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2009 Professional Practices Program

King County Votes

King County, Washington

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Capitalizing on the extreme media attention surrounding the 2008 presidential election, King County Elections decided to launch a web 2.0 campaign to capture voter’s thoughts and experiences in the democratic process on election day.

King County, Washington is located in the Pacific Northwest and has more than 1.1 million registered voters. Home to Microsoft, Nintendo and Amazon, many of King County’s voters are on the forefront of technology.

Our goal was to create a collaborative documentary project showcasing one of our last poll vote elections as well as the historic presidential election.

We combined blogging, twittering, photo sharing and text messaging to involve local voters in the process at www.your.kingcounty.gov/votes.

This blog featured short twitter feeds on the left, i.e. 140 character updates from voters, poll workers and King County Employees, a Flickr photo feed on the right with pictures from poll workers and voters to send in cell phone or emailed photos for sharing. A free program called blogger was used to maintain the site itself. The twitter feed and flickr postings are automatic; everything else was put in by hand. Posts were more casual than a news release and posted hourly on Election Day. Content came from King County employees, residents, voters, and poll workers.

Once established, we worked closely with poll workers to send in periodic updates to the King County Votes site. Residents were able to use their cell phones to type in status updates as well as send pictures and comments from polling places throughout the county. Additional promotion included drafting a press release and including the feature in any election day interviews that were conducted. The press release is included in exhibit 1.

The web address was widely publicized and voters experienced every aspect of Election Day via live Election Day reports and photos available on the King County Elections homepage. Members of the public were invited to post their own photos, along with poll worker and election staff posts. Posts included pictures and captions showing the whole process with the help desk, ballot opening and counting, and scenes from many polling places around King County. Web site examples of this can be found in exhibit 1.

The success

Elections received an incredible return on investment with the King County Votes Web site. Not only did residents contribute and comment but local media picked it up and blogged about in the Seattle Post Intelligencer, West Seattle Blog, Seattle Times and The Stranger. The end result was a great collaborative document of our last poll election, using Web 2.0 tools.
Tuesday, November 4, 2008

Partnership in Democracy poll workers

Participants in the Partnership in Democracy poll workers talk about their experiences on election day.

Posted by King County Elections at 10:25 PM  0 comments
Report from a Seattle voter

Even the long-tenured poll workers couldn’t recall seeing so many voters at once. The poll workers are in high spirits and are managing things with grace and efficiency. There wasn’t a snag or bump to be seen, despite a room at capacity and a line out the door. There’s a giddiness in the air, part from this being the last time at the polling place for most of us, part pride and gratitude at being able to vote at all, and part relief that finally, we can get this day and this election behind us, and time can move forward once again.

The collapsible polling stations each had ten or so voters in line, but since these are paper-and-ink ballots they can be completed anywhere you can find space to write. And they were. Every flat surface in the school library featured voters marking their choices, and a black ink pen became a treasured commodity that was passed to your chosen successor in a way that reminded me of my dad handing me the car keys for the first time.

It’s an iconic voting experience today in more ways than I can count.

8:45 p.m. Renton City Hall closes down the polls

Renton City Hall polling place counts down to their 8 p.m. closing time. Pictured are Adrianha Horton of Bellevue Community College and Daneca Duggins from Odyssey High School. They are first time poll workers.

Veteran Poll Inspector Del Mead helps to close down the poll.