

# Managing the Risks Inherent in a Punch Card to Touch Screen Voting Machine Conversion

Presentation to the California Voting Modernization Board  
September 16, 2002

When a large, urban jurisdiction is planning to make a voting system conversion from a paper-based voting system to an electronic one, nearly everyone involved will face a huge learning curve: the elections administrator, the election department personnel—both permanent and temporary, the poll workers, and the voters. At a time like this it is essential that the vendor providing, installing, and supporting the new system NOT also be experiencing a similar learning curve.

In order for the voting machine vendor to work in partnership with the elections administrator to effectively manage all of the risks inherent in such a system conversion, the company must have demonstrated experience in conducting similar, large, urban jurisdiction installations. We all know that “experience is the best teacher”, and I think the country at large has learned a lot about the complexity of elections administration since the presidential elections of 2000. Those of us who have served as elections administrators already knew this. There are enough factors outside the administrator’s authority to control, such as the procurement of polling places and the hiring of thousands of poll workers in time to thoroughly train them to administer the laws and voting process on Election Day, that it is essential to gain control over all aspects of the process to the greatest extent possible.

When it comes to choosing a voting machine vendor to provide, install and support the new system, the best way to gain control over the situation is to choose a vendor with the necessary experience in all aspects of the project implementation and a good track record in delivering successful outcomes. This can be determined by talking with their customers and investigating the success of the election installations they have performed.

If a jurisdiction decides to select a vendor without the experience of successfully implementing a similarly sized jurisdiction conversion, it is

essential to have the luxury of time in order to test the system's hardware, software, user friendliness, both on the part of the poll worker and the voter, and reporting accuracy. Secondly, it is essential to introduce the system to the voters before Election Day, to the extent possible, in order to identify and address any voter interface problems and to expose as many voters as possible to the new system before it comes time for them to vote on it.

Attached are critical characteristics to consider when choosing a voting machine vendor for a new voting system implementation. It is important to note that successful elections were held in Southern Florida's 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> largest counties on September 13, 2002. One of these counties, Palm Beach County, is a democratic stronghold and suffered the same degree of problems that Miami-Dade and Broward counties did during the 2000 presidential election. The supervisors of these large, urban Southern Florida counties deserve tremendous credit for their successful elections. It is also important to note that they all contracted with the same, experienced vendor: Sequoia Voting Systems. Californians are well aware of Mischelle Townsend's successful touch screen voting system installation during the 2000 presidential election—the first in the nation. Mischelle is an outstanding administrator with vision, and she chose Sequoia Voting Systems to be her partner in such an important and risk-laden project.

I am a former election administrator from large jurisdictions in Texas, Nevada and California. In 1994 I began a punch card to (DRE) conversion in Clark County, Nevada. This was the largest voting system conversion of its kind in the nation at the time. I learned many things in conducting this conversion. The most important of those lessons were: 1) It is essential to choose a vendor with experience and the commitment to make the project a success whatever the cost; 2) It is important to change the way poll workers are recruited in order to keep your experienced poll workers and yet maintain control over the polling place in the new environment; and 3) It is critical to develop a poll worker training program that allows each potential poll worker the opportunity to personally open and close the polls on the new voting machines and to test their knowledge of the material rather than assuming that they understood it. Clark County selected Sequoia Voting

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Systems as its vendor because of their experience and track record. They lived up to their reputation of doing whatever was necessary to ensure the project's successful outcome. Today Clark County is extremely pleased with their voting system.

I applaud Bill Jones for his leadership in positioning California to take advantage of the new technology to improve the accuracy, security, and accessibility of the State's election processes. It would be a huge error to discount the touch screen technology because of two counties' nightmarish experiences in implementing touch screen voting last Tuesday in Florida's 2002 Primary elections. I hope you can see from the positive conversion experiences of the Florida counties of Palm Beach, Hillsborough, Pinellas and Indian River in the same primary election that it is possible to make the technology work in large, urban election environments.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Ferguson  
Vice President  
Sequoia Voting Systems

Attachments (3)