

# The Rundown

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## Interactive Political Web Site Launched By ABC O&Os

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VOLUME XXVI, NUMBER 40 OCTOBER 9, 2006

Your Web site is the perfect vehicle for extensive material that can be accessed by your viewers when and if they have an interest in the campaigns. Here is how this is being done by a station where the managers are committed to an aggressive expansion of their Internet presence and to utilizing the latest technology.

### How it works: NextGenPolitics

KGO-TV, San Francisco, has been a leader in developing the potential of the Internet for market research and political polling.

It has just unveiled another excellent tool to enhance its political coverage --- a Web site devoted to the statewide races.

KABC-TV, Los Angeles, and KFSN-TV, Fresno, have also rolled out versions of the site that were modified for their markets.

The NextGenPolitics site features:

- Five-minute candidate video statements.
- Answers to voters' questions.
- Campaign financing information.
- Other voter resources.

"This is the perfect use of the technology and our journalistic skills to reach out to these different candidates and get their views," says News Director Kevin Keeshan.

Keeshan had discussed doing something like this with pollster Richard Hertz, who conducts the online polling for their ongoing ABC7 Listens project. The technical staff at Hertz Research created the software to make it happen.

**The site makes it easy for viewers to find more information on the campaigns -- much of which doesn't really have a place on broad-based news shows.**

"As we all know, not everyone is interested in what the different candidates for California Secretary of State have to say. But those who are interested now have a place where they can access that information and get whatever they are looking for," says Keeshan.

He feels it also gives a voice to members of those parties who often feel they are neglected.

**"It takes the power of television to bring attention to it, to promote it and to let people know it's there. Then the power of the Internet gives people the access to a wide range of viewpoints you wouldn't have otherwise."**

**Kevin Keeshan  
News Director  
KGO-TV**

#### **Today's technology enables this.**

Keeshan says broadband penetration has reached a point where more people can get video.

"Flash technology makes it so easy to both post video and to launch it, that we felt it was now a time when the technology was at the right place," he says.

#### **Candidates appear on video**

Each candidate for statewide office --- governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer, controller, and insurance commissioner --- was invited to provide a five-minute statement on camera.

Out of the 41 statewide candidates, 37 submitted videos.

"They could give us the statement already recorded, or they could come to our studio to record it," says Keeshan.

#### **Keeshan is convinced that watching a person speak and explain positions is valuable.**

"You can read candidates' written statements all day and not get nearly the feel for them you get when you see them on camera talking extemporaneously about their views on a variety of issues," he says.

Pollster Richard Hertz explains, "There was no editing and no teleprompter, and that was on purpose. We wanted people to hear what the candidates sound like when they are normal people --- not in perfectly polished pieces. They may stumble a little, but it lets people see what they are really like."

#### **The videos load quickly.**

"As soon as you select a candidate, it already starts to load the video, whether or not you use it. So when you hit the play button, it's goes," says Hertz.

#### **Twenty-six candidates chose to tape at the studio.**

The others delivered their own tapes.

"One candidate provided what amounted to a five-minute campaign commercial. In the future, we will probably set tighter guidelines in terms of what can be on the video," says Keeshan.

The news executive feels that in this case, if that is the candidate's way of

communicating to the voters, he doesn't have an issue with using it on the site.

## **Questionnaire was developed based on questions submitted by viewers**

### **Candidate questions were solicited from voters.**

The pollster reached out online to members of their ABC7 Listens panel. "We gave them a short description of what the duties and responsibilities are for each office, and asked them what questions they would like to ask the candidates for that office," Hertz explains.

### **Very quickly, the respondents generated 50 pages of questions.**

"We consolidated them into three common questions asked of all the candidates on their background, their vision of government, and how they would deal with special interest campaign contribution conflicts," he says.

"Then, they each got four to six additional questions that dealt specifically with their office, and those questions were all from voters," he says.

Will you take campaign contributions from companies such as brokerage houses or bond firms who want to do business with the state? What criteria would you use to avoid conflicts of interest in this regard?

#### **Laura Wells**

As a Green Party candidate, I never accept corporate campaign contributions, so I cannot be bought, I will not award pay-back contracts to pay-to-play contributors. Enron donated to all sides, got energy deregulated, and turned California's budget from a surplus to a deficit.

All questions were essay questions, and candidates sent fairly detailed responses. Voters can go to the site and compare the various candidate answers to the same questions.

