*SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS*

# FASTER, BETTER, CHEAPER
*by Harry Neufeld*

*Adapted from Harry Neufeld's speech at the International IDEA Democracy Forum 2001 in Stockholm, Sweden. We are grateful to International IDEA for allowing Elections Today to print excerpts here.*

In my experience, there are three primary reasons that computer technology projects go ahead. Quite simply, it is because they hold great promise for allowing particular aspects of business or administration to be done *faster, better, or cheaper*.

Experts in the computing industry are in the process of defining a brave new world as a result of the information revolution. All around the globe, election administration is being modified significantly as a result of these broad, sweeping changes. Election administrators cannot ignore opportunities to use the technology solutions available but they also must squarely face the challenge of introducing sustainable approaches in a period of rapid technical development, which can make solutions obsolete quickly.

I find that election administrators making decisions regarding technology adoption generally tend to fall into one of two camps. One camp openly embraces changes in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and looks warmly and optimistically at the possibility of using applications of new ICT products to reduce costs, reduce processing time, or provide a level of improved services to the public. Those in the opposite camp resist change, emphasize the risk and cost management equations of change, and counsel proceeding with extreme caution when introducing any new technology.

Nonetheless, many examples of successfully using computing and communications technology in election administration already exist, including:

- *Voter Districting* - The complex challenge of periodic boundary delimitation can be addressed by Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, which makes electronic maps 'intelligent' and allows complex criteria to be efficiently used in deciding how to create new political or administrative boundaries based on geographic population shifts.
- *Voter Registration* - The options for rapid updating, processing, printing, and electronic communication of voter lists in preparation for elections has triggered the creation and rapid spread of computerized voter registries in the past couple of decades.

- *Political Finance* - Registering parties and candidates and tracking political financing expenditures can all be done with relatively straightforward database technology applications. In some jurisdictions with political financing regulations, contribution and expenditure information is made available publicly via the Internet in the interests of providing increased transparency.
- *Polling and Logistics* - The logistical details of organizing and executing polling arrangements lends itself to the use of all kinds of standardized computer applications, from spreadsheets to project management schedulers to electronic mail.



- *Electronic Voting Machines* - Electronic voting machines used in polling stations are an innovation that has seen widespread adoption in some countries and is being actively considered in many others. The speed and accuracy of results tabulation, the avoidance of paper wastage, and increased efficiencies in the voting process are all benefits.

jurisdiction will have established a method of allowing eligible voters to uniquely identify themselves via the Internet; ensure those citizens' electronic ballot choices are disassociated with their identity once they submit their vote; and make the entire voting process simple enough to ensure widespread adoption and public endorsement within that jurisdiction.

I very much hope that there will be extensive public debate about whether Internet voting is really better than the general procedural methods that have been in use for the past several hundred years. However, I have no doubt that a process of Internet voting can be made more efficient or faster than traditional election methods. And, even when assuming infrastructure costs are not part of direct election administration expenses, it will be interesting to see if Internet voting actually proves to be cheaper. If it proves less costly, there will be immense pressure on election administrators everywhere to adopt Internet voting methods.
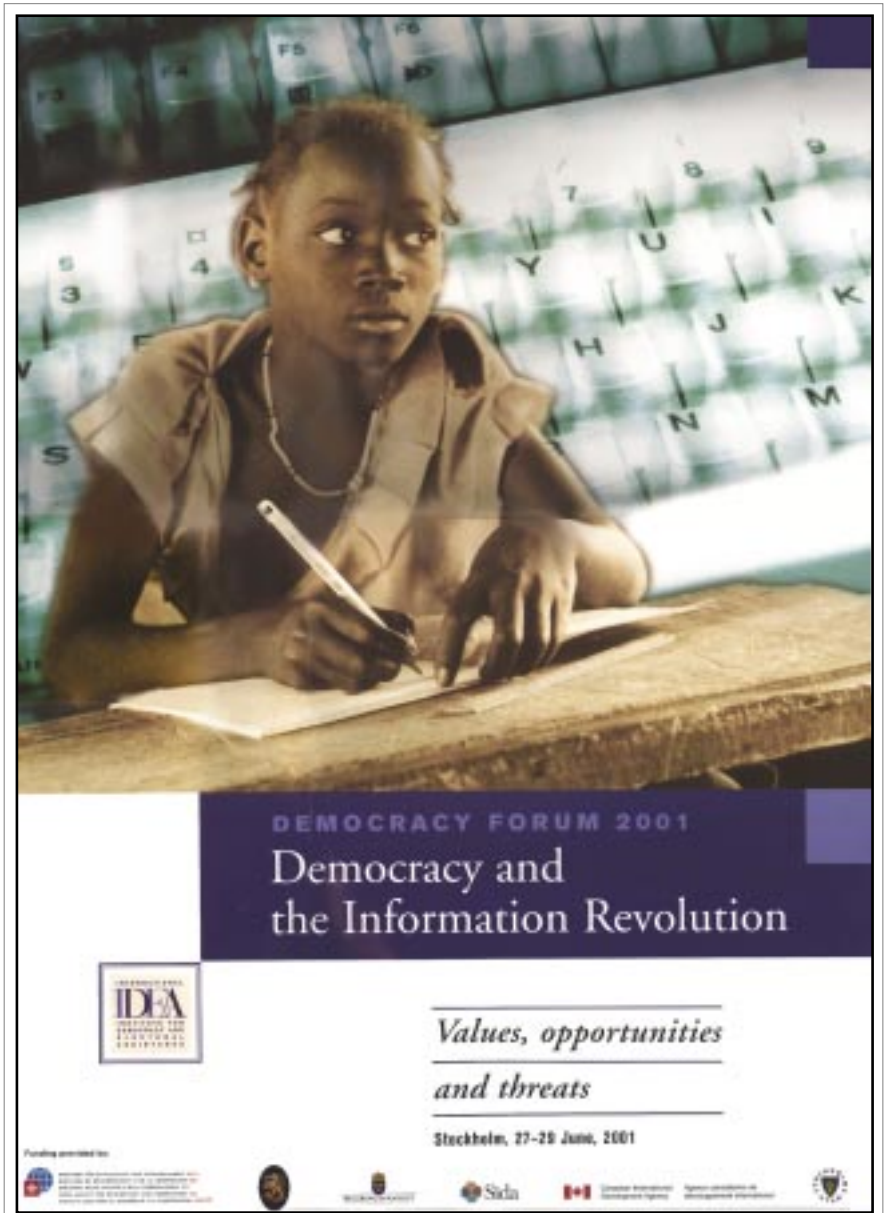
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- *Vote Counting* - Using ICT to calculate and disseminate voting results can be as simple as using a spreadsheet program to tabulate how the votes translate into seats and as complicated as linking simultaneous vote counts from around a country into a secure computer database publicly accessible via the Internet.

One particular technology-inspired vision for the future of election administration supersedes all of the ICT applications mentioned above: Internet voting. There are many proponents of voting via the Internet and widely varying ideas on how it should work and be managed. However, some of the consistent themes are as follows:

- Internet voting means that you do not need to set up polling locations, hire and train election officials, or require citizens to interrupt their lives to attend a polling station on a certain day at certain times. Citizens can vote at their convenience, at home or at work or elsewhere over a period of days or even weeks.

- Once the voting period closes, results can be calculated and communicated instantly without the lengthy delays associated with ballot counting.

- The costs of voting via the Internet will be incremental in comparison to the massive expenses associated with setting up the voting machinery in traditional election arrangements.

I believe the question is no longer if Internet voting will be adopted, but when. I predict that within the next five years at least one major



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