
- Do you see the “election business” changing from a products to a service model? What does that mean for your company and clients?

When HAVA was first adopted, the vast majority of voting system manufacturers were mainly product providers. For many reasons, being merely a product provider is not, and was not, a sustainable model for growth. ES&S recognized this fact and made the transition to a full service and solutions provider over the last several years. For our company and our clients, this “service” oriented model has released us from being dependent upon the cyclical flow of product buying cycles and allowed us to commit continuous research and development dollars to our customers for the long haul.

Elections and election technology have become more complex. Simply being a vendor who provides a product is no longer sufficient. Elections are multi-faceted with absentee mail, multiple set-ups like precincts and voting centers, early voting, electronic ballot delivery, etc., all needing to work together. Layered onto this is the need for voter registration, outreach, election results reporting, warehousing, voter check-in, poll worker management, etc. Our customers are seeking providers who can be integrators and solutions providers. This demand has turned our strategic focus to meeting those needs.

- What is the future of the industry in an environment where federal funding is gone and state/local funding is so challenging?

At ES&S we believe that history has shown that innovative creativity is born out of fiscal challenge. Our future will depend on us rising to this challenge.

From an industry standpoint it means we must provide product solutions that meet the needs of the elections community for not just today – but for tomorrow as well. Our systems must be capable of bridging to the future. These systems must have the ability to meet new trends or changes which might be brought forward by State Legislatures in the near or long term. Our systems must be ready to accommodate the ever increasing demands of voters for more convenience and efficiency in the manner in which they vote. It means we must listen to our customers and then give them what they need and want, enabling them to meet their voter’s needs. It means we have to provide for integration and interoperability for multi-modal forms of voting. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, it means that we must be good stewards of the supply chain of parts to ensure quality and long term sustainability.

The lack of federal and state funding also means that in some areas of the country uniformity of voting within a particular state will begin to erode. State’s who once required Statewide voting solutions may no longer be in a position to maintain that uniformity if they are unable to provide the funding. This will increase the challenge for States and voting system providers to ensure that system usage by customers remains consistent in manner from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Industry providers will also need to provide a broader product set that can appeal to a greater number of existing customers and potential customers as each jurisdiction
within a State may have different product needs; for example all vote by mail vs. a combination of vote by mail and in-precinct voting.

The lack of funding has also spurred us to provide creative financing to help States/jurisdictions address their fiscal challenges.

- How can the private sector work with policymakers and election officials to support innovation and otherwise support election administration?

  Great question. The answer is through collaboration. There are many people who should come to the table to support innovation and election administration. Policy makers, advocates for voters with special needs, legislators, manufacturers and election officials are all integral parts of this discussion. Voting solution providers should also be included in these discussions as early as possible.

  It is our desire to provide quality solutions that match your needs. Every State and jurisdiction is unique. One size does not fit all and it likely never will. Our mantra is to build our solutions to meet your specific voting trends and your State requirements, not to bend your State’s needs to fit our solutions. To achieve that goal we need to be on the front end of discussions regarding your technology requirements. Research, development, testing and certification take time. We can be more responsive to your technology needs when we know what they will be and the expected time frame you may require them in.

  Collaboration (such as this panel today) allows all of us to collectively embrace a visionary approach to voting by discussing and developing solutions that are designed to fit your needs - in your time frame.

- What developments in the field are you the most optimistic about? Which ones worry you the most?

  We are most optimistic and passionate about technology which has been designed to enhance the individual voting experience and reduce lines at the polling place. Today, we have the capability to allow a voter to view their ballot online, pre mark his or her selections, save it to a phone or print a paper copy, and then use that pre-marked ballot to come to the polling place, skip the long lines and vote quickly and efficiently. Providing voters with voting experiences that mirror their everyday use of technology creates a fun new voting experience.

  Increased access for military voters, including the ability to securely return a ballot via email is an exciting opportunity. This product has been available for several election cycles but it is only now just becoming more of an election “norm” for election officials.

  Another exciting technology (especially for legislators) is the ability to have real-time access and insight into how voting is transpiring at the polls. Through the use of pollbooks and web based technology, election officials can sit at their desk and view real-time reports that show how many people have voted and other key Election Day data while the polls are open. The media and political parties can also be provided access to relevant information on Election
Day. No more having to send rovers out to the precincts while you patiently wait for a poll worker to count the total number of people who have voted.

We are also very excited about the emergence and use of data. The movement towards common data standards provides the opportunity to increase the interoperability of the suite of systems that are needed to administer an election, and therefore the efficiency and new functionality that only integrated systems can provide. Additionally, the capture of data and use of it (“Big Data”) holds great promise in helping to improve performance in all aspects of election administration.

Another new frontier to watch is the world of Commercial Off the Shelf Technology (COTS). To date pollbooks have been one of the largest consumers of COTS technology, however there is a new trend toward the use of COTS for polling place tabulation systems as well. Just as the transition from paper to touch screen brought forth a learning curve so will a transition to COTS devices as polling place tabulation systems. Uniformity, supply chain management, training, usability and security are all areas that have not yet been fully vetted in either testing or real world usage. As noted above, it is our job to provide the systems you desire. It is also our job to ensure accuracy without compromise and as such we take very seriously our commitment to ensuring systems that meet the highest of standards.

- Anything else you think the election community – and especially state legislators and staff – should know?

Think long term when you are adopting new laws. Seek input from all -- election officials and voting system providers. If you are seeking to adopt a change to the manner in which votes are cast, have you checked to see if the existing technology in your state is capable of handling that change? Is it an older legacy system that may not be capable of upgrades?

Be willing to consider changes for new technology. Recently we brought a new universal product to market. It’s a game changer for many and it has been well received, however we have had to work with several States to update laws because the existing statues were written specifically for an older technology.

In the days of old, States could adopt laws regarding voting system use and those laws may not need to be changed for many years. As new technology is introduced to the market today at a rapid pace, a closer eye needs to be paid to whether legislation may be too prescriptive. As an example, most polling locations prohibit the use of cell phones by voters. This was a smart law back when cell phones were only capable of making phone calls. Today voting system technology can allow a voter to use a cell phone to make pre-selections on a sample ballot before entering the polling place and then use a simple Quick Response (QR) code on the phone to pre-populate a ballot. This is only the start of innovative and creative ways to make voting more efficient, cost effective and just downright fun for voters.

It would behoove all of us (vendors, legislators, election officials) to always keep one main thing in mind – the voter. At the beginning and the end, it really is all about the voter and their right to a fair and trusted voting experience. The Presidential Election Commission made excellent recommendations related to shrinking long lines and using technology that would be
convenient and easy for voters to use. If we all view our voters as our customers then together we can build systems and adopt legislation that will meet our goal of providing access to a voting experience that will improve not just the security of systems but, equally important, access and usability of voting systems for ALL voters.