



Lewisville, Highland Village candidates using new technologies to win votes

BY DAN EAKIN, Staff Writer

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Whether people evolved from monkeys may be an ongoing debate for years to come, but there is no question that the art of campaigning for office has evolved in many ways during the last couple of centuries.

President Abraham Lincoln was the first of several presidents to gain political support by making speeches from the back of a train.

In the movie, "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou," with a setting in the 1930s, the governor declines to "press the flesh" in search of votes as he enters a radio station, exclaiming, "We're mass communicatin' now!"

Then came television, and people nationwide could see each national candidate close up.

The latest evolution in campaigning has arrived, with the invention of the Internet.

While candidates believe that personal appearances, handshakes and maybe even kissing babies are still important, they have turned much of their attention to campaigning via Web sites, e-mails, blogs and other new technologies.

That is true not only with national and statewide candidates, but also with local candidates.

A check with city council candidates in Highland Village and Lewisville revealed that every candidate has a Web site, an e-mail address and other Internet technologies, and plans to use them in full force in an effort to be elected.

"It's a new world out there," said Bill Towe, who is facing Bill Meek in the race for Place 7 on the Highland Village City Council. "The days of yard-sign and billboard campaigning are numbered. They are expensive and have very little exposure for the cost."

He continued, "We saw the evolution of the campaign trail with Web sites and URL links this past fall. Major commercial and social websites like www.youtube.com, www.facebook.com, and www.myspace.com were major campaign vehicles in this last presidential election. The age of electronic campaigning allows candidates to reach millions of potential voters at a fraction of the cost. Next we will see online videos and live debates from future candidates."

He added, "Even in smaller election formats, we are seeing websites such as mine, www.votebilltowe.com, that contain accurate information about a candidate. I personally feel that this medium is very effective and factually informative. I would rather hear what a candidate has to say for himself rather than hear it from his opponent. I hope that the days of slanderous television ads and news reports are numbered.

"Finally," he concluded, "we are finding that candidate's official websites can be used as a form of communication between constituents and their elected officials, complete with e-mail communication and online video."

Meek said, "Obviously, the computer has revolutionized information sharing now at the speed of light and it is now used in all walks of life and business. It has certainly made campaigning easier to organize and get going. I have used this modern technology to produce literature, a Web site, as well as produce e-mail lists in my campaigning. Information sharing is very fast in e-mailing voters

and constituents, and everyone involved with the campaign process."

He added, "That said, I personally still want to contact people for that in-person contact. There is no substitute for the handshake and that personal touch when it comes to a voter gaining a feel for personalities. Eye-to-eye contact is important when discussing issues, to help people make

choices at the polls."

John Gorena, who with TJ Gilmore and Margie Rochelle, wants to be elected to Place 4 on the Lewisville City Council, believes that Internet technologies are important, but that yard signs should still be used in moderation.

"I still think that there is a need for political signs to get the word out," Gorena said. "That is, many people will not even know to look for a candidate online unless they know they are running. My problems with signs are the sheer quantity that some candidates use to pollute the landscape."

Gorena continued, "As for Web sites, they serve a great purpose to get information out to the public about the views of the candidate. But I caution visitors who visit these political Web sites. Things can look pretty and some sites have rhetoric that can be easily ignored or taken as fact. Visitors should weigh the message with the history of the candidate such as the way they voted or what they have done to be involved."

Rochelle said, "Instant communication has become the norm in today's society. Campaign Web sites and e-mail are newer media outlets now available to candidates and voters. Both in the search for information and the dissemination of information, we are better able to communicate with each other."

She continued, "By using a campaign Web site, a candidate can rapidly inform the voters of who they are, their platform, and what they hope to do. By providing an e-mail address, a candidate is saying, 'contact me, tell me who you are, what are your concerns and to ask me questions and also keep me informed.; Web sites and e-mails are an additional tool a candidate can use to reach out and touch a greater number of people than ever before."

Gilmore said, "There are five things that Web technology is allowing me to take advantage of:

"1. Content management Web sites allow candidates to simply type an article, add pictures and hyperlinks, and post that information to their Web site in an extremely short time frame. The most obvious example of this is the typical blog web site.

"2. Taking the blog one step further is the use of tools like Twitter and RSS (real simple syndication) feeds. These technologies allow interested parties to be notified when a change happens on a candidate Web site. My twitter feed can be found <http://twitter.com/thomasgilmore> This also allows me to post small notes to users of the feed feature from any data device, including cellular telephones.

"3. Online campaign fund raising using features like PayPal. This makes it extremely easy for supporters to connect to a candidate and donate should the candidate's message resonate with them. It's a tool that worked extremely well in the last Presidential election.

"4. Embedded video, a la YouTube. Candidates can now place video-based information from a cell phone or camera on their Web sites. Debates, issues, even endorsements can be strengthened with this feature.

"5. Creating an informational database of campaign materials for interested volunteers to download and distribute. This allows a campaign to be run in a dispersed fashion, without having to have large meetings where material like door hangers are distributed to volunteers. Active citizens can easily print out information to distribute to neighbors and friends about candidate issues.

Gilmore concluded, "As a voter, a balance of solid information and meeting the candidate are the best ways to make a choice, based on the tangibles and intangibles that a candidate brings to the table."

