

Election night coverage in Canada: Newspaper Web
sites hindered by the Canada Elections Act

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Presented to: Annual Convention,
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
Newspaper Division

Miami, Florida
August 2002

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The Internet promised to make election night on November 27, 2000 in Canada quite different from previous federal election nights in the country, and quite unlike election night in the United States three weeks earlier. By the year 2000 all major national newspapers and other organizations in Canada were providing breaking news online, competing to be first on their web sites with major stories such as the death of Canada's former Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau in the fall of 2000. Until the 2000 election, real-time results on election night, as the ballots were counted, had always been the exclusive domain of broadcasters. Television anchors, reporters, analysts, pundits and even comedians provided play-by-play reporting of the results as they came in. Networks raced to scoop each other to declare the winner first. In the past, newspapers weighed in the morning after with context, analysis, commentary and details of riding-by-riding results. The Internet has changed all that. "No area has been more profoundly affected by the Internet than the media. Traditional print and broadcast sources are now reinventing themselves online. Change is further fueled as existing print and broadcast agencies merge" (McGuire et al, 8).

Now that newspapers in Canada had begun providing breaking news online, not just a web version of their printed product, it meant that technically, at least, they could join the game once dominated by broadcasters and compete to be first to provide results and declare winners on election night. They could provide Canadians with alternatives to watching their favorite network. The Internet would also allow broadcasters to provide added value to their election night coverage for those Canadians who chose to log on instead of, or in

addition to, watching television to follow the results. Canadians are heavy Internet users (according to Nielsen, there were 16.3 million users in Canada who logged on during December 2000 – that’s about half the Canadian population) so it was reasonable to assume they would log on for results on election night. They did in numbers that surprised even people in the online news business. For instance, globeandmail.com received 1.26 million page views on November 27, 2000 (Campbell). The Internet also promised to be more satisfying, in some ways, for people hungry for individual riding results. Because of the linear nature of a television program, riding results could only be broadcast one riding at a time, usually in a graphic on the screen. The non-linear nature of the Internet, on the other hand, meant online users should be able to call up the results of any riding, any time.

METHOD

Our study included the most popular Canadian Internet sites and news broadcasters on November 27, 2000 as available at the Carleton University School of Journalism media laboratory in Ottawa, Ontario, which operates on EST. The sites examined included:

- two national newspapers: The Globe and Mail (globeandmail.com) and the National Post (nationalpost.com)
- two Internet news sites: sympatico.com and canoe.ca
- web sites for news broadcasters: CBC (cbc.ca); CTV (ctvnews.com); and, Global TV (canada.com)
- independent web sites: electionresultscanada.com and can.politics
- the television coverage broadcast in Ottawa, Ontario by English-language national television broadcasters CBC TV, CTV

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News and Global TV. One local Ottawa TV broadcaster, The New
'RO was included as well as the national public radio
broadcaster's coverage on English Radio (CBC Radio One).

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Our team of monitors logged onto the assigned web sites at 6:30 EST when the first polls closed in the eastern-most province of Newfoundland and logged out at 12:30 a.m. EST, two-and-a-half hours after the last polls closed in British Columbia and the Yukon Territory.

The study examined each web site to examine information on:

- 1) how quickly were results provided after the polls closed.
- 2) How accurate were the results.
- 3) What kind of range of information was provided (simply numeric results, analysis in the form of charts or graphs or, written analysis.
- 4) Interactive features offered.
- 5) The technical functioning.
- 6) Design features.
- 7) Other innovations offered

Similar criteria were used to evaluate the election night coverage provided by the television and radio broadcasters included in our sample. Our monitors also visited several U.S. web sites during the 'blackout' period to determine news coverage of the Canadian election in American media. These including ABCNews.com; CNN.com and The Burlington Free Press (Vermont).

