



The BlackBerry Edge

Hot new phones loaded with even hotter software are getting put through their paces this primary season.

When residents of Evesham, N.J., voted in May, Republican poll watchers checked off voters using pen and paper.

Their Democratic rivals brandished BlackBerries powered by software from a company called First Tuesday in November, a nonpartisan tech firm.

The Democrats won.

The BlackBerries may or may not have been the deciding factor, according to leaders in both parties. But Tom Wilson, chairman of the New Jersey Republican Party, isn't taking any chances.

The Garden State GOP quickly started using BlackBerries provided by First Tuesday in subsequent elections. Wilson has been impressed by the increased turnout—around 10 percent—among targeted voters. He plans to use the devices again this year.

“It’s not a silver bullet,” Wilson says. “But I think it’s got a tremendous amount of promise as a management tool.”

Volunteers use the devices to check off voters at the polls. The data can be uploaded instantly to campaign headquarters, where staffers can focus on calling supporters who have not yet voted. Each device’s phone is disabled to avoid becoming an unwelcome distraction at polling places.

Armed with BlackBerries of their own, street canvassers can download those same voter lists—letting them skip homes that have already voted, and visit more people who need extra encouragement to get to the polls.

And well before Election Day, staffers and volunteers can use the BlackBerries when going door to door, sending in instant requests for absentee ballots and yard signs, among other tasks.

First Tuesday began rolling out the technology in 2006, says David Cerrone, managing partner of the company in Galloway, N.J. The service, including hardware, costs about \$500 per voting precinct, Cerrone said. The company contracts with only one side in a given election. According to Cerrone, First Tuesday has been talking to the national parties, with hopes of doing bigger elections in 2008. ■

