

eCounting

SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION GETS THE RIGHT RESULTS

When you have a potential 4.7 million ballot papers to count across 32 councils in a single day you need an eCounting system that you can rely on. There is simply no room for error. This was the case for the Scottish Government, who needed to introduce a new eCounting system for the councils taking part in the local government election in May 2012.

THE CHALLENGE

Scotland uses the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system, which is considerably more complex than the first past the post way of voting – where the public votes for just one candidate. Instead, it is possible for the electorate to vote for every candidate standing – in order of preference.

As a result, the manual counting of ballot papers in an STV election takes considerably longer – on average around three days if done manually. An eCounting system is essential to deliver the election results quickly, accurately and transparently.

However, the risks of handing the reins over to technology can be high. A previous attempt at eCounting resulted in the Gould Report outlining essential requirements for any future system. All stakeholders were keen to ensure that the 2012 election would pass without incident.

“One of my success criteria for the new system was that people did not talk about the technology after the election,” said Liz Ure, ICT consultant, Scottish Government. *“The news should be about the candidates elected, not the process of counting the votes.”*

In addition:

- There could simply be no delays as election dates are fixed
- All complex legislative requirements had to be met ensuring transparency of processes and a fair and accurate result
- Staff in all the 32 councils needed to be trained and confident using the system
- Each Count Centre was commissioned on the Monday, testing and refresher training undertaken on Tues / Weds, the count run on the Friday and the site de-commissioned on the Friday

CASE STUDY

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

“It went pretty much like clockwork – full marks to the CGI team.”

Liz Ure, ICT Consultant,
Scottish Government



opt2vote
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OUR ANSWER

We won the contract to work with the Scottish Government with eCounting software partner Opt2vote. Although the overall project needs were defined by the tender requirements, user feedback was also essential from the 32 councils to determine the details – what would be the exact processes on the day, which reports were needed, even the requirement that was uncovered to change fonts to help visually impaired staff.

Testing was critical to the project to ensure it did not fail. “The remit from my bosses at the Scottish Government was to test the technology to destruction to make sure it was robust” Liz Ure

Around 40 tests were completed, processing around 10,000 papers, then a further eight or nine tests with 20,000 papers to iron out any issues. but 20,000 papers cannot really test the system to its limits, so a bulk test was completed, scanning and counting 165,000 ballot papers in one run.

In addition, the team ran a disaster recovery day, where Scottish Government was invited to watch a count and then quite literally pull the power plug half way through, in order to see whether the count could be retrieved and completed. It was the final stage involved ensuring the right equipment was in place to manage the counting across the councils and that staff were trained.

“This was not a standard supplier-client relationship. It was collaboration. We shared the same office and worked as a single team. It was the only way a project of this magnitude would work.” Liz Ure.

A SUCCESS STORY

The count started around 9am the day after the Scottish elections. The first count, from Orkney, was completed by 10.30am and all the others followed throughout the day. The final count to be completed was in Highland by 6.15pm. This was because the first count was so close – to within five decimal places between candidates.

A recount was called and the second count ended in exactly the same result – something that would shock a seasoned election watcher if it were ever replicated in a manual counting system. Such was the efficiency of the eCounting system that First Minister, Alex Salmon was caught unawares at the speed of the results. He had to cancel a number of scheduled appointments in order to be present for the first declarations.

WHY WORK WITH US

Ingenuity. Inventiveness. Innovation. These are all key characteristics of Scotland and the Scots – and of our work in Scotland. Our offices in Aberdeen and Edinburgh act as hubs for ground-breaking projects such as smart metering, which is set to change the way we all use energy, and the world's largest integrated transport smartcard scheme. Our 350 experts in Scotland are supported by over 69,000 colleagues worldwide focused on helping you find a better way of working.

“The project referenced in this case study was delivered by Logica, which CGI acquired in August 2012”

KEY BENEFITS

- All ballot papers counted by 6.15pm
- Accuracy proven by a repeat result delivered on a recount in one council
- Fairness and transparency assured as questionable papers could be viewed clearly on screen for senior election staff to accept or count as spoiled in public view
- The next day's newspapers covered the candidates and not the counting technology

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ABOUT CGI

With over 68,000 professionals in 40 countries, CGI fosters local accountability for client success while bringing global delivery capabilities to clients' front doors. Founded in 1976, CGI applies a disciplined delivery approach that has achieved an industry-leading track record of on-time, on-budget projects. Our high-quality business consulting, systems integration and outsourcing services help clients leverage current investments while adopting new technology and business strategies that achieve top and bottom line results. As a demonstration of our commitment, our average client satisfaction score for the past 10 years has measured consistently higher than 9 out of 10.