



SOCIAL MEDIA ELECTIONS REACHING OUT

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- Increase citizen awareness and engagement during election campaigns
- Focus on increasing voter turnout, not taking political positions
- Offer a neutral platform for politicians
- Pay special attention to young voters

FIND OUT MORE FROM OUP

- Measure your Social Media Maturity on <http://www.socialmediamaturity.eu/en>
- Refine your strategies in our Social Media game on <http://www.socialmediagame.net/>

More opinions, case studies and stories at <http://www.opening-up.eu/content/social-media>

Election time is when politicians have the best chance to grab attention. They take part in open debates on radio, TV and at local venues. They tour about, meeting people to listen to their concerns and explain how their policies will help. They participate in “hustings” where the public can put them on the spot.

But there is nothing quite like door-to-door canvassing: face-to-face, one-to-one conversations with people about the issues they deal with every day.

Social media offers a similar level of connection between politicians and citizens. Conversations –whether on a Facebook wall or via 140 character tweets – feel personal and they take place within the context of the citizen’s everyday life, not a one-off meeting.

But here’s the catch: most local politicians and councillors do not have large social media followings. And the people who do follow them are probably not the people they most want to meet.

The Opening Up project has found that the municipality can make a big contribution to citizen engagement and participation at election time. People agree that the municipality’s social media presence should be politically neutral, but with a diverse, large and local following, it is the very audience that every election candidates seeks.

There are plenty of options, ranging from Facebook live web streams of election meetings to dedicated Facebook pages where candidates can respond to citizen’s questions. The town or city’s social media election campaign needs good promotion and careful management; it must also appeal to users – politics for politics sake is still unlikely to attract the crowds. But there’s no doubt that social media can create a buzz that leads to votes.



NAME: Birgitte Ståde, Communications Consultant, Høje-Taastrup, DK

MUNICIPALITY: Høje-Taastrup

PULL QUOTE: **"VOTER TURNOUT HAS RISEN, THANKS IN PART TO FACEBOOK"**

TURNOUT TRIUMPH

Municipal elections are about the citizen's everyday life and if people do not vote, local democracy loses its legitimacy as councils will not have the mandate to govern. But voter turnout at municipal elections in Denmark has been in decline for some years, causing grave concern among local councils and the national government.

But thanks in part to Facebook, we have reversed the trend. Turnout in 2013 rose to 69%, up from 65% for the previous election in 2009.

We ran a campaign to raise awareness among voters of the forthcoming election and encourage them to vote. The initiative included lots of practical posts: "Have you received your voter card?" or "See which candidates you can vote for".

The Facebook team also ran posts in the spirit of Facebook: funny pictures and "must share" messages. These included a series of 'behind the scenes' posts to highlight some of the unsung heroes who make elections go smoothly – like Jeanette from the canteen preparing food for all the polling station workers. In partnership with the local newspaper, we arranged a big, well-attended public meeting with the main candidates. The meeting was streamed live on the Facebook-page and the municipal website. Around 350 people watched the video live, and nearly 500 more watched it after the event. Before and during the debate the citizens could ask questions to the politicians via the Facebook-page. During the evening questions and comments poured in. We also updated the Facebook page with photos and small stories from the meeting.

On the day of the election we posted stories from polling stations and dealt with election-related queries and questions. During the day we posted updates on voter participation and during the whole evening we continuously posted the results as they came in. We received excellent feedback from citizens on this service.



NAME: Groningen, Netherlands

For the municipal elections in 2014, Groningen launched a major digital campaign to increase voter turnout, especially among young people.

The campaign spanned many digital channels (plus a printed newspaper and a 'Stemwijzer' website) to reach all target groups. Alongside media messages the city also set up a special webcare team to answer citizen questions.

A new Facebook page targeted young people who could enter a contest to upload a video to convince their peers to vote. The videos got a total of 6.000 views.

WHAT THEY SAY

"SOCIAL MEDIA IS A STRONG WAY TO RAISE AWARENESS OF ELECTIONS AND TO RAISE THE VOTER TURNOUT."

Mayor Michael Ziegler, Høje-Taastrup, Denmark



