

Political Web sites' sophisticated technology continues to grow

Read Mark Scarp's blog, "Scarpsdale," at <http://blogs.evtrib.com>.
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As the current presidential campaign is often waged on YouTube, it really should be no surprise to see more sophisticated Web sites making their way into Scottsdale city politics. Mayor Mary Manross, who is seeking a third term, unveiled hers Friday.

The Internet isn't new in local politics, of course. Former Mayor Sam Campana said Friday she had an elemental site when she ran 11 years ago.

Even so, to look at Manross' classy-looking site felt as though we've come into a bit of a new era. Maybe it's the American flag waving behind its top-of-the-home-page photo of Manross that has you swear you're hearing "Hail to the Chief" playing. Check it out at www.marymanross.com.

How far we've come since 1996, when Campana was Scottsdale's first special-effects candidate. She attracted interest — and criticism — when she ran ads on local movie-theater screens depicting then-retiring Mayor Herb Drinkwater's face morphing into her own.

Campana said her Web site of a decade ago was markedly simpler than today's.

"I think one person looked at it every day. And two dozen really nerdy people would e-mail us — and we were happy to have the nerd vote," said Campana, who left office in 2000 and today is executive director of the wildlife protectionist nonprofit Audubon Arizona.

"Four years is like three generations in that kind of technology. ... By the time I left, I was so old school I was nearly unemployable," she said.

Bob Grossfeld, president of the Scottsdale-based political consulting group The Media Guys, said a political Web site has become "the universal pamphlet," catering to voters' growing instincts to check out a candidate at his or her site rather than by telephoning a campaign headquarters.

And technology has made Web sites look sharper without requiring "a Ph.D. in Web development," he said. Grossfeld said he is not representing any candidates in the upcoming Scottsdale city elections.

The best political Web sites are interactive, Grossfeld said. Such sites allow give-and-take between increasingly savvy voters who have specific questions about candidates' views, he said, and those sites are superior to those without interactivity, what he called "one-way brochures."

City Councilman Jim Lane, who has formed a mayoral campaign exploratory committee, said he doesn't have a Web site but would if he decided to run. It's going to be more important now that city ordinances regarding political signs on public property have been toughened, he said.

"The Web site is the best place to refer people as an adjunct to signs, which we're not going to have as many of," he said.

Grossfeld said he produces online video for his political clients, which reaches voters far better than signs.

"We're tapping an area of the brain most people don't care much about — who to vote for," he said. "Not that they don't care, but for most people it's not something they'll get all jazzed about, at least not until 24 hours before the election."

On that day, he said, "everybody becomes an expert in public policy."

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