5. Communication Services

Advertising Services

A new advertising campaign was a key feature of the VEC’s election communication in 2014. The animated campaign aimed to reflect the diversity of Victorian voters and emphasise the importance of every single vote. The majority of advertisements opened with an historical election statistic on close results. This concept tested well in research. The campaign was designed to be effective across a broad range of advertising platforms and featured on television, radio, online banners, social media, outdoor posters and billboards, in addition to the VEC’s website and campaign material.

Specific advertising content was developed for each key message during the election. Television advertisements were developed to address enrolment, early voting, voting with assistance, the importance of preferences and how to correctly complete the ballot papers. Additional advertisements to address more specific needs or legislative requirements were developed for various platforms. Sample advertisements from the campaign are included in Appendix 16.

The advertising placement strategy was developed with the intention of targeting areas and audiences that are typically under-represented in the democratic process. More capital was invested in social media than at any prior State election and services such as streaming media were included for the first time.

In line with Victoria’s Regional Communication Policy, more than 15% of the total advertising budget was allocated to the use of media outlets in regional areas. However, due to savings at the time of booking, the ultimate spend in regional areas was 14.05%.

As people from culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are much more likely to face barriers to the democratic process, the total advertising spend in CALD outlets was 10.15% of the total placement budget. This is more than double the proportion required by the Department of Premier and Cabinet’s Multicultural Communication Policy for Government agencies.

The VEC’s media buying agency advised that the VEC had exceeded its media targeting strategy in terms of reach and frequency of advertising. However, post-election research indicated that in virtually all voter groups, far fewer voters could recall having seen any advertising in traditional media (television, print and radio), especially compared with results in 2010. Upon further investigation, this result has been attributed to greater audience fragmentation in terms of media consumption i.e. there are many more media channels to cover than ever before – extra free-to-air TV, subscription services and online outlets. This will be taken into consideration in terms of future media buying strategies.

EasyVote Guide

From Friday 14 November, personalised EasyVote Guides were mailed to all voters on the electoral roll at the close of roll. For the 2014 election, the format of the EasyVote Guide was presented as two items – an A4 EasyVote Guide and a DL-size EasyVote brochure. The format was changed with a view to speed the printing time, to enable the product to be mailed earlier, with the result that mail-out of the product was able to commence within two days of the close of roll. The draft products were tested for ease of understanding and content with focus groups and rated extremely well with all audiences.

Information in the EasyVote Guide included voter-specific electorate and voting details on an EasyVote Card to take to the voting centre; the dates, times and voting locations for the election; information regarding the change of electoral boundaries; and accessibility ratings for each voting centre within the voter’s district. The EasyVote brochure provided information about early and postal voting options, accessibility supercentres and electronically assisted voting; instructions on how to correctly complete both ballot papers; and interpreter contact numbers for 20 languages other than English.

Communication Services for CALD Voters

The VEC offered translated information online, in text and audio format in 20 languages other than English, along with translated enrolment forms, which convert to English when printed. Specialist advice was sought from LEBA Ethnic Media to help ensure that the key messages from the advertising campaign reached non-English speaking voters across the State. Recommendations as to the most effective outlets for each language, along with translation and despatch services were received.

Press and radio advertisements constituted 68% and 23% of the total CALD advertising spend respectively. Victoria has a vibrant and diverse spectrum of in-language print publications and each key message from the advertising campaign was translated and published in as many languages as possible. Similarly, translated versions of each radio advertisement ran on recommended in-language radio shows throughout the campaign.

Online advertisements about enrolment and preferences were placed on in-language newspaper sites that have strong Victorian traffic. Similarly, key Facebook posts about enrolment were promoted to Victorian users who identified their preferred language as one of the 20 the VEC was targeting across the State.
Mobile Application – Vote Victoria

Building on the success of the mobile application (app) developed for the 2010 State election, the VEC engaged mobile development agency Mnet to produce an expanded product for mobile users for the 2014 State election.

