

BEGIN SUMMARY

California has a dubious distinction: In the election cycles of 2006 and 2008, California had the largest number of provisional ballots cast in the nation when 1 in 20 Californians voted this way. More provisional ballots were rejected in California than in any other state — 30% of those rejected nationally.

The current, paper-based voter registration system is costly for local government and inconvenient for the user. The process is error prone; misspellings and omissions are commonplace and virtually unavoidable. The solution, we believe, is the use of electronic registration forms with electronic signatures.

In May, Santa Clara County in California became the first elections agency in the nation to accept registration forms that were completed and delivered entirely electronically. My company, Verafirma, worked closely with the County to ease any concerns and make the process as easy and efficient as possible for them. We successfully registered a handful of voters for the June primary election and continued this effort in the November election.

Our process is simple:

1. An individual is emailed an electronic version of the National Voter Registration Form — the same form posted on the EAC website;
2. The individual fills out the form and signs it on a touchscreen device using their finger or a stylus;
3. When they click “Finish”, a copy of the completed form is sent to their email inbox, and an identical copy is automatically sent to their local elections officer;
4. The Registrar handles the email submission as they would a paper registration form.

For the voter, there is no need to print out the form, to find an envelope, find a stamp, and put it in the mailbox. The entire process is completed with a few mouse clicks or taps on a touch screen.

iPads and other touch screen devices are more sensitive and yield a much better quality of signature than the touchpads you see at your local grocery store. In fact, the Assistant Registrar for Santa Clara County, Elaine Larson, was quoted in Government Technology Magazine as saying Verafirma’s signatures “were really clear and better than what we have on file.”

In addition to the ease and efficiency for elections officials, it’s clear that voters love this, particularly young people. These “digital natives” do everything online or on their mobile devices; they text more than they talk; they fill out forms online all the time. Our new technology appeals to them much more so than the current, clunky paper

registration process. In fact, most of the students we contacted were surprised this technology is not already available.

This technology is the future of voter registration. More and more, smart phones and touchscreen devices are becoming ubiquitous in all aspects of our lives. Voter registration should be one of those aspects.

Don't get me wrong, however. We do not think our technology eliminates the need for other methods of registration. It is, in fact, complementary to those methods. We believe there should be a wider variety of methods available for registering to vote.

Verafirma is willing to work with any local elections official or Secretary of State, or the Elections Assistance Commission to advance this effort.

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