Canada Elections Act and the Internet on Election Night

Our study found that newspaper web sites and other Internet news operations failed to live up to their promise on election night in Canada, for reasons both within and beyond their control. In part, they underestimated the traffic they would receive that night and the result was many people found pages that wouldn't load, sites that were not available and results that were posted long after they were announced

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on television. In addition, they were stymied by a unique Canadian election law prohibiting the publication of election results in any region where the polls had not yet closed. While Americans living on the West coast have always been able to tune into live coverage of election night results as soon as the polls close in the East, hours before their own polls close, Canadians have not. Since 1938, the Canada Elections Act prohibits premature transmission of results "in any manner" -- even "purported" results, such as those one might receive from exit polls -- in places where the polls are still open (Report, Chief Electoral Officer). To break the law is to risk a fine of up to \$25,000. "The underlying aim of the prohibition was to ensure that no electors would be influenced by results from elsewhere in Canada when they cast their ballots, and that all electors had access to the same information when they voted" (Report, Chief Electoral Officer).

The Canada Elections Act virtually hamstrung online news producers on election night. Broadcasters complied with the law by blocking their election night television feeds to regions where the polls are still open so when the polls close in Eastern Canada, people living there can tune into live election night specials while Canadians elsewhere see only regular programming. When the polls close in Central Canada, the election night feeds are extended to include Central Canada. However, access to web sites cannot be blocked by region, though news organizations tried to find ways to do it. They concluded there was no way to publish election results from the East and prevent people living elsewhere from reading them.

Election 2000 was to be an important demonstration of the power of the Internet for news junkies. Some online news organizations such as the Globe and Mail had only set up separate online news operations

to produce breaking news online in the year 2000. The country's other national newspaper, The National Post, was also expanding its online news operation. (Other news organizations, such as the CBC, Canada's national public broadcaster, had been providing breaking news online for a few years.) For all of them, election night was an enormous opportunity. It would give them a chance to try to satisfy and even cultivate the growing appetite of Canadians for news online; to establish themselves as leaders in the business of providing news online; and to provide new kinds of coverage not available on television or in the newspaper.

They were frustrated, however, by Elections Canada's blackout rules. They knew that the nature of the Internet meant anyone with a computer and Internet access could spread news about the election results, illegally, as soon as they were made public in Eastern Canada and probably escape detection. But if newspapers did it, they would likely be caught by Elections Canada monitors. "If I lived in Newfoundland and wanted to set up a small results-reporting web site with friends across the country, chances are nobody would ever notice. But if I were a maverick in British Columbia who had a site and put out a press release bragging about it then I would expect to get caught. And, if I were the Globe and Mail, I would be sure I was going to get caught," said Neil A. Campbell, then editor of the globeandmail.com.

In the end, none of the major news organizations took the risk. Instead they waited until all the polls had closed in British Columbia and the Yukon Territory before publishing any results on their web sites. That meant, for example, that Eastern Canadians had the results on television and radio shortly after the polls closed at 7:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) but would find nothing at media web sites until 10 p.m. EST. Similarly people living in Quebec, Ontario,

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Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta were getting results on television shortly after the polls closed at 9:30 p.m. EST but could not get the results at media web sites until after 10 p.m. It meant that by 9:30 p.m. EST, the polls had closed for 88% of all eligible voters but the polls were open for another 30 minutes for the remaining 12%. It meant web site editors and producers had to wait for the remaining 12% before they could publish results from anywhere in the country. So, the possibilities offered by the Internet on election night were not realized in full, thanks to Elections Canada.

The Early Blackout Period

While Elections Canada managed to deter media web sites from publishing what the television networks were broadcasting, it was not entirely successful in preventing the spread of early results online, thanks, in part, to one renegade citizen – a 30-year old software developer in Burnaby, B. C., Paul Bryan. He saw section 329 of the Elections Act as an unreasonable restriction on freedom of speech. He said “The gag law is a serious threat that could infringe on our rights on the Internet. I take freedom of speech very seriously.”

He took up the cause following the federal byelections in September 2000. In two separate byelections on the same day, Joe Clark, the Progressive Conservative party leader, was elected in a Nova Scotia riding and Stockwell Day, the Canadian Alliance leader, was elected in a B.C. riding. At the time, results from the Nova Scotia byelection were published online before the polls closed in B.C., four hours after they closed in Nova Scotia. A few days later, police confiscated the computer of Ivan Smith, a Nova Scotia man they believed was responsible. It was enough to motivate Bryan to launch his challenge.

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He said "If we don't stand up for our rights, they go away. I wasn't willing to sit idly by and watch that happen."

