

# Mixed Greens

An assortment of fresh tossed ideas.

## 010 Using mass media to get a message across

King County Communications Retrospect by Kim Van Ekstrom

Starting Early with a Simple Message by Sheilah Crider

### King County Communications Retrospect

A strategic communications plan is a core element in the preparation for each election in King County. It consists of the development of key messages that address every important aspect of the election, the production of outreach products (including the local voters' pamphlet) that reinforce key messages, and the development and placement of media messaging which emphasizes those key messages that directly correspond to voter behavior and impact the efficiency of administering elections. Finally, communications efforts are reviewed at the conclusion of each election through staff and outreach partnership debriefs, along with voter surveys when possible.

For the 2010 primary and general elections, we identified several priority key messages that became the emphasis of outreach communications, and were combined under an umbrella theme of "It pays to be informed."

- Vote and return ballots as soon as possible
- Use only a black or dark blue ink pen to vote
- Remember to sign the voter oath
- Avoid voting frivolous write-ins
- If contacted by Elections about a signature matter, follow up promptly

In addition to issuing regular press releases and promoting media coverage that included these priority messages, King County developed and purchased placement for public service announcements that reinforced them. Through agreements with Fisher Broadcasting and local TV stations, personalities like Ken Schram and John Carlson talked on air about how they stay informed as voters and return their ballots early. Trusted TV personalities like Jean Enersen provided the talent for commercial television Public Service Announcements. Our own Director, Sherril Huff, provided the talent for the PSA placed on the local public broadcasting channel and government access TV. Adding to these messages, large web ads ran on the websites for prime media outlets, delivering over two million impressions. The PSAs linked the concept of being an "informed" voter to saving tax dollars and helping to make elections more efficient.

Click below to listen to audio PSA



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[Video PSA](#)

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King County Elections reinforced these messages with regular website updates and an aggressive social media campaign that used Facebook, Twitter, and the County's blog to expand outreach and feature photographs and video clips that helped tell our story. Two fun, low cost, and successful elements of our electronic communications that were introduced in the general election included a webcam in our opening room and a digital "I voted" sticker that could be downloaded to a Facebook page or website, or could be printed out. About 6600 people downloaded the sticker and the election cam received over 14,000 visits from all over the world!

So, how well did the campaign work? Our ballot processing staff has not yet completed a review, but has reported that both "late returned ballots" and "missing signatures" rates were down while the "signature cure" rate was up. Through our partnership with KING 5TV, we were able to administer Survey USA telephone surveys right before the Primary Election and again after the General Election. We were very pleased that voters indicated a high level of awareness of our paid advertising (97%) and fairly high awareness of priority key messages. In 2011, through use of a HAVA grant, we will be implementing a statistically valid survey that will help us better measure voter awareness about these and other important issues.

The "It pays to be informed" campaign appears to have gotten a fair amount of traction, and the social media campaign garnered substantial voter and media attention as well as a number of positive comments. The campaign was envisioned to have a long shelf life, and given its apparent success, will be extended and further developed as part of the communications strategy for elections in 2011.

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Screenshot of King County elections website

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## Starting Early with a Simple Message

One of the most important goals of Island County Elections is for citizens to have their vote count in every election. This year, to encourage greater participation, we chose to start communicating with voters earlier than in years past.

Our overall message was simple: We are having an election – we want you to VOTE! We developed the message, determined the best means of distribution and then put the plan to work. This was highly effective, with over 75% voter turn out.

Our outreach program involved the following.

- Numerous press releases
- Interviews in person and via phone with local reporters
- Posting elections dates and events on public calendars online
- Website notices and updates that were updated frequently
- Networking with political parties and social organizations within the community
- Newly redesigned ballot instructions insert

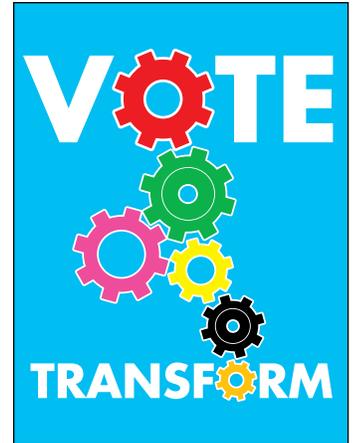
I also collaborated with the Commanding Officer and the Voter Registration Liaison Officer at Naval Air Station Whidbey. The purpose of those relationships was to increase military member participation and improve voter registration of troops stationed at Whidbey, onboard ship, on installations abroad and in war zones.

In the future, we hope to have large color flyers or posters generated for libraries, senior centers, retirement communities, schools, hospitals and convalescent facilities/nursing homes calling attention to voter registration, encouraging use of the web to make voter registration changes and encouraging residents to vote. Photos and pictures attract more attention than the written word.

Our imagination has been influenced by the budget deficit – we have less to devote to new programs and enhancements.

We gratefully exchange ideas with our fellow County Auditors, creating and sharing success stories among our offices is a vital resource during tough economic times. With reduced staff, not having to re-invent a form or program is beneficial.

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