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Early Voting Wait Time Dashboard

Forsyth County Georgia

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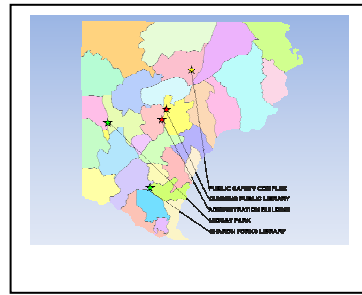
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Early Voting Wait Time Dashboard

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Background

Forsyth County has over 100,000 registered voters and is located due north of Atlanta, Georgia. The vast majority of our work force commutes out of the county each day and this has put pressure on our Election Day voting.

Four years after the implementation of Georgia's ADVANCE/EARLY VOTING, the interest continues to be high and the demand from the voters is for more locations, extended hours and additional days. During our Early Voting period, we open up five voting sites the week before Election Day. Of those five sites, four are remote and distributed geographically throughout our county.

Problem

Some of our sites have had significantly better turnout for voters than others and caused us to have an inconsistency in the wait times at the individual early voting sites. Our office had used several means to try to mitigate these times by advertising in the newspapers, sending emails to our distribution lists, mega electronic signs in front of underutilized sites etc...none of this really met what we tried to accomplish, which was a redistribution of the voters.

During the beginning of 2008, we felt that we also had to have significantly higher numbers for our Early Voting in order to ensure that the lines for voters would be shortened on Election Day – the best way to do this was to get more voters to the polls during the week before.

It was important for us to move as many voters to early voting as possible as we have not purchased new voting equipment for several years, yet have had a steady increase in the voting population – our county has been one of the fastest growing counties in the nation over the past five years. If we could not utilize better the early voting sites, we anticipated serious lines on Election Day.

Solution

After meeting with our polling officers at the early voting sites and communicating with a number of our voters, we decided to develop an “Early Voting Dashboard” that would give our voters a visual of the wait times at individual sites.

Thus began the process of working with our GIS, Webmaster, IT and election office staff to develop a simple, but visually effective method of communicating the actual wait times. We attributed the interest and excitement within our county to the introduction of the “Early Voting Wait Time Dashboard”. While our surrounding counties were plagued with wait times approaching three to four hours or more, we maintained a steady flow of our voters and never exceeded an hour at any given time. The average wait was less than twenty minutes.

What our voters told us they liked was the ability to visually see what locations were open and what the wait time was for individual locations. People who had access to the internet via home/work computers or individual pda's i.e. Blackberries were able to log on and see which was the best location to stop at and vote.

Here is an example of what our website looked like:

The screenshot shows a website interface with a central map titled "Advance Voting Wait Times". The map is color-coded by wait time: green for "Less Than 20 Minutes", yellow for "20 - 40 Minutes", and red for "More Than 40 Minutes". Several locations are marked with stars and labeled: PUBLIC SAFETY COMPLEX, CUMMING PUBLIC LIBRARY, ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, MIDWAY PARK, and SHARON FORKS LIBRARY. Below the map is a table with the following data:

Location	Wait Time	
Public Safety Complex	~35 Minutes	Map It
Cumming Public Library	~60 Minutes	Map It
Midway Park	~10 Minutes	Map It
Main Office - Admin Bldg	~45 Minutes	Map It
Sharon Forks Library	~20 Minutes	Map It

The website layout includes a left sidebar with navigation links like "DEPARTMENT", "Voter", and "SUBDEPARTMENTS". The right sidebar contains sections for "NEWS", "EVENTS", and "ALERTS", all of which are currently empty. There are also links for "Feedback", "Subscribe", "E-mail Options", "Privacy", "Terms of Use", and "Help".

Results

Was it successful – we had great press from local, state and national news sources even reaching into the Bloomberg News from New York. Our voters loved it and expressed their satisfaction with numerous emails, phone calls and reports from our post elections survey (>8,000 positive comments). We averaged about 15% voting at our early voting sites during the first few years of having it in place. With a publicity campaign, we increased it to 30% during the 2008 Presidential Preference and hit 68% of our voters casting their ballots prior to Election Day and 90% of them did so in person. See attached comments from our voters and comments in the Atlanta newspapers. We have also had a number of counties asking us for help in developing their websites to meet the same need.

We believe this has had a beneficial effect in not only allowing us to meet the needs of our voting public, but we have not purchased additional equipment as we have spread our voters out over a longer period of time – so better service and no increased capital costs.