He set up a web site at electionresultscanada.com and promised to post early results on November 27th. He kept his promise. The page displayed results shortly after the polls closed in Newfoundland at 6:30 p.m. EST and updated them every few minutes for the next three hours. Bryan is coy about exactly where he was on election night but says he got his results by watching CBC television's feed to Atlantic Canada using a satellite dish. As he heard the results from the off-air feed, he typed them in by hand, on his web page, which was hosted on a server in San Antonio, Texas -- a deliberate move to ensure the results were technically published outside the country.

He managed to keep up until the results came pouring in from Central Canada, and he could no longer type fast enough. At that point, he had hoped to connect to the Elections Canada web site, which had promised to post results at 10 p.m. EST. But he found the same problem anyone else visiting the official Elections Canada site that night did -- the site was unstable and very slow to post results. When he found better results at media web sites, shortly after 10 p.m. EST, he created a page that read "Mission Accomplished" and directed his visitors to media sites for further results.

During the time Paul Bryan was posting results, his page was accessible, popular and simple. He provided no stories, no analysis, no photos, no fancy graphics, and no declarations of likely winners -- just raw results from individual ridings showing who was leading and how many polls had reported. He says he had 500,000 "page views" that night. A page view is a record of a web page being requested by an Internet user. On newsgroups such as can.politics there were also a

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number of postings from people asking for the address of his or any web site where early results were being posted.

Days later, he, too, was visited by the police who seized two of his hard drives and his VISA card statements because they included charges for the server he used in Texas to publish the results. At the time, he said authorities may have a difficult time proving where he was on election night and, if they can't verify that he was in Canada, he may argue he was not subject to Canadian law. It's one of the arguments he may make when he appears in court in May. In December 2001, more than a year after the federal election, Bryan was officially charged with illegally posting election results. In an interview in March of 2002, he says he will fight to have the law changed. "The Internet is a place where people are engaging in political speech. This law is tantamount to furnishing people with information and then ordering them to keep their mouths shut. That's not the kind of free and democratic society that I think of when I think of Canada. My intent (is) to take it all the way. I want to see section 329 stricken from the books (MacDonald).

Paul Bryan succeeded where the media organizations did not. He was first with results and his site survived the stampede of Internet users in search of early news.

He wasn't entirely alone. Other brief stories about early results appeared on Yahoo Canada a full hour and a half before the polls closed in Central Canada; in a story by the international news service, Reuters, published on various web sites; in a story dated 9:10 p.m. EST from Associated Press, which was picked up by several U.S. papers and published on their web sites; and, in a story published by ABC News on its web site before the polls had all closed in Canada. News about

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early results was also published in messages at sites such as cnn.com from Eastern Canadians who wanted to spread the word.

There was also a Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, radio station broadcasting live results on the Internet for a time, but when a Globe and Mail reporter called to ask about the decision to break the law, the station was quickly silenced. The station manager later said the broadcast was accidental. (In the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 2000 election, it asserted: "partial election results were disclosed prematurely on Internet sites, through e-mail lists available to the public subscription, and by satellite television. It's not clear whether the report is referring to Bryan or others. It added that there was "a complaint" and that it is being reviewed.)

Until the election in 1997, polls closed at 8 p.m. local time across the country, which meant there were four-and-a-half hours between the time they closed from one end of the country to the other. The election night shows started in Newfoundland and extended west as the polls closed in Eastern, Central and Prairie Canada and eventually in British Columbia. The three-hour period between the time the polls closed in Ontario and B.C. was always the most critical one. As the results from Ontario and Quebec poured in, staff at Canada's three major television networks - CBC, CTV and Global - examined the voting patterns and declared which party would form the next government and whether the government would be a majority or not. So, in the past, by the time polls closed in B.C., election coverage would almost always begin there with the declaration of which party would form the next federal government - before a single ballot in that province had been counted.

In 1997, in part to reduce the risk of early results leaking out over the Internet, the law was changed to provide staggered hours for voting across the country, though not a uniform poll closing time. So, in 1997 and, again in 2000, polls closed in Newfoundland at 6:30 p.m. EST; in the Maritime provinces at 7:30 p.m. EST; in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta at 9:30 p.m. EST and in British Columbia and the Yukon Territory at 10 p.m. EST.

