

Techwit: Chad-free voting

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Now that the 2002 elections have passed without serious mechanical failure, it's time to return to worrying about the technological meltdown of the 2000 presidential race.

(<http://>)

Techwit By Jason Ohler

You may recall that the leader of the free world was determined by faulty technology, poorly designed ballots and little bits of paper called chad. Fortunately, developers are hard at work creating the next generation of voting machine called Touch Screen OnsiteVoting User Technology (acronym TSOVUT, pronounced "So what"). The will of the people will once again be heard.

TSOVUTs work a lot like the touch screen computers the airlines use for electronic check-in. Let's say



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you're voting for Ben Dover. You touch the part of the screen with his name on it and the computer responds, "You have selected Ben Dover. Is this what you meant to do?" You touch "yes." Then it asks, "Is that your final answer?" You have one more chance to change your mind. You press "yes." The computer says, "You have voted for Ben Dover. Another insufferably long political season has come to an end. Thanks for voting. And have a nice day."

Not bad for Version 1.0. But it's nothing compared to version 2.0, which will add a new level of intelligence to the voting process. It will also add loads of controversy. Nicknamed "The Justifier," it not only asks you who you want to vote for but why. You're given four options to choose from: 1) because of the candidate's views and record, 2) because my friends are voting for this candidate, 3) because I heard this candidate's name more often than the others and my subconscious is compelling me to vote this way even though I have no good reason for doing so, 4) cuz I feel like it, but hey, at least I voted.

The first time I tested the new TSOVUT I chose option No. 4, "cuz I feel like it." It asked me, "Would you like to know more about this candidate before casting your vote?" I chose "yes" and was presented with a list of topics, from which I selected "The Environment." Suddenly the screen filled with news articles describing each candidate's views on issues of environmental importance. After reading for awhile I decided to explore other topics, like "Growing the Economy," and "Education." When I got tired of doing all this tedious homework and wanted to vote I selected, "I would like to vote now so I can go home." But once again the TSOVUT wouldn't let me move forward. Instead it asked me if I found my candidate's views consistent. When I pressed "yes" I was told, "Wrong, knucklehead. You can't be for the environment and education and against taxes. What's the matter with you?" Gosh, I thought to myself. Maybe the machine's right. After all, my car knows when it's out of oil. Maybe the TSOVUT knows when I'm out of smarts. I paused just long enough for the TSOVUT to say, "You seem confused. Would you like to: 1) phone a friend, 2) find out how others have voted, or 3) take away candidates from less important parties?" I finally hit the cancel button and started all over. But this time when I was asked why I was voting for my candidate, I took option No. 1, "because of the candidate's views and record." The voting process simplified incredibly.

It won't take long for people to figure out that this is how you outsmart this new voting technology. As with many situations in life, you succeed by pretending to know what you're doing.

Trending this week:

But that's not the point. We're in danger of technology taking away our right to be misinformed, make bad choices and not care about who gets elected. And we didn't even have a chance to vote on it.

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