

Rigging the Irish Election in 5 easy steps

This is a cynical and satirical blog post series on how to skew opinion and create a movement which will get your candidate elected or get another candidate to lose an election. It will outline methods using existing technologies and techniques used by other political animals in other countries, which the technology backwards Ireland has so far failed to use. While a cynical look at mass manipulation of people and the media, it does outline the massive power of technology and how it can be used to abuse the political process if people are not aware of how this abuse can be carried out.

Each part in this series relies on a software platform called E.A.B. which is a little like the SAP <http://www.sap.com> Customer Relationship Management enterprise application. The E.A.B. system is essential for each one of the five parts in the plan to rig the Irish Election.

1. Create cells of organisers - Reach

Irish politics has shown that there is a core set of voters in each party that will vote along party lines no matter what. There really isn't much to do with these core people apart from making sure that they get out to vote when the time is right and also to help perpetuate propaganda when required. Die-hard supporters are far too rabid and transparent to be used for most of the steps to persuade voters to vote for your candidate and are best avoided. Those swing voters that got the Labour Government in to power, the swing voters that got Bill Clinton and George Bush are also the ones that need to be targeted. However in an environment where everyone is cynical about politics, trying to engage these people directly will more than likely be futile. Like bloggers influenced by their peers to go and buy technology, these people need to be influenced by people in their social groupings that they rely on (whether they realise it or not) when it comes to decision making.

The E.A.B. system's Reach module allows the creation of cells of subtle volunteers, who in turn are in charge of influencing 50 people in their social grouping who would be classed as swing voters. These 50 people are all profiled and their constituency and social status are logged in the database. Also whether they are registered to vote. This is the important differentiation compared to the traditional systems. Previous to this it is all about working the streets and estates of a constituency trying to influence people with posters and flyers and knocks on the door. But by using the swing voter's existing friends to influence their decisions, it is more powerful but at the same time much harder to track, unless of course you use modern technology. The Reach system can then track how many swing voters are being influenced.

When polling data is fed into E.A.B. it can identify areas of weakness for the party and the candidate and can alert the cell members to stealthily increase their campaigning. The Reach module automatically sends out data to all the cell members that can be used to influence their people. The data includes intelligent, independent style essays on health and the economy and other issues that concern the electorate as well as issues that the electorate should feel concerned about. Issues that the party and the candidate has the best solution for. All these essays would each match the plans of the party and the candidate. None of these essays would ever be linked to the party or the candidate. It is understood they would remain private but can be used as thought pieces in conversations and communications with swing voters. They can also be rehashed to be used in blog posts. As well as serious essays, the data sent would also include summaries of embarrassing episodes on the opposition parties and local candidates, inconsistencies with previous statements from the opposition, spin to be used to combat negative publicity for the party and candidate they're supporting and it will also include jokes, pictures and videos which make a mockery of the opposition and which can be passed on to friends.

2. Profile your candidates and the opposition - Tracker

Software solutions exist which allow you to monitor the web for people. Sites like PoliticsInIreland.com track TDs and candidates and monitor the web for what is being said about them. The engine behind PoliticsInIreland can be used as a whitelabel Web monitor for existing TDs as well as candidates. The Tracker module of E.A.B. does something along the same lines as PoliticsInIreland but also has a manual input for non-Internet tracking which still comprises the majority of coverage, especially in local papers and local radio. The Tracker system builds a profile of a candidate which includes a timeline. Auto and manual tagging also allows you to read their views on all the policies of a party and issues the

public care about. Some manual intervention is needed to point out the inconsistencies from a candidate and how their views change over time.

Radio and TV: The Tracker system records all news current affairs radio programmes on national and local radio. It does the same for news and current affairs TV shows. These are all kept for 3 months before being archived out of the system. All of these shows can be tagged manually and the timelines also can have notes attached to them. If they are tagged, they are kept in the main system and linked to the party and candidate profiles.

Papers and pamphlets: Local papers, freesheets and even pamphlets will not be in electronic form. Here volunteers will either scan in articles from or by candidates as well as their pamphlets or else they can post them off to someone else with a scanner. When scanned in using a local version of E.A.B. Tracker, the images are uploaded to a central E.A.B. server which runs character recognition software and creates an electronic text version of the articles. Again, all of these can be auto and manually tagged and are linked to the profiles.

The Tracker module and the profiles it creates is linked to the Reach module and so it will automatically send updates on candidates to each cell member. When policy inconsistencies and gaffs are spotted a special alert is sent out. The Tracker database can also be used to supply sympathetic media outlets and bloggers with "attack" information on opposition candidates.

3. Manipulate the media and blogs - True Voice

The E.A.B. system's True Voice module makes it much easier to manipulate call-in shows, letters to editors and blog comments. True Voice is of course connected to the Tracker system and the Reach system. The True Voice module itself is split into various submodules which allow the easy manipulation of opinions. First it has a detailed database of the contact points for every media outlet both email, post and text number and can send opinions to all of these outlets automatically.

