Editorial

netWorker

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Securing the Vote

Given the constant, 24/7 clamoring of election-related news this year, it's hard to explain how little attention is being paid to the topic that will likely take over the airwaves once the presidential election actually takes place—the flaws that remain in our largely electronic voting systems.

As journalist Laurie Rowell points in this issue's cover story, "Down For the Count?," it has been four years since ACM, the non-profit educational society that publishes this magazine, issued objective, non-partisan policy recommendations delineating the many shortcomings and failures of today's digital voting systems. Little has changed since then. Battleground states Florida and Ohio stand among many trying to back away from touch-screen voting machines, but what alternatives are available to them? The truth is that optical scanner systems, with a paper trail or without, are as easily hacked as touch-screen machines.

Fortunately there are some talented researchers working to solve this problem, at least for the long-term. One of our favorite developing systems, Scantegrity, works as an add-on to optical scanner systems. Though still in the early stages of design, it involves printing extra symbols on paper ballots, which lead to encrypted voter receipts, optional online vote-verification, and a specific voter-dispute resolution procedure. Doesn't each of those beautiful phrases ring out like bells of freedom across the land?

If I were a computer science student in 2008, I would be tempted to specialize in voting-system design. This is one problem that's going to be with us for a very long time.

Ken Korman,
Executive Editor

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