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## The evolving trend of e-voting

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**T**he next municipal election is one year away (minus one day), and it seems that “silly season” has begun. Redbrick President Brian Lambie fielded his first angry call on Friday. This one was from a resident certain that her municipality’s plan for electronic voting was a plot by both Council and the CAO to take away her vote. As the Association of Municipalities of Ontario’s media relations agency, Redbrick staff take our share of odd phone calls. This probably won’t be the last one about the “e-vote.” In 2014, nearly 100 Ontario municipalities used some form of online/electronic voting, and we expect numbers to grow in 2018.

We live so much of our lives online, that voting just seems like a natural extension of that life. It offers an amazing opportunity to improve turnout by making voting easy and convenient.

But it is not without its challenges. Trust and integrity in the voting system is the bedrock of democracy. Having a comprehensive communications plan to introduce and support online voting is essential. This year, given the buzz about elections, the internet, and online security (Equifax, anyone?) municipalities will need to invest even more in communicating the reliability of their online voting systems.

It will be critical to engage early and often with your community. You need



to use all available channels – paid ads, earned media and social media – to generate awareness and engagement on all the steps in casting an electronic vote. Redbrick’s annual Municipal Social Media Survey has found that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most popular social media channels for local government information and services. Video in particular is a great tool to do quick and compelling explainers and reminders that can be shared easily. There are a number of easy-to-use video technologies that often require little more than an iPad and a tripod.

A robust issues management plan is essential. The plan should include ways for staff to monitor and share direct feedback from the public or candidates, track social media comments and monitor media coverage. An issues plan provides messaging for potential problems so you can respond quickly

to matters as they come up. It should also arm frontline workers with clear instructions as to who to notify if there is a complaint, technical glitch or other possible concerns from voters, candidates or the media. All staff may need extra communications and support, as the election period brings about added scrutiny, complaints and sometimes even verbal attacks by members of the public. Brian may be able to handle angry voter calls, but for staff it can be much more personal and difficult to handle.

Clerks across Ontario are embracing new technologies to deliver transparent elections and improve voter turnout. Their success depends on an effective communications plan that supports these efforts. To learn more, contact [tayabali@redbrick.ca](mailto:tayabali@redbrick.ca) and [join our network](#) to receive occasional articles and updates from Redbrick.