Again under the name Vote Victoria, and also available for Android for the first time, the app utilised the enrolled address input by users and provided voting information, locations and reminders during the voting period. From 6.00 pm on election night the app delivered live first preference and two candidate preferred results, along with a State-wide summary and the facility to share the count status with friends via Facebook or Twitter.

The app was downloaded 16,255 times between 14 November and 19 December when it was removed from the Apple iTunes and Google Play stores. This was a three-fold increase over the 2010 mobile app, while registering an aggregate user rating of 3.6 out of a possible five stars across the two outlets. Usage analytics show that the app was accessed an average of 4.88 times per user for an average duration of over 32 minutes. Peak usage of the app was between 6.00 pm and 7.00 pm on election night, and the most viewed districts were those with close outcomes or unanticipated results: Prahran, Melbourne, Richmond, Brunswick, Frankston, Albert Park, Bentleigh and others. Although 99% of users were based in Australia, the app was also downloaded in 51 other countries around the world.

Social Media

In the four years since the 2010 State election, the VEC has built a strong presence on social media along with a reputation for responsive monitoring. Social media has evolved considerably in this time, with more platforms becoming significant in the market and responsive monitoring. Social media has evolved considerably in this time, with more platforms becoming significant in the market and responsive monitoring.

The VEC decided to focus its efforts on Facebook and Twitter, providing rich posts with content unique to the organisation. The VEC’s Facebook page-following increased by 36% and the @electionsvic handle was directly mentioned in 3,397 tweets. The VEC posted 478 tweets during the 2014 State election campaign. Fifty-two tweets were prepared in advance and the remaining 426 were direct responses to other users’ posts. More broadly, the State election, under the tag #VicVotes, was mentioned more than 20,000 times.

Activity that mentioned the @electionsvic handle grew throughout the campaign. Posts spiked noticeably on key dates in the election timeline: close of the roll, close of nominations, start of early voting and key result dates. As a general rule, VEC activity on Twitter had a response ratio of around 1:7, i.e. for every VEC post, users posted approximately seven times. The campaign was internally managed by the VEC’s small Communication Team and channels were monitored 16 hours a day to ensure elector’s posts were responded to as soon as possible.

Telephone Enquiry Service

The VEC conducted a tender process for the provision of an outsourced telephone enquiry service (TES), with Stellar Asia Pacific being the successful tenderer. The purpose of the TES was to cater for a high volume of public enquiries over a 9.5 week operational period – from 29 September through to 3 December 2014. See Figure 8 for statistics relating to the services provided by the Telephone Enquiry Service.

To help ensure high quality, accurate and appropriate content of responses, a VEC project team (project manager and three supervisors) worked onsite at Stellar’s South Yarra location. Operating hours for the TES were from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm weekdays (8.00 pm on close of roll day) from 29 September through to the commencement of early voting, when hours were adjusted to provide additional hours of service on weekdays and Saturdays.

The number of calls to the service in 2014 was 108,536, marginally more than in 2010 (106,784). The major difference in 2014 was the significant jump in the number of calls to the VEC head office from interstate and overseas callers who are not able to access the VEC’s 13 phone number from outside Victoria. In 2010, these calls numbered in the hundreds over the campaign period, whereas in 2014, more than 5,000 calls were taken from outside Victoria in the two weeks prior to Election Day. The VEC believes the reason for the increase in the number of calls from overseas and interstate was the ability to use telecommunications software to make calls with ease and without additional cost, using existing data allowances or free wifi locations.

| Calls handled by operators | 73,000 | 67.26% |
| Calls handled by auto-attendant | 30,728 | 28.31% |
| Calls abandoned | 3,033 | 2.79% |
| Diverted to voicemail | 1,775 | 1.64% |
| Total calls | 108,536 |
| Call handled through interpreter | 1,186 | 1.09% |
| Average call handling time | 294 seconds |
| Emails answered | 3,941 |
| Mail sent as result of enquiry | 11,778 items |

Figure 8: Statistics relating to the Telephone Enquiry Service, 2014 State election