**Candidates who have chosen not to participate by supplying a video statement are represented online with a graphic.** A silhouette comes up, and the screen says, "Candidate declined to supply video."

If the candidate refused to answer the questionnaire, a message comes up stating that the candidate declined to answer.

Hertz says there was a lot of work involved in getting the candidates into the studio and coordinating questionnaires.

KGO dedicated a studio and photographer for two days and its Executive Producer spent many hours on getting it organized.

However, he feels the site should be fairly low maintenance from here on out.

## **Candidate videos will air on other platforms**

The statements by the candidates for governor will air on newscasts leading up to the election.

"The governor's race is obviously of higher interest, and we will use the statements to drive interest to the page for other races. In fact, for every political story we do now, we drive interest to the page," says Keeshan.

He believes this is the first time in California history that people can actually hear from all the candidates on the ballot all in one place.

Plans call for using the candidate statements for all the statewide races on KGO's digital channel.

"This really lets you use all three platforms of a modern TV station --- the broadcast, the Web and the digital channel," he says.

"It's also a great way for a station to cross-promote the different mediums they are using," he adds.

## **Who's paying their bills?**

**It may be more useful to know who the major campaign donors are than it is to see their carefully crafted issue answers.**

"No matter what your political persuasion, everybody knows that special interest money is a huge problem in politics," says Hertz.

"This won't solve that in and of itself, but it does create an alternative. People won't have to raise a lot of money to get known, and why should they in an age where such a high percentage of people are online?" he says.

### **Brown, Jerry**

Total Raised to Date: \$5,169,337

Office: Attorney General

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Top Contributors

Operating Engineers Local 12/IUOE	\$22,200
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Building & Construction Trades Council CA	\$22,200
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California School Employees Assoc/CSEA	\$22,200
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**The politics site links directly to followthemoney.org.**

"It's a very good Web site that does a great job of categorizing contributions by groups --- such as labor unions or other special interest groups. It lets people see exactly who is donating to these candidates," explains Hertz.

Keeshan feels this is particularly valuable information and a major asset of the site.

"I really like the fact that you can watch the candidates, and then click on a link and pull up the campaign spending information. People are really interested in it, and it says a lot. If someone is running for insurance commissioner, how much money are they getting from insurance interests?" he asks

**Rich detail for those who want it**

Besides the videos, Q&As, and campaign financing information, there are a number of other interesting elements.

- Links point back to their local news site for other political stories.
- Links to the candidates' Web sites.
- Under the campaign financing information, there are automatic Google searches.

**The nextgenpolitics site does not contain advertising.** They wanted to see how the project rolled out.

"We didn't know how many candidates were going to participate or how many stations would join. It started out as a KGO project, and they did the heavy lifting. But once we got it put together, the other stations became enthusiastic about it, and it was fairly easy to customize the content for them," adds Hertz.

### **Potential is significant**

**An interested person can really research the candidates, and form their own opinions utilizing the firsthand resources.**

"Viewers can watch the video, and then they can click on the campaign contributions and see who is supporting them --- how much money they've collected, who their top donors are, and what industry sectors they've gotten them from. Then you can read their answers to our questionnaire," says Keeshan. It also opens the election process to more than those select few who can buy in through the organized major parties.

"It is for every party --- not just Republicans and Democrats. The Peace and Freedom Party, Libertarian, Green Party and Independents --- every party that has a candidate is represented," he stresses.

"Some of those candidates certainly can't afford campaign advertising, as you can see if you check the campaign spending report. Yet we feel we have an obligation to inform people, although we as an the industry have fallen short over the years in doing that," Keeshan adds.

KABC and KFSN have put up their own customized versions of the site.

**Each station has localized the site for their market by having their own anchors record the introduction to the site.**

KABC's site is programmed so each time the page reloads, a different anchor appears onscreen for the introduction. The links are all re-pointed to the county voter registration sites for the right local areas.

Hertz believes this is the future, and that other sites like this will roll out in 2007 and 2008.

**"We're looking at a massive expansion in 2008. We think this should be a lot more places. It could also work for congressional races or even city council races."**

**Richard Hertz**

## Hertz Research

You can see KGO's page at: <http://www.nextgenpolitics.com/ngp.html?c=kgosf>

For more information you can reach Hertz at [rich@hertzresearch.com](mailto:rich@hertzresearch.com)

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