Dusk: After the Polls closed in Ontario

At 9:30 p.m. EST, when the polls closed in Central Canada, but remained open for another half an hour in B.C. and the Yukon, online news producers could still do little but wait for the remaining 2.595 million eligible voters to finish voting even though the polls were closed for 21.243 million voters. Broadcasters, however, shifted into high gear. Suddenly the anchors energetically bounced on air as they could finally reveal the preliminary results from Eastern Canada. The graphics from the Atlantic region (with vote counts up to two hours old) were ready and displayed within seconds.

Television networks, for most Canadians, beat the media web sites by a wide margin simply because they could produce results within Elections Canada rules by targeting the region where their signal was broadcast. So, Eastern Canadians could watch results for almost three hours as they were broadcast on the regional feeds of the national broadcasters - long before they could find them online at media web sites.

The Blackout's Over: All the Polls close

As the moment arrived when the doors were being closed on all the polling stations in British Columbia and the Yukon, the media web sites were finally able to display what they had been hiding for hours.

The Globe and Mail site snuck in a few moments early with three stories indicating how well the Liberals had done in Atlantic Canada. Then, it provided a breakdown of the number of ridings where each of the parties was leading. It seemed to mirror what was available on television at the time. At 10:06 p.m. EST the Globe and Mail site led with a story that CTV News had projected a Liberal majority – just two minutes after the network became the first to declare the winner. It would be another 16 minutes before CBC Television would project a Liberal majority, at which point the Globe would refresh its story with that news, too.

Throughout the night, the Globe and Mail site provided a series of stories about the latest developments. It also offered a number of interactive features such as charts, maps and links for details about the popular vote, riding results, candidate information etc. For users interested in following the results of specific ridings, the Globe site made that easy to do. Internet users visited the site in record numbers. The Globe and Mail's Neil Campbell said it got 1.26 million page views that night and 1.68 million the next day. He says on an average day the site gets 300,000 to 400,000 page views.

What set the site apart from all the rest, though, was that it was accessible all night long. Before the election, Campbell said "We've put a massive effort into having a site that doesn't break down. We're expecting a surge in traffic that night and have added extra server capacity. We're also cutting back a little on some of the extras

normally on the site so we can make the page easier to load. I don't know how much thought other sites are putting into this but we've been obsessed by it, because if nobody can get in the door, then it doesn't much matter how great your content is."

It was an effort that made the globeandmail.com the winner among online news sites that night. At almost all of the other online sites, pages would not load, connections timed out and it became enormously frustrating for any user interested in following the election online or getting specific riding results.

When the Globe and Mail went online with breaking news in June of 2000, its biggest competition was cbc.ca, the CBC's online news operation. The CBC had been providing breaking news online for a number of years and was the veteran in the field. Despite all its experience, though, the CBC site did not work well on election night 2000. Our attempts to reach it at 10 p.m. EST resulted in network error messages. After several tries over a few minutes, we finally managed to load a page with four short stories about the results from Atlantic Canada. The link to the results page, however, yielded a message that the "server was busy." The link to a chat (a page where visitors join others in a discussion conducted through typed messages in real time) with a well-known television personality did not work; nor did it ever seem to work that night. Another link to a general chat with other users failed and, although we tried it every 15 minutes, we did not get through until 11:49 p.m. EST, though when we did get in, it was clear others had been there chatting for some time.

At 10:23 p.m. EST a new headline appeared which read "Liberals will form a majority government." But the link to the full story took users to an old story about Ontario and Quebec being the keys to the election - a story that had been posted on the site before the polls

closed and results were available. The link to what was the key story of the election call did not actually take us to a story about the declaration of a winner until 11 p.m. EST – almost an hour after the election had been called by CTV and posted on the Globe web site; almost forty minutes after it had been called by CBC television.

By 10:25 p.m. EST we were finally able to connect to the CBC results page where we were told the page would be updated every 30 seconds. The problem, however, was that every 30 seconds a message would appear saying the server was too busy to update the results. When we tried to link to individual ridings to track results, we often got messages saying the server was too busy to provide them. We also found more strange links to outdated stories. Under the main results table we found a headline at 11:09 EST which read "It's a Liberal government but too soon yet to say whether it's a majority or a minority." That was a full half hour after the site had posted a headline declaring a Liberal majority. For anyone who wanted to follow the election results, it was a most frustrating experience.

