

OPINION

Developing a Web-Based Voter File System

BY ROBERT BLAEMIRE AND BILL RUSSELL

As consumers have become more accustomed to ordering products on the Internet, candidates and political organizations have demanded access to the data about the consumers. To meet that demand, we began developing a Web-based voter file system early last year that clients could use to better identify and contact potential voters.

We've been building computerized databases of registered voters for more than a decade. These files contain individual and demographic data about voters. Since getting into the business, we've found that the projects we've

disseminating data among campaigns and various field people. Still others want to use the system to be able to make changes to the file to keep it as up-to-date as possible. In reality, most clients want all of those features, with varying levels of priority. These are the three major advantages of having a file available online.

Buyer Beware

Yet having easier and more immediate access to the data doesn't automatically make one more knowledgeable about

date of birth on their voter record and therefore may not meet your criteria?

If you are looking to identify voters who always vote, why make a selection asking for voters have voted in four out of the last four elections? Suppose the voter has only been eligible to vote for the last two elections?

Questions like these are the ones we, and any reputable voter-file business, often ask clients, in order to help prevent them from making expensive mistakes by calling, mailing or knocking on the doors of voters they really don't need to reach.

Web-based voter file systems, by providing the data directly to the client, distance those of us who do this for a living from the process and place more responsibility on whomever uses the data.

Yet there is no question that this technology makes it easier for campaigns to use voter-file databases to be more effective in their voter contact. Early in this election cycle we have seen the campaigns using our Web-based voter file system order hundreds of voter contact products every week. This is considerably more than these voter files would have seen before the system was online.

Many campaigns are doing far more door-to-door canvassing than they would have in the past. They are using the high-tech, Web-based voter file to get back to the effective, but decidedly low-tech, practice of knocking on a voter's door and asking for their support. This is a positive step for both the campaigns and the organizations providing this service. **CLE**

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taken on—mostly for Democratic state party clients—have improved dramatically, thanks to more useful data available, growing numbers of campaigns using the files as well as an increased understanding by campaigners on how to use the files well.

Developing Web-based systems that use data from state parties and organizations hosting voter files is the latest development in the industry.

Different clients want different things from their systems. Some want the system to provide easy access to the file for their campaigns. Others want the system to provide a way of sharing and

using the voter file, or about ways to avoid unnecessary errors and misjudgments. Those who use Web-based voter file systems must be cautious.

Campaigners still need to fully understand the nature of the data available to them. If you plan to contact voters in your district who have voted in particular elections and not all of the counties in your district provide complete voter history, you need to know that a selection like that omits significant portions of your geography.

If you wish to target voters under 30 years of age, are you aware how many voters in your district may not have a

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