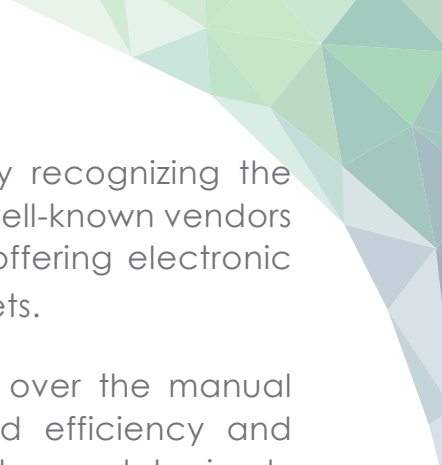# Taking Electronic Voting to the Next Level with Meeting Management

WHITE PAPER

Recognizing the evident inefficiency of manual voting, many organizations are opting to switch to electronic voting methods. However, when making such a switch, it is important to remember that not all electronic alternatives offer equal functionality, management options, and transparency.

This paper outlines the advantages, for both councilors and citizens, of adopting integrated meeting management voting over standalone devices.

Boards and councils across all public sectors are increasingly recognizing the inefficiency of traditional manual voting methods. Many large, well-known vendors of audio-visual equipment are capitalizing on this interest by offering electronic voting devices alongside their microphones and other AV widgets.

While such standalone voting tools may be an improvement over the manual approach, they still come nowhere close to the automated efficiency and transparency of integrated meeting management voting. It's not enough to simply collect and display each vote; unlocking the full potential of electronic voting requires the ability to record, process, publish and integrate those votes with other information in the board or council's meeting management system (MMS).

A Lone Vote

The fundamental limitation with such standalone voting systems is that they are completely separate from the organization's MMS. Votes may be registered electronically and displayed, but the voting tool does not put the results into the meeting minutes – and in fact, may not take into account all of the information needed to accurately determine the results of the vote. The Clerk responsible for the meeting must interpret and enter the votes into the meeting minutes manually. While that may not sound too difficult, it wastes time in an otherwise fast-paced meeting, and increases the risk of human error.

Knowing these limitations, why have some municipalities and school boards adopted standalone voting tools rather choosing an integrated approach with their meeting management platform? The answer often stems from failing to consider the Clerk's needs when outfitting or upgrading the council room. New builds and overhauls of council chambers are all too frequently viewed only from the perspective of the "AV user experience" of the most visible participants – the council or board members – rather than taking a holistic view of the entire meeting management process.

For example, when one municipal jurisdiction recently built new council chambers, the Clerk – who has responsibility for actually running the council meetings – was not consulted. As a result, the county ended up using completely separate systems for voting as well as tasks like webcasting and microphone control, even though their existing meeting management system offered tightly-integrated options for all of these functions.

Beyond the wastefulness of purchasing additional tools for capabilities already available through the meeting management platform, the result actually created more manual work for the Clerk, not less. While the councilors may like pressing a

red or green button on their AV panel to enter their vote, the Clerk's job would be much easier if they voted through a device like an iPad that would automatically enter the votes into the meeting management platform and compile the result.

Feature Disparity

In addition to the above efficiency obstacles, standalone electronic voting systems also typically have specific functional deficiencies when compared to integrated meeting management voting. These may include:

- **Voting modalities.** Voting on motions and agenda items isn't simply a matter of recording and counting votes – correctly interpreting the results is crucial. Not every vote is based on a simple majority; some may be weighted votes, while others may require a two-thirds super majority. Many standalone meeting management systems simply display the number of votes for and against, depending entirely on whomever is running the meeting to manually determine and record whether the item passes. Even worse are tools that automatically determine a result but assume that everything is a simple majority, leading it to possibly display the wrong result for other vote types. The ideal solution accommodates multiple voting types (including majority, weighted, super majority, unanimous, multiple-choice ballot and secret ballot), automatically interprets the result, and records it in the minutes.

- **Information display.** Showing the votes for and against on a screen in the council chambers is a good step towards increased transparency and accountability, but integrated meeting management voting can take the public presentation of information much further. The meeting management system can automatically display the motion or amendment under discussion while voting is taking place, providing valuable information to onlookers, and platforms with integrated webcasting capabilities can incorporate voting results into the live and recorded streams for online audiences.