It was equally frustrating for the people responsible at the CBC. Ken Wolff, a producer at cbc.ca, said "technically we were not nearly as good as we should have been. The technical people screwed up." He insists that the content they produced was excellent but admits too few people got to see it. Wolff said the CBC servers never actually crashed, though they were incredibly slow. Despite the problems, he said they still recorded the highest number of page views ever that day at 1.6 million, more than the Globe and Mail. He said he can only imagine how high the numbers would have been if error messages hadn't sent visitors clicking away to other sites.

While the National Post does not offer a lot of breaking news at its web site yet, it set out to provide up-to-the-minute election

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coverage and real-time results on election night. But it, too, encountered technical problems that made it difficult for users to access information or follow results. Shortly after the polls closed, it posted stories about the Liberals making big gains, and the NDP and the Tories almost falling off the radar. By 10:30 p.m. EST, the pages were slow to load and we could not access the text of the stories. Ten minutes later a Canadian Press story appeared whose lead read:

"Ontario's Liberals pulled out to an early lead in today's federal election, but remained far from another sweep of Canada's most populous province." By now both major networks had declared the Liberals the winner of a majority government. A few minutes later error messages appeared when we tried to reach the story. By 10:57 p.m. EST the Post was finally running a story headline that read "Chrétien to win majority government." But the Post did provide useful interactive features such as ways to find the results from individual ridings.

The producer of the National Post Online, Nancy DeHart, said the site never crashed, though it was slow at times. Still, the site had seven times more traffic than normal that night with 700,000 page views recorded on election day. She also reported that 10 per cent of the traffic came from points outside Canada. The Post simply didn't have the server capacity to handle the surge in traffic on election night (deHart) since new servers had been ordered but such purchases had been frozen for a time when CanWest Global bought 50 per cent the National Post.

Canoe.ca, a web site which showcases papers in the Sun Media chain owned by Quebecor, was also providing results on election night. As soon as the polls closed, Canoe's main page offered links to stories about the Liberals poised for a majority and the NDP's fortunes slipping in Eastern Canada. By 10:09 p.m. EST, there were numbers

posted indicating how many seats each party had won. Results were also broken down by province and riding. The results were updated regularly through the next few hours. The stories, too, were updated regularly but it was not until 11:16 p.m. EST that we found a story declaring the Liberal victory. Art Chamberlain, the executive producer of Canoe's Cnews site, said the site was as quick to declare a winner as the networks, but he admitted the site was painfully slow to load for many visitors. He, too, said Canoe was not set up to handle the incredible surge in traffic it received that night. He said the site had 3.4 million page views on election day and 1.2 million on election night itself.

On election night, Canada's largest private television network, CTV, had ambitions to produce editorial synergy with its web site, CTVnews.com to compete with the newspaper web sites. Launched in September 2000, the site is currently the most sophisticated broadband broadcast site in Canada providing real-time news stories, newscasts, background text and video clips. The plan for election night was to turn the resources of the broadcast network loose on the web site to provide "a complete package of materials for viewers: streamed video; background reports on polls; profiles of candidates; humor columns; analysis, reporter notebooks, chat rooms and searchable results (Sikstrom). But the service is demanding, technologically, because it operates best on high-speed service (cable or ADSL). While CTV said it received 42,000 unique visitors on election night, (Humphries) our monitors and others from outside our site reported major problems loading the site. What is impressive about the site is the enhancement of the information text with video clips. So, before 10:00 p.m. EST our monitor could read stories and watch video news clips about election day with excellent screen resolution (made possible through

the broadband, 300k facility) and finely-co-ordinated sound. After the polls closed in Newfoundland, the site posted a story on polls closing in Newfoundland with a video link but the link was misdirected to an older version about voters heading to the polls. By 10:04 p.m. EST, after all the polls in the country were closed, CTVnews.com was very slow to load or loaded only half a screen or text only, with a lead story quoting the CTV call for a majority government. A box on the right hand side of the screen offered "Election results." It led to globeandmail.com (a link which the Globe and Mail purchased as an 'advertisement'). By 10:35 p.m. EST the CTVnews.com site was frustrating to our monitors; the video screen did not work and only some of the text articles appeared when loading. It then became inaccessible for the rest of the broadcast period.

