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Scoring the e-lection

By Jason Wilson, Barry Saunders, Axel Bruns

This close to the election, it's customary for newspapers to recommend a vote one way or the other. We're not about to do that at Club Bloggery (although we would recommend thinking about the candidate who's been more responsive and available to your community), but we can do a summary of who has made the best running on the Internet, and understood and used its possibilities best.

In this spirit, we'd like to present our take on the losers, winners and those who have held steady on the net. This might not alter your vote, but it should give you pause: the Internet will only become more important in future campaigns, because for us "ordinary Australians", even those without reliable broadband access, the Internet is increasingly where we work, rest and play.

Losers

In general, it seems to us that the Internet as a campaigning tool really ambushed the conservative side of politics, but even the Nationals and Family First seem to do it better than the Liberals.

The PM's pre-campaign YouTube adventures – including the infamous "[Good morning](#)" salutation on his first effort – may have, as a novelty, gotten him some extra television time, but they showed how at sea the Liberals are with new media. They really didn't take account of the unique flavour of YouTube as a platform, and were staged in a familiar "campaign broadcast" style, that a lot of YouTube's users wouldn't even watch on television. The videos were [begging](#) for [satirical repurposing](#), and they duly received it.

Later in the campaign, Andrew Robb's adventures as a "[Google assassin](#)" similarly revealed that the Libs' didn't know how to use the web for political purposes. It was an odd reversal of a technique we'd used to break a story on [youdecide2007](#), but it backfired, and the [media turned](#) on the Libs for selling them a pup.

Any list of losers on the Internet front has to include The Australian. We'll need to wait until Saturday to be absolutely sure, but at this stage it looks as if they've been routed in the "[Poll Wars](#)" that we've already written about. The narrowings, bounces and corrections that they've predicted all year haven't arrived, and they've ceded enormous authority to the [psephologist bloggers](#) who appear to have called the result from a long way out. Their journalist, Caroline Overington, not content with sending ill-advised emails, has apparently now been [bullying bloggers](#) in order to contain the damage to her reputation. There will be some deep thought in Castle Oz after this election.

Steady

Who has come out even in this election? Kevin Rudd. Why? Because he carried out a pretty effective cross-platform branding exercise, but hundreds of thousands of people have seen him eating his [earwax](#). (Sorry, we couldn't resist the rhetorical questions). Rudd's presence across websites, social networking sites and banner ads was always under the sign of "[Kevin07](#)", and it was useful in painting him as the modern candidate of the future. With the Libs effectively abandoning the net as a campaigning space, it will be interesting to see how many votes Rudd's picked up among those most likely to access political information online. But earwax? No, Kevin, noooooo.....

Most of the minor parties have held steady, too. They have more to gain from online forums and new media exposure than the big parties – hence their ready embrace of forums such as ours over at [youdecide2007](#). Initiatives like the [Greensblog](#) are welcome, and will make a difference in future campaigning and policy-formation, but arguably they're too new at this

stage to have had a real impact on the campaign. The minor parties have also successfully embraced social networking services like Facebook, and candidates like the Greens' Larissa Waters now have more friends than they know what to do with. It will be interesting to see whether, post-campaign, they can use these intelligently, as a way of keeping in touch with their base.

Some online mainstream media sites – like news.com.au – have entrenched their positions as forums for often polarized debate among users, and gradually they have come to see the Internet as a place to break, rather than merely reprint stories.

Winners

In the media, it's hard to go past [ABC Online's](#) array of goodies as a salutary example of how to embrace the possibilities of the net. (We should remind everyone at this point that we are not ABC employees). They have opened up their site to a range of [expert and "colour"](#) writers, journalists have embraced the genres and practices of blogging, and as soon as a story has broken, you'll find it on the website. Resident pseph [Antony Green](#) has been given space and toys to draw in the political junkies, and all of the "old media" marquee programmes have streaming and downloadable video and audio. For many, the ABC News website is their first port of call for breaking stories.

As mentioned earlier, political bloggers – and particularly psephs – have had a win this election. Part of the reason that organs like the Oz are inspired to "go" them is that they are attracting the eyeballs of precisely the kind of niche, premium audience that the national broadsheet relies on, but risks alienating in its drift to the right. Every respectable political junkie now has [Possum](#), [LP](#) and [Poll Bludger](#) in their RSS reader – we'll see if the left-leaning political bloggers can keep it up if the Howard ascendancy ends on Saturday. We also need to think about how the blogosphere and citizen journalism can reach out beyond the political junkies, and engage with those people who K-Rudd was trying to talk to on Rove.

As far as polities go, for us it's hard to go past Senator [Andrew Bartlett's](#) blogging as an example of what political communication could be. Over several years, and then in the campaign, Senator Bartlett has diarised his work as a Senator, his policy deliberations, and has succeeded in giving his readers a pretty good idea of what kind of person he is. It's not spin – he's been brave enough to admit instances where he might have gotten things wrong, and has engaged in debate with his readers. We're not necessarily advocating a vote for him – Queensland voters should check out his policies for themselves before making a decision – but it would be sad if the Senator were to lose his seat this Saturday and there was no-one in the Parliament to continue this kind of experiment. Right now he's on a knife-edge: here's hoping that, win, lose or draw, he keeps up his exemplary blogging.

PS: if the coverage thus far has failed to make your mind up, pop over to [How Should I Vote](#) or News's interestingly named [YouDecide2007 Vote-a-matic site](#) to plug in your political ideals and see who you should vote for.

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