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## Plug-in network solution is too slow

Mike Himowitz

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED MAR 2, 2006



**MIKE HIMOWITZ**

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Get-out-the-vote department: Last week's column about the pitfalls of all-electronic voting generated more response than anything I've written in years. The astonishing thing: Most of my readers

agreed with me.

At least none of them started a message with, "You liberal idiot!" or "I'm canceling my subscription, you pinko dolt!" That's what I usually get when I venture into matters of public policy.

Anyway, I made it clear that I don't like Maryland's current Diebold AccuVote TS system. It's the very worst example of "black box" voting - based on secret, proprietary software that leaves no paper trail and is impossible to verify.

But several readers wondered whether there's any system I do like. And indeed, there is. It's not on the shelves at CompUSA in a shrink-wrapped version, but you'll find a good description on the Web site the Open Voting Consortium.

This alliance of computer scientists and civic activists began agitating for responsible electronic voting long before the subject made headlines.

Although it isn't perfect, I think the group's proposal comes close to satisfying all the competing demands on an electronic voting system.

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BUY TICK

It starts with two assumptions. The first is that any electronic system has to be completely open to public inspection - including the hardware and software. The second is that the best record of a vote is still a paper ballot.

To that end, the OpenVoting system uses an electronic voting terminal, but only to generate a paper ballot, which is in turn scanned optically to record the actual vote.

Unlike existing scanned paper ballot systems, OpenVoting doesn't require election officials to print millions of ballots in advance and store them in secure warehouses.

The ballots merely have to be programmed into the terminals. That satisfies election administrators who hate handling all that paper.

As a voter, you do get a paper ballot that's clearly marked - you can check it for errors before you slip it into the scanner.

If there's an equipment breakdown or a challenge, the paper ballots are always available to be compared with the electronic totals - and rescanned or counted by hand if necessary.

To install a system like this, we wouldn't necessarily have to scrap everything we've acquired. In fact, most electronic terminals can be programmed to act as simple ballot printers.

And the system would satisfy advocates for the disabled who want electronic terminals because they can be outfitted with audio systems that allow the blind to vote without assistance.

Give it a try yourself. You can cast an entertaining test ballot on the OpenVoting Web site at [www.openvoting.org](http://www.openvoting.org).

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