- **Reporting and publishing.** As discussed earlier in this post, the inability of standalone electronic voting systems to automatically enter vote results into the meeting minutes or publish them online is a serious impediment to efficiency and transparency. Similarly, while such systems may be able to export an Excel spreadsheet or CSV file of individual votes, they have no formal historical reporting or search capabilities. In contrast, a robust meeting management system with integrated voting can provide a treasure trove of historical vote data, making it easy to review breakdowns of past votes or identify trends.

- **Pecuniary interest management.** With a meeting management solution, councilors can indicate conflicts of interest before or during the meeting, and they will automatically be stricken from related votes. (Depending on the jurisdiction, they may also be required to leave the room during the vote). With a standalone electronic voting system, there is no technical provision to prevent that person from registering a vote; pecuniary interests are handled entirely manually.

- **Chair tiebreaking and alternative chair control.** With a standalone voting system, chair tiebreaking must be manually managed. In contrast, with an MMS-based voting solution, the system will only allow the tiebreaking party to cast their vote if the original vote results in a tie. MMS-based voting also allows the current chair to assign the role to another participant if necessary, with the system automatically accounting for the "move" of the tiebreaking position.

- **Participant location and remote voting.** Standalone voting systems work best if each council member maintains the same seat each time in chambers, which is usually but not always the case. Integrated meeting management voting through a tablet-based application provides greater flexibility within the room, enabling participants to sit anywhere. And for jurisdictions that allow remote voting – in fact, many actually encourage it, particularly where bad weather frequently hinders in-person attendance – a meeting management solution with secure mobile apps enables off-site participants to vote in real time from anywhere.

- **Attendance management.** Beyond overall roll call, the voting system needs to accommodate very short-term absences – such as when a participant leaves the room temporarily because nature calls. While such variances must be accounted for manually with a standalone voting tool, a meeting management system can provide an easy means of checking members in and out of the voting pool. Similarly, the system can automatically display a warning if a quorum is not present, enabling the chair to determine whether to proceed with a vote anyways depending on the nature of the item.

The below table summarizes many of these functional differences. As you can see, from a meeting management and Clerk's perspective, standalone electronic voting systems offer only minimal gains over traditional manual voting. In contrast, an MMS-based voting solution can do everything that a standalone voting tool can do plus more, all in an automated manner that streamline the voting process; saves time during and after meetings; and minimizes the chance of errors.

eSCRIBE

	Manual Voting	Stand Alone Electronic Voting	Meeting Management integrated
VOTE MODALITIES			
Majority Votes	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Recorded Votes	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Weighted Voting	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Super Majority Voting	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Unanimous Voting	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Ballot Style	Manual	Manual	Automatic
PUBLIC DISPLAY			
Motion under discussion	✗	✗	✓
Amendment under discussion	✗	✗	✓
Result	✗	✓	✓
TRANSPARENCY			
Pecuniary Interest Management	Manual	✗	Automatic
Chair tiebreaking	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Alternative Chair Control	Manual	Manual	Automatic
CITITZEN PARTICIPATION			
Vote results in Minutes	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Vote results on Web	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Historical Reporting	Manual	Manual	Automatic
ATTENDENCE			
Roll Call	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Quorum Management	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Short term abscences	Manual	Manual	Automatic
Historical Reporting	Manual	Manual	Automatic

Vote for Efficiency

eSCRIBE's Vote Manager module offers a tightly-integrated solution to unlock the full potential of electronic voting. Working seamlessly within eSCRIBE's end-to-end meeting management platform, Vote Manager supports all major vote types, automatically incorporates results into the meeting minutes, and features intuitive management of roll call, pecuniary interests, tiebreaking and more. Participants can vote in real-time through a browser-based portal or optional iPad and Windows 10 mobile apps, and results can be publicly displayed in an enhanced graphical view within the council room and online.

Request a demo to see for yourself how eSCRIBE can take your voting processes to new levels of efficiency and transparency.

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