The impact of the Internet on the competition

While the Internet did not live up to its promise, it did have a major impact on election night television coverage -- on the way some information was gathered, and on the graphic style in which broadcasters presented their information. These forays could well provide important models for newspaper Internet sites during the next election. The three national broadcasters monitored for this study embraced the concept of interactivity, available to them via the Internet, in a diverse array of ways.

The most popular method of reaching out to viewers was simply asking them to telephone or e-mail their opinions. Chris Waddell, then a producer for CBC Television, said CBC TV received about 3,000 e-mail reactions on election night. However, aside from those unscientifically-gathered opinions of rural Canada, CTV made a significant foray into using the Internet to more meaningfully

understand why people voted as they did with an election night online poll (a rapidly emerging survey method(Couper)). A reporter and the IPSOS-REID President and CEO, Darrell Bricker, appeared throughout the night to report on the results of the same-day public opinion poll completed by 2,350 respondents (the sample group was pre-selected before election night to balance the sample according to demographics and region) (Hill Times). Each of the respondents was sent a 12-question survey, by e-mail, to be completed after they had voted. They were asked how they voted this time and last, as well as their opinions on issues such as abortion and party leadership (e.g. 'Do you agree or disagree that Stockwell Day and the Canadian Alliance have a hidden agenda?') (IPSOS-REID).

The base of information allowed CTV to provide context and depth to the otherwise simple reporting of voting results. "It was more or less a typical family's living room on a mass scale using the technology," Lapointe said in an interview. "We wanted to talk psychologically about the vote. What were their issues, what was driving people? We wanted the opportunity, in discussing the results, to say that Canadians were driven by this feature or that feature or that image or that personality. To that extent it was useful." It gave CTV the confidence that the information garnered by its team of reporters and producers was accurate and up to the minute, he argued. "It gave us a final reality check. [The election campaign] could come down to the last three days and it could be an attack ad or a last minute messaging from one of the leaders or a regional issue that knocks the legs out of a party. So it gives you that kind of data [and it gives you] empirical material so you're not winging it with anecdotes heard on the campaign trail." It allowed CTV to flesh out its analysis, for instance, to discuss why the Liberals had amassed a

surprisingly high level of support in Quebec or explain that although Ontarians' support for the Alliance was weak, it had more to do with the leadership of Stockwell Day. "It wasn't a massive revelation from the political science point of view but when it comes to daily journalism, it was a better bedrock of information and better than doing 50 interviews on election day," said Lapointe. He is adamant that it was not an exit poll, the kind of instant poll that broadcasters in the U.S. have suddenly soured on, given their experience in the November 2000 Presidential election. CTV first used the sample group for online polling during the campaign when the party leaders debated each other in English. Respondents sat by their TVs, then dashed to their computers to answer questions such as "who won" and "who lost" at periods throughout the debate. While the answers flooded in after the first question, Lapointe said one server could not produce results for any of the succeeding questions until after the debate in time for the 11:00 p.m. newscast. It failed as a real-time poll about whether the debate was influencing viewers, but Lapointe said CTV found better servers to use on election night.

There was some reluctance at the CBC to venture further into interactivity. "The Internet was not factored in [to our planning of the show]," Waddell conceded. "We still look at the Internet as a way for people to get more detailed information than we can give them on the screen. What we can do is give people a sense of the big picture, what it means, how it got there. You can't get that from the Internet. I'm skeptical how active you want to be when you're watching TV. It's so passive."

