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New Voting Interfaces Spring Up

By *Brian Watson Special To Interactive Week*, [Interactive Week](#)

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With national controversy still swirling over a Palm Beach County, Fla., ballot some voters believe confused them into voting for Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan instead of Al Gore, the problem of antiquated voting systems has never come under more scrutiny.

But some voters around the country seem quite satisfied with their selections, thanks to new electronic voting interfaces that are making the process more efficient and understandable.

In Thurston County, Wash., the nation's first online balloting was held in conjunction with Washington state's Feb. 29 presidential primary. In an official [review](#), the county auditor, Sam S. Reed, pointed out the possibility of some security problems, but reported that 93 percent of participating voters felt comfortable with the security measures.

And last week, VoteHere.net, a Bellevue, Wash.-based secure Internet voting firm, teamed up with Compaq Computer to offer nonbinding online voting in Arizona and California, using new, high tech voting interfaces.

According to Jim Adler, VoteHere's chief executive and co-founder, the respective secretaries of state were quite satisfied with the pilot programs. "The tabulation process went very fast, and they're all looking to deploy this in the next election," he said. "There's certainly room for improvement in online elections, and that's what we're working on."

Adler said his company "treats an election system like any other mission-critical system - it has to work," which entails guarding against internal and external interference.

Adler believes that security must be a top priority for online elections due to its evolutionary nature. "It's important that a system defines security from the start. If you can't keep them secure, how can you keep voting secure?"

To be effective, Adler said, the mainframes must protect the secret ballot, protect

against fraud and be able to be audited.

Sean Grady, a logistics execution consultant at SAP America, found the new voting interface in his Coppell, Texas, polling station to be a breath of fresh air. He likened the new "user friendly" system to a PalmPilot.

Grady was given a serialized cartridge that he entered into a flat-paneled device. The flat screen was then activated, and Grady cast his ballot using a stylus. He said the entire process took about five minutes.

"I would think it's about time," Grady said about the new voting innovations.

"There are so many basic things you can do with the Internet and computers, so it doesn't surprise me that voting might be next."

Grady said he felt extremely comfortable with the system and wasn't worried about security issues. "With this interface there were no problems like that," he said. "I feel secure about putting my credit card online, so why would I have a problem with voting?"