

Candidates wasting value of websites

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Elections, which can be as dull as a long drink of warm water, can be exciting on the Web. This year, for instance, the South Korean president snatched victory from the jaws of defeat by mobilizing support by creative use of the Internet.

Having looked at election websites in Canada, the U.S. and England, I find it fascinating to see how candidates either understand how to use them, or fail miserably.

What should one expect in Calgary then, a city with the highest percentage of internet users in the country, (according to Statistics Canada) and where 75 per cent of households have at least one person using it regularly? Do most people running for alderman, mayor or school trustee use the Web to its full advantage?

By no means. Some of them are a joke, while others simply waste the time of anyone who seeks them out.

Thirty-seven people are running for alderman. Of these, only 24 even have websites, only eight of which provide enough information to allow voters to make an informed decision. The rest are slow loading, have bad background colours that make the pages hard to read, and generally provide little or no real information about issues, or where the candidate stands.

Talk about wasting the most cost-effective way to let people know where you are on the issues and what you're all about, something somebody with no party support can hardly afford to do.

Take the race in Ward 3, where 11 people are running to replace retiring John Schmal. Only eight of these candidates even have websites, and finding them can be a real challenge.

Only four of these websites are listed on the City of Calgary's candidate list website (Helene Larocque, Lynn Martin, Naheed Nenshi and Jim Stevenson).

Another four have listed their websites on posters, and other signs (Jim Stevenson, Naheed Nenshi, Francis Byron and Allan Hunter). Unfortunately, the address is easily readable on only one of them, Jim Stevenson's.

Two candidates have put up special signs listing their websites, as if this were an afterthought intended to correct a mistake in their earlier publicity (David Heyman and Helene Larocque).

Thus, out of the eight candidates, only two of their websites are relatively easy to find (Jim Stevenson and Francis Byron).

The other main problem with candidates' websites is their lack of visual quality, and that most contain very little information.

So, here's my ranking. Only two candidates seem to have taken the internet seriously, David Heyman (www.davidheyman.ca) in Ward 3 and Linda Fox-Mellway (www.lindafox-mellway.ca) in Ward 14. They have outstanding websites.

Another six candidates deserve honorable mention, for putting in at least some effort. They are Gordon Lowe - Ward 2 (www.gordlowe.org), Helene Larocque - Ward 3 (www.voteforhelene.com), Jim Stevenson - Ward 3 (www.votejim.ca), Ray Jones - Ward 5 (www.aldermanjones.ca), Joe Ceci-Ward 9 (www.gowithjoe.ca), and Diane Danielson - Ward 10, (www.dianedanielson.ca)

If the election turned on websites, they'd be in - simply because they have made an effort to tell voters what they stand for, and why they ought to be elected, by making an effort to have a website that is simple, effective and informative.

This is the 21st century. Anyone seeking office should put some time into creating a great website. Why wouldn't you?

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