

Cedarville University A Major Player in Ohio's Election Tallying Efforts | Public Relations

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Cedarville, Ohio—While the world awaited results from Ohio's election tallies, Dr. Alan Dillman, a Cedarville University faculty member, was helping Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell accurately count the votes. Blackwell has prided himself on building the finest technology infrastructure of any state and raising the technology bar for all secretary of state offices nationwide. His technology strategy was never more public than on election night. Dillman, along with a cast of faculty, staff, and students, played key roles in making Ohio's election a success. Dillman is an associate professor of management information systems (MIS) and one of the principles in Government Consulting Resources, Ltd. (GCR), a professional services firm which had the contract to build, test, and manage Ohio's election night Web site. Dillman personally led the effort from the GCR side, teaming with key members of Blackwell's staff. Additionally, GCR teamed with several other firms — including key players such as GovTech Solutions, which performed the software development — to deliver the end result. SmartTech provided the backup and additional system capacity, and Mercury Interactive performed the stress testing. The 2004 presidential election kept many people awake into all hours of the morning combing the Ohio Secretary of State's Web site to see the results as each Ohio county reported their tallies. The Ohio Secretary of State's Web site received more than 29 million hits from more than 90 countries. Dillman said, "According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) BlogDex ranking, the Ohio Secretary of State's Election Night 2004 Race Summary Web site was the sixth most popular, most contagious link circulating the entire blog-o-sphere universe for the 24-hour period surrounding the election. With all of that activity, users experienced an average response time of around two to 12 seconds — depending on how much information they were requesting." Dillman explained, "The key to the site's success was the planning, testing, and monitoring of the site. Working with the secretary of state's office, the GCR team constructed the site and performed stress tests to estimate the site's capacity. Then during election night, the GCR team worked side-by-side with the secretary of state's staff to monitor and adjust the site's performance throughout the night." "Key to monitoring the site was what is known as Point of Presence (POP) monitors," Dillman explained. "In essence, these are people who actually use the Web site throughout the night and monitor the activities and performance of the site. A broad range of Cedarville University business faculty, staff, and students participated as POP monitors throughout the evening. Every 15 minutes they tested every link on the site for speed and accuracy of display, then reported these results back to the secretary of state's election night operations. If the slightest blip was happening in the system, we knew about it almost immediately thanks to the efforts of the Cedarville people," said Dillman. "We received early warning of usage surges and how the system performed on various types of machines," he continued. "This was essential to success as the Web site took on extremely heavy loads at three key points during election night." Dillman said the first warning came from POP monitors around 7:30 p.m. on election night. Some pages were showing a slight slowdown. Shortly thereafter the system monitors showed a huge spike from hundreds of users to around 100,000 within a five-minute time frame. Dillman added that at first the

team was concerned about the possibility of a denial of service attack, but they soon discovered that another Web site had posted a link to their site, driving users to their site. The second wave hit around 11:15 p.m. when news media from around the country began reporting that Ohio would be the key state in the election. "Again, the POP users and particularly the Cedarville participants were right on top of the situation by indicating some intermittent slowdowns in response time," said Dillman. This proved to be an early warning as hundreds of thousands of users began accessing the Web site for information. Blackwell's staff and the GCR team went into action executing their plan to, in essence, double the Web site's ability to support the demand. "Timing was impeccable as the peak for evening hit at 11:45 p.m. and the system was running like a champ," said Dillman. The system kept running through the early morning hours as users from around the world looked to Ohio for their election results. "Mr. Blackwell took center stage many times that evening on major news networks, and each time he was able to report the most current and accurate results of the Ohio election," explained Dillman. "Mr. Blackwell's goal of a fair, honest, and accurate vote in Ohio was achieved through, arguably, his management of the best-run election in U.S. history, and thanks, in part, to the efforts of the faculty, staff, and students of Cedarville University." -30-



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