register to vote. That is a very helpful service. Except this year we heard a number of reports of people who showed up at the polls with their "receipts" showing they had registered online. It seems that when they completed the form online, they assumed it had been submitted to their elections office, completing the registration process.

**So, happy election technology to all!** For many of you, there are still a few months before you get to use it all over again.

## Fond Farewell to Yvonne Smith

It was the type of retirement party everyone expected for Yvonne Smith: a beautiful September 18<sup>th</sup> night in a filled banquet room at a fine Chicago eatery. Among a host of her friends and colleagues from Illinois and various cities from across the country, Dick Smolka



(Election Administration Reports), Tom Wilke (New York), Sandy Steinbach (Iowa), Gwenn Hoffman (IFES), Doug Lewis (Election Center), and Penelope Bosnall (FEC), joined Yvonne in her official farewell dinner. Yvonne received gifts and testimonials to cap off over two decades of dedication and work in the election community. Ron Michaelson, Executive Director of the Illinois State Board of Elections, read a resolution adopted by the State Board that recognized Yvonne's service to the citizens of the Prairie State. The Illinois League of Women Voters also adopted a resolution praising Yvonne for her years of service and dedication.

We at **InfoSENTRY** had the great pleasure of working with Yvonne in

several stages of the Illinois statewide voter registration file project. Yvonne has been a tough taskmaster and has always been willing to be in the trenches—not cheerleading from the sidelines. She has been as determined as she has been focused in her efforts to manage the tough projects handed to her. As Yvonne said in her comments during the festivities, she always viewed her work as "...not just as a position in an elections agency, but as a career." *That is the view of a true professional.*

Yvonne plans to spend more time in Arizona enjoying her retirement in the sun. The results of her career will shine on Illinois voters for many years to come.

Yvonne, if you ever get tired of the desert, come visit us at the beach!



### TidBYTES Tip

**W**ith so much attention shifted to elections, Web and network security basics are a must. Security compromises can be from both external *and* internal sources. And, security breaches can occur at any time, to your Web site *and* your information systems. In a recent Computer Security Institute/FBI study, 90% of large corporations and government agencies surveyed reported attacks during the previous year. Less than 50% of the organizations were willing to disclose damages. However, the reported amount totaled \$265.6 million.

Here are a few basic steps your organization can take to address the issue of information systems security:

- 1:** Establish a *written* security policy.
- 2:** Distribute the security policy to all levels of staff. It is important that every member of the organization is aware of the security process and made familiar with the basic, key issues (for example, not disclosing passwords or downloading and installing applications from the WWW).
- 3:** Designate an IT professional who is responsible for security measures.
- 4:** Review and update the security policy on a routine basis, based on a network penetration analysis and a thorough review of your facilities, security policies, systems procedures, and security incident reports.

Call the **certified** systems professionals at **InfoSENTRY** for more information or assistance with your Internet site or information systems security needs.



### Holidays Wishes

2000 came in with nary a Y2K hitch, but we're sure many of you are ready to leave 2000 behind and welcome in 2001! As we begin to wrap up the year, all of us at **InfoSENTRY** would like to wish you a Happy Thanksgiving and truly joyous Holiday Season. We have enjoyed working with many of you and visiting with many more of you at the various conferences throughout the year. We look forward to continuing friendships and working relationships with you in the coming year. Cheers!

