# ORCA

In the 2012 US Presidential election, the republican candidate Mitt Romney had his team develop an operational management system that would provide real time tracking of voter turnout in key states (Goatham, 2012). The intended purpose was to manage the logistics of their “get out the vote” push (a distinct phase in a political campaign where ones campaign supporters in vote) as the Election Day progressed. The system was fed real time data from volunteers at the polling stations through a web-based mobile app so that it could be gathered and read by campaign headquarters. The alternative to this system would be to carry out a series of phone calls or track news sites in order to identify low turnouts within certain precincts.

The system was designed not as a mobile app, but as a web application intended to be accessed on a mobile device. The system would show the names and addresses of each eligible voter for a specific precinct. Once a volunteer is logged on, they would slide a bar on the application to notify that the identified person has voted. The user also had access to notify the campaign’s lawyers if there were illegal activity or issues with polling stations.

Volunteers experienced frequent problems on Election Day. The system crashed sporadically throughout the day as volunteers were attempting to log in. This created a huge surge in traffic, so much so that the campaign’s Internet Service Provider (ISP), Comcast terminated the network connection in belief that it was denial of service attack (Gallagher, 2012).

A few issues were only brought to the developer’s attention on Election Day. The system used an HTTP Secure connection but the developers had forgotten to redirect users who were attempting to use the HTTP address. Users who typed the address including the “www.” webserver host prefix were unable to reach the system, causing volunteers to think it was down. In order to log in, the user must enter their username and password along with a phone PIN. In one case, Colorado campaign officials reported that hundreds of volunteers were unable to log in, and the reset password tool was not working correctly. At 6 p.m. that day they admitted they issued the wrong PINs and reissued new PINs, which also didn’t work (Kranish, 2012). Volunteers who attempted to contact technical support were given a busy tone or a “try again later” message.

This system can be compared almost directly to the oppositions system, “Narwhal”. Narwhal had minimal complications on Election Day and attributed its success to its testing process. Obama’s campaign team held dress rehearsals for their system before its full use in November 2012. The ORCA system had not received extensive beta testing before Election Day and the campaign team also didn’t know how it would interact with the data infrastructure in their headquarters (Falcone, 2012). Another failure was that nobody notified their ISP to expect an increase in traffic or anticipated server loads. The development team were too dependent on the automated testing results rather than stress testing the system in its full operational environment. There was also a lack of risk management as the system deflected from the intended business goal. The failure to address these issues can drastically raise stress levels of the system at critical points in time and divert important resources away from core business functions, and will eventually lead to embarrassing end-goal failures.

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