The True Voice application can randomly generate hundreds of opinions ranging from semi-neutral to very pro-candidate and pro-party. An easy drop down list allows you to generate opinions on specific topics but an AI like engine can also take a human typed opinion and from it create dozens of opinions along the same lines but rewritten to be practically unique. It can do this for text messages, for emails and for letters to the editor which are printed out and posted. The module generates fake names and locations but it also relies on real email addresses so that if a media outlet replies, they will not be told the email account does not exist. The True Voice system will rely on gmail, yahoo, Hotmail,eircom.net and iol.ie addresses. It is intelligent enough to not use the same email address when sending opinions to news outlets again and again. Meaning the Last Word won't see John from Sligo emailing in every second day.

The SMS module:

It is scarily easy to fake text messages from anyone. The SMS protocol is as insecure as the email system. As a result True Voice randomly generates mobile numbers which look valid and send messages from these numbers to the various call-in shows on Irish radio and TV. For some shows that send an auto-reply, a bank of numbers of real numbers are instead used. These numbers are taken from sim cards purchased from all 3 mobile phone companies from dozens of outlets around the country.

The Email module:

Like the SMS module, this takes the autogenerated opinions and sends them into the call-in shows as opinion. In addition this sends letters to the editor of all the print publications.

The Voice module:

Using new phone technology, this system will ring volunteers through an automated system, will explain what the show is about and what opinions are needed and then will give the option of connecting to the show or declining the invite to give an opinion. "Press 1 to connect to Right Hook or press 2 to decline".

The Web module:

Something like the text module but instead for leaving blog comments and also comments on discussion forums. The Tracker module will alert the system as to what blogs and discussion forums are currently discussing your candidate. Since those wiley bloggers are a clever lot, the web modules will have a list of IPs/proxies that can be used so as not to bring suspicion to the automated system. The web module will have a database of discussion sites available as well as up to half a dozen usernames which can be used on that each site. While opinions are autogenerated, it will still need a human to press the publish button here to ensure that what is being posted appears to be natural and is being posted in the most appropriate area.

4. Embargo day - Embargo

The day before an election sees a ban on election reporting and advertising in the media. This does not apply to the online world and in reality can never do so since you might be able to embargo Irish websites but not websites outside of the country. The Embargo module will be used to leak a sensational story about a competitor which can be perpetuated online but cannot be covered in print or on radio and TV. Every gaff and inconsistency from a candidate should be lined up and ready to go. One page fact sheets on the parties should will be sent out to all cell members and sympathetic bloggers which contain information on "flip flopping" and scary facts on parties. The Embargo module can suggest create draft blog posts to cell members with blogs and can be lined up from 10pm before the embargo. The module will also send automated emails and text messages out to people with details on controversial stories with the return address of the cell members. With a traditional media blackout, it means that there is no ability for a candidate to counter these claims until the morning of an election.

Advertising should be ramped up on Embargo day too since people will probably be going online that day for election information. Ads connected directly to the candidate can be released as well as ads not connected to the candidate at all. This is for ads linked to search results. However Google and the other online ad companies list which sites are part of their advertising networks and so you can line up 24hour only campaigns to start on embargo day with ads tailored to youth sites, health sites, babycare sites and so forth. These ads would concentrate on issues which will influence these audiences. Politics sites themselves should be avoided for advertising as they are full of politics junkies and their self-indulgent fantasies.

5. Election day - Traffic Module

Before election day, each cell member will create a list of people in their constituency that they know. This includes those they are meant to be influencing as well as any more they think they should be calling. On election day the Traffic module, using the same idea as the Voice Module in part 3, will call each cell member and ask them do they want to connect to X, Y,Z and chat to them about voting, it will base the calling list on exit polls at the various polling stations. Before you connect it will tell you where their polling station is and any other information too. It will also highlight one or two facts that can be used to sway them. The automated system will also have an option to "Ring me back later" and "I've done enough, please see can someone else phone the rest".

The same system will also ring during the day and will call out a text message it wants to send out to all your "friends" on behalf of you. It will ask you do you want this sent out. You press a button to say yes or no. Alternatively you can write a text and text it to a special number hooked into the Traffic Module. You will then be called by the Traffic Module do you want to send it to all your friends, once confirmed, it will be sent out to everyone.

Later in the day, the system will switch and start targeting anyone in any area, again depending on exit polls. A much larger database will be used for this and it will be crosschecked with the databases of contacts from every cell member and any number there not called will be be put on a "do call" list. Cell members and volunteers will be called at home and connected to these numbers, again with some profile data given out before the call is connected. After the call ends, a callback will ask if the person appeared to interested in voting or whether they had or not, depending on the election it will ask whether that person requires to be collected and brought to the polling station. Again, all automated.

