

Posted date: 10/2/2006

Everyone Counts Says Everyone Counts at the Internet Polling Booth

Business Sees 100 Percent Revenue Increase In First Month of 2007 Fiscal Year

BY AMY YARNALL

Connecting people and changing lives by ensuring verifiable voting results is what Everyone Counts Inc. plans to do for the private sector.

The privately owned company serves public and private companies and some government agencies.

The online voting business seeks to connect remote voters scattered worldwide.

“It costs us less than half the cost of running a paper election,” Lori Steele, chief executive officer of the company for about a year, said.

Steele declined to divulge software costs.

A paper election costs approximately \$4 to \$7 per voter according to the International Foundation For Elections Systems, based in Washington, D.C.

There are no software uploads to a company terminal and the software is user-friendly; with the click of mouse the chief executive officer, chief financial officer or marketing professional can go to an election spreadsheet where they can create an election or survey.

“We use the software as a service model, charge an annual service fee,” he said.

With eight employees in San Diego, a subsidiary in the United Kingdom and in Melbourne, Australia, the company is growing rapidly.

Clients include the United Kingdom’s Department of Constitutional Affairs, Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., trade unions and credit unions.

“We (at Everyone Counts) learned early on that if you keep beating your head against the government wall, then you’ll eventually go out of business,” Steele said.

“This is a multi-billion-dollar industry,” added Steele.



Lori Steele

In July, its first month of fiscal 2007, Everyone Counts grew 100 percent in revenue. At this rate Steele said the company is expected to grow 400 percent by the end of 2007.

They do not disclose revenues.

“We’ve already booked 100 percent for just July, and it’s really exciting,” Steele said. “I’ve been saying this is the tipping point and I think this year is it.”

The company moved its headquarters from Melbourne to San Diego in January.

It was a “smart choice and plus I didn’t want to leave San Diego if I didn’t have to, I just love it here,” said Steele.

She said she travels about half the time for Everyone Counts and enjoys it.

“I guess when you love what you do, then it’s not really work,” Steele said.

Going Global

After a move to San Diego, the “new” Everyone Counts began servicing a global market.

“The voting system was used for our national board elections in 2000,” Barbara J. Thompson, senior manager for KPMG, AU, said.

KPMG is an international corporation that provides audit, tax and advisory services and has 14 offices in Australia and more than 300 partners and 4,000 employees

The firm used a preferential voting system, but with the growing number of partners, it was becoming strenuous to input a myriad of ballots.

The Everyone Counts’ voting system was used in the firm’s elections of the national chairman, national board and the remuneration committee.

Proving that Internet voting is a viable option for people is a challenge for Steele.

Voting needs to be transparent — crystal clear results, with no room for error.

Seeking Perfection

“With the Internet, people expect the voting system to be perfect,” Steele said. “But not with anything else; others outside the United States have a better understanding of what using the Internet can do for them.”

This year, the Democratic National Committee announced it is going to allow online voting for the party-run caucus.

“Voter turnout is going down all over the world, except in emerging countries,” Steele said. “What we’ve found is that people begin to take their vote for granted or think their vote doesn’t count.

The recent election in Mexico was a nice example for how one vote does make a difference,” said Steele.

“Believe it or not, corporate elections are quite political, Steele said.

Since there aren’t many labor unions left, Steele said the unions have to work hard to take care of their members.

“She’s a wonderful person, to be frank, she would succeed in any business,” Tony Palchek of Motorola Ventures, Schaumburg, IL, said of Steele. “She’s smart, entrepreneurial, and a risk taker.”

Motorola Ventures is the investment arm of the wireless and broadband communications corporation.

Having met through a mutual friend, Steele and Palchek began discussing business tactics and techniques in 2004 and as Steele’s vision grew, Palchek shared his knowledge with her.

“I do a lot of research for my job, and when she was just going over the concept for her business, I shared with her what I learned, helped her adjust her views and understand the market,” Palchek said.

After that, Palchek said Steele took what she had learned, believed in it and grew her business.

Her vision for the company came almost as an epiphany one day at a U.N. conference

Previously an investment adviser for more than 20 years, Steele, was at the U.N. International Telecommunications Union in Geneva, speaking at a youth forum about social entrepreneurialism.

Social entrepreneurialism is a way of investing resources into causes that can make a meaningful difference and make a company economically viable.

Back in California, the recall of Gov. Gray Davis was under way and Arnold Schwarzenegger was the top candidate.

“We were having polling errors with filling in the bubbles correctly — it was then I realized America was ready for a change,” Steele said.

“Democracy would work better with the right technology.”

To Profit Or Not?

The grueling question was figuring out whether the company should be nonprofit or for-profit.

“I realized it didn’t have to be a not-for-profit and that it could be a for-profit company with e-democracy. I could still do a good thing and make a profit.”

E-democracy combines technology with voting, connecting corporate officers, shareholders, elected representatives and citizens internationally.

Quitting her financial investment job to focus all her energies on Everyone Counts was a risk Steele was willing to take.

“I quit to make it happen; you pretty much have to jump off a cliff, if you will,” Steele said.