

DEPARTMENT OF ELECTIONS
City and County of San Francisco



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Subject: Usability in Voting Systems

Dear Executives:

Recently, all staff with the San Francisco Department of Elections received introductory usability training. Mostly, the training focused on issues relating to the use of computers, but there was some discussion of "usability issues" regarding voting systems. The two-hour session was illustrative on how the consideration of a voting system with usability in mind would allow all voters to cast their ballots with greater ease and reduce election administration costs.

A few weeks after the Department's training in usability, the Department held a pilot program to allow the public to use two voting systems related to our Request for Proposal to purchase a new voting system. We also invited usability professionals to attend the event and give their professional opinions concerning various usability aspects of the voting equipment.

Members of the public and the usability professionals who attended the pilot program identified numerous ways in which the equipment could be more voter-friendly to the general public and more accessible to voters with disabilities. The usability professionals, however, pointed out that all voting equipment and not just that equipment being evaluated in the pilot program can benefit from a usability review.

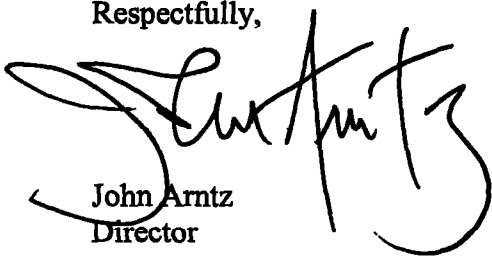
Everyone associated with voting wants elections to run smoothly. Any problems and complications that voters encounter with voting equipment, e.g. difficulties understanding how a voting machine works, may have a significant impact on the voters' view of their voting experience. These complications could result in having to provide additional training for pollworkers.

It is my understanding that there are several factors that allow organizations to be successful in the area of usability:

- Allocate sufficient resources to better incorporate usability and accessibility into systems designs;
- Concentrate on mechanisms for evaluating customers' concerns regarding usability and accessibility;
- Acquire sufficient knowledge of usability and accessibility methodologies; and
- Apply usability and accessibility methodologies during various stages of product design, development, and revision.

Voting equipment manufacturers now have the opportunity to make usability a primary aspect in the design and production of voting systems. Voters certainly will benefit from this incorporation of usability considerations. Also, pollworkers and election administrators, who must educate voters and train pollworkers on how to use any voting system, will benefit. Finally, the Help America Vote Act reinforces the need to more programmatically incorporate usability and accessibility considerations when updating and designing voting equipment.

Respectfully,



John Arntz
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