Reflections

1) THE BLACKOUT: The advantages of providing local riding results on newspaper web sites cannot be fully realized, and the Internet

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cannot compete against coverage on television, as long as the Canada Elections Act forces staggered voting hours and the blackout. Although it would be in the interests of the newspaper and other Internet news services to change the law, none admitted to such a campaign, hoping that private citizens would take up the charge instead. And, none in our survey admitted they were even tempted to break the law. "No one wants to go to jail for telling a British Columbian who was elected in Crowfoot (Alberta)," said Lapointe. "We were all pretty well warned and took advice from legal counsel, so we didn't even think about it." However, CTV did, in a roundabout way, enable Canadians to get results before 10:00 p.m. CTV has a cooperative arrangement with ABC News in the U.S., allowing ABC News to take CTV video feeds (even from the Atlantic) and turn them into text and video clips for its web site. That meant anyone in the world with Internet access could view CTV material before 10:00 p.m. EST at abcnews.com. Policing the blackout proved difficult this time and promises to become even more difficult in the future. As Lapointe noted, "it's the wild west out there. The Internet gives everyone a broadcast licence."

2) LOCAL RESULTS: One disadvantage of the linear, sequential fashion in which TV broadcasts news and other information, is that viewers have to wait for the programmers to serve up results on specific ridings or candidates. Under Canada's Parliamentary system, eligible voters mark their ballots for the local member (Member of Parliament) running as a member of a national political party. (The political party electing the most M.P.s forms the government.) Since national broadcasters focus on the national race, the big names and the big picture, it can be difficult to follow a riding especially if there was no big name or no particular news angle in the race. Still, some

viewers want to know what happened in their local ridings or region. National broadcasters have accommodated that in the past by providing "local cutaways": cutting away from the national broadcast every half hour for a five-minute segment produced out of each local newsroom. "People need to see people locally, hear from the winners and losers in their region. It's not a national election for a lot of people. You're not voting for Jean Chrétien, you're voting Stan Keyes and you want to see if Stan Keyes won," argued Lapointe. However, broadcasters could not cover local elections with resources they dedicated to the national election night results coverage. CBC argued that the staggered hours have squeezed air time between 9:30 p.m. EST and 11:00 EST, at which point party leaders start making their concession and victory speeches, so there is no longer any time to cut to local races and away from the national one (Waddell). Clearly, if viewers want detailed riding results, the Internet can provide a superior service.

3) POPULISM: The great promise of the Internet was that it would involve more people in how their nations are run. "The most optimistic, and perhaps most unrealistic, perspective sees new media as a force in a democratic revolution, with new media stimulating a political interest and activism among citizens. Media populism abounds, as ordinary citizens work their way into a political arena that once was primarily the domain of elites" (Davis and Owen, 256). Election 2000 embraced that hope as news sites and broadcasters had the potential to involve Canadians. CTV's Lapointe: "The degree to which you can involve voters on the night, the better you are. I don't mean that as a sop to 'vox populi', it legitimately has a purpose in understanding the country if you can put the emotion of the people onto television." This election that meant reading aloud e-mail messages from viewers;

the next election could see viewers' reactions on video clips, captured by their web cameras attached to their home computers then transmitted to the broadcasters and web sites.

4) CONVERGENCE: This election year also saw a flurry of media mergers in the country. While the news operations were still running distinct operations, there were signs of media convergence. For instance, shortly after the election, BCE finalized the deal to own both media companies. With the deal in its final stages, our study observed that globeandmail.com bought an ad on the CTV News program as well as a link on the ctvnews.com Internet site. At the same time, since CanWest Global purchased Hollinger Inc and 50 per cent of the National Post it meant one web site could rely on the other when technology failed. For instance, when the web site for Global TV, globaltv.com, faltered around 10:37 p.m. EST, visitors clicking on stories were automatically linked to the National Post page. "We're looking at doing more co-operative ventures and that means sharing more resources during an election broadcast and campaign," said Global's Cal Johnstone in an interview.

5) TECHNOLOGY MATTERS: Most newspaper web sites and Other Internet sites learned a lesson broadcasters acquired decades ago (the best research and plans mean nothing if your program goes to black or dead air) on election night - that if they do not have the server capacity, it hardly matters if they have the fastest results and the best journalism. The 2000 election could be seen as a test run, so that providers could determine the appetite for Internet coverage and results online. It also means gearing up with more servers or gearing down, to accommodate visitors with modest Internet access (dial-up modems). "The lesson learned out of this is that you have an enormous

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instrument in broadcasting and hundreds of thousands of people are in front of it. When you encourage them to turn from one screen to another you have an opportunity to pull a lot of people in so you have to be ready for them," said Lapointe.

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