

VOTE 2020

Automating vote-by-mail to improve integrity, security, turnout

There is always plenty of anticipation in a Presidential election year, and this year is no exception. Given the recent headlines about data breaches and security, much of the burden of that anticipation falls on election officials.

For many states, the voting process is shifting from in-person polling stations to absentee and vote-by-mail balloting. Voting by mail is increasing in popularity because it eliminates overcrowding at polling places, increases voter participation, improves ballot security, and creates a digital audit trail for transparency. Additionally, when you add automation to the vote-by-mail process, it can provide significant cost savings for election officials and minimize the potential for errors.

Security and accountability have never been more important to the voting process than now. State and county election organizations need to oversee the entire process of delivering mail ballots to voters. This includes from when ballots are printed, inserted into envelopes, addressed and delivered, to when they are received by the county for return ballot acceptance, signature verification, and sorting by district or batch level for counting purposes.

One of the largest counties in the United States, Orange County in California employed “Amazon-like” processing for secure inbound and outbound tracking of mail ballots. The solution includes detailed audit trails of mail ballots as they leave the county facility, arrive at USPS, and return to the facility.

“The ability to track mail ballots to the voter, and back from the voter, is a very important element for ensuring transparency in the process. It also provides the voters with an extra level of confidence in the system that their ballot was deliv-



ered and counted,” said Neal Kelley, Chief Election Official of Orange County Registrar of Voters.

It provides a measure of confidence for voters. Are they getting the right ballot in the envelope? Are the ballots getting back to the county, so that they know their votes are being counted? Knowing that this integrity and tracking exists should go hand-in-hand with voting itself.

Why is that level of integrity important?

Elections officials need to demonstrate end-to-end tracking, auditing and monitoring across the lifecycle of a mailed ballot. What voters contest that they never actually received their ballots? Not being able to demonstrate transparency and accountability undermines the ability of elections officials to do their job properly.

It also goes beyond tracking the envelope. States and counties need to audit what is inside the envelopes. They need to ensure that each ballot sent includes

The BlueCrest Relia-Vote solution at Orange County is an integrated print and mail solution that includes the IntelliJet 20 HD printing system, which ensures high print quality and readability of ink—particularly important to ensure consistently high-quality ballot barcodes.

It also includes the Mailstream Productivity Series inserting system with Print+ Response inline printing system, which provides high integrity, high-speed inline return envelope printing, and precision processing of mail pieces and content.

Key to the system is the file-based processing that verifies the content of every mail piece is accurate.

The Vantage high-speed sortation system, featuring SortEngine 360 software, performs multiple checks including voter validation, USPS Intelligent mail barcode compliance of the outgoing ballots, outbound/inbound tracking of mailpieces, as well as sorting to the precinct or district level, and validating voter signature on the returned ballot using inline Automated Signature Validation (ASV) software.

Lower costs when you increase automation

With automation comes savings. Orange County is realizing a significant return-on investment with the Relia-Vote system as a result of less manual processing, fewer human errors, and reduced facility space needed to process large volumes of mail ballots.

Extending automation to other processes, such as adding sorter tray rack systems to help remove the mail from the sort bins, can further improve workflow and minimize worker fatigue driving additional efficiencies and savings. Mail Automation Incorporated (MAI) provides Tray Rack Systems that help operators efficiently sweep the mail from the sorter bins when they are full.

As municipalities look to add automation and capabilities, here are three

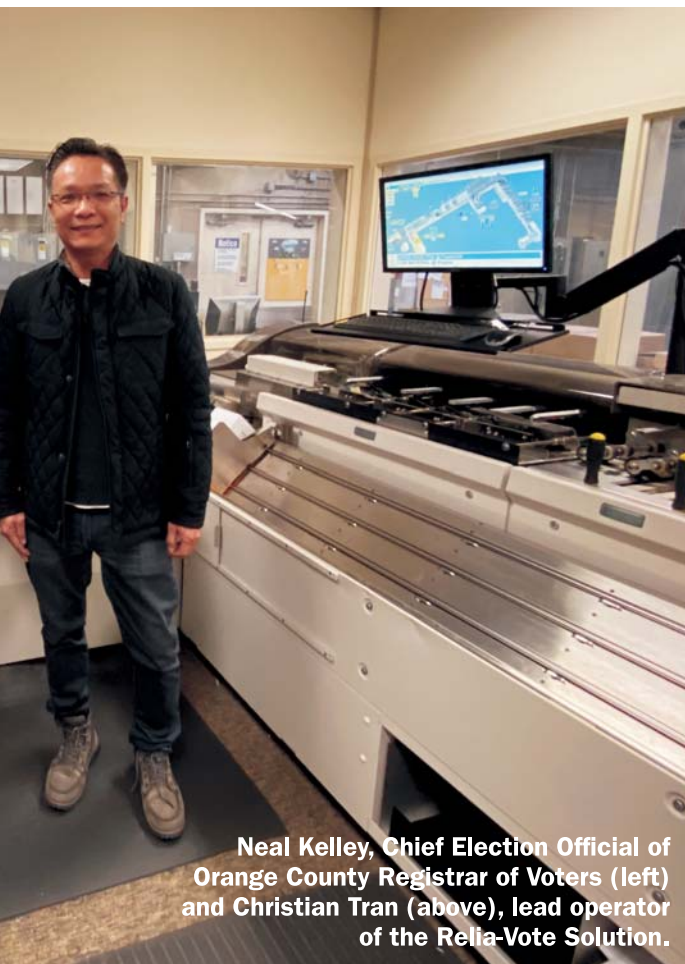
things to consider when exploring solutions:

- Ensure the solution will provide high-integrity and audit compliance. Demand strict and auditable process controls to ensure the right ballot gets to the right voter.

- Invest in solutions that deliver productivity and cost savings. Integrated solutions that automate processes across the end-to-end ballot assembly can reduce labor and costly mistakes. Also, make sure you evaluate the total cost of ownership of any investment.

- Plan for future mail ballot volume growth. Look for proven, scalable, upgradeable platforms.

Investing in vote-by-mail solutions can help states, counties and municipali-



Neal Kelley, Chief Election Official of Orange County Registrar of Voters (left) and Christian Tran (above), lead operator of the Relia-Vote Solution.

every page it is supposed to, that the envelopes going out and coming back are consistent and accurate, right down to the thickness of the envelope, and that the signature of the voter matches the voter registration file.

“We needed a solution that would provide us with the processing capabilities we needed along with the data, tracking, and integrity technology required for our operation. We are delighted with the new Relia-Vote end-to-end system,” said Kelley.



MAI mail sorter tray rack system

ties automate and modernize their vote-by-mail and absentee process so they can save time, labor and postage costs, and provide full insight into the entire process.

The votes are in

Vote-by-mail and absentee voting is a win-win scenario for both voters and elections officials as long as the mailed ballot voting process can deliver on the promise of integrity and transparency.

(To learn more about BlueCrest enterprise print, mail and customer communications, go to www.bluecrestinc.com.

MAI is a full-service Systems Integrator with customized mail tray and parcel conveyor solutions. For more information call 844-808-5454 or visit www.MailAutomationInc.com.)