The 2018 election information campaign emphasised the importance of every single vote. It was a refresh of the 2014 animated campaign and featured ‘paper’ characters to represent the voting process (paper ballots) and the organisation as a brand, while also reflecting the diversity of Victoria’s voters (see Appendix 7 for the advertisements). Results from the previous State election showed that the concept was well received, but advertising recall was lower than expected. The approach in 2018 was to update the concept and focus on effective media placement to improve recall.

The $3.8 million campaign was divided into three phases: enrolment, early voting, and voting.

Each phase was supported by advertisements across a range of platforms selected to have the maximum impact with identified audiences, while ensuring the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) received value for money.

The key elements of the advertising strategy were to:

- reduce all print advertising to the mandatory statutory advertisements, in line with the substantial contractions in the market’s print consumption since 2014
- match media outlets and viewing times with identified target audiences
- significantly increase investment in out-of-home, digital and new media channels
- achieve highly competitive prices.

In recognition of the diversity of Victorian electors, the VEC spent 10% of the total media placement on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) media advertising – double the minimum amount required by the State Government. The VEC spent 20% of the advertising budget in regional media, exceeding the State Government’s 15% requirement (see Figure 8).
Nine Digital catch-up TV, where the videos were viewed through until completion 89% and 98% of the time, respectively. The use of a paid Google search campaign proved extremely effective, generating over 207,000 visits to the VEC website, the majority of which occurred on mobile and tablet devices. While the general awareness levels were high, market research respondents suggested that the VEC could still look at ways to advertise more and in new media types.

VoterAlert

The VEC developed, piloted and implemented an embedded digital communication service called VoterAlert for the 2018 State election. This service was used to engage electors who had supplied a mobile phone number and/or email address. A rolling series of messages welcomed these electors to the program and reminded them of key activities during the election, such as checking their enrolment before the close of roll, and the start of early voting.

Enrolment

The VEC contacted 1,968,739 electors as part of the welcome and close of roll campaign. Emails were more successful in driving electors to check and update their enrolment details before the roll for the State election closed.

Of the 405,919 electors who visited the VEC’s enrolment portal during the welcome and close of roll campaign, more than 250,000 (62%) did not vote in the same proportions as Victorian electors in general, with only 72.22% of directly enrolled electors voting in the State election.

Independent market research\(^1\) showed that 85% of voters recalled seeing communications from the VEC leading up to the election. Reach and frequency targets in the TV, out of home and digital streams of the campaign were met or exceeded. Advertising through Facebook drove significant traffic to the VEC website (over 10 million impressions and 71,000 link clicks), while YouTube delivered significant value, with 1.3 million completed video views at a rate of $0.02 per completed view – the lowest cost ever recorded for a government YouTube campaign.\(^2\)

Further video-on-demand targeting extended the reach of television commercials through various websites on the NewsCorp network and

---

\(^1\) Evaluation of Services at the 24 November 2018 Victorian State Election – Colmar Brunton, April 2019
\(^2\) Victorian Government Master Agency Media Services data analysis

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market segment</th>
<th>Amount spent</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CALD communities</td>
<td>$375,660</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities</td>
<td>$37,566</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adult communities</td>
<td>$1,237,551</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional communities</td>
<td>$759,994</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Advertising spending by community for the 2018 Victorian State election.
Communication services

The case for change: Digitisation of information

In various circumstances, the Electoral Act 2002 requires the exchange of information between the VEC and electors, and for the VEC to provide information to more general audiences. Since the Electoral Act 2002 was introduced, the ways that Victorians interact with and exchange information have significantly changed. Victorians are increasingly communicating and accessing their news and information digitally, relying less on traditional print advertising and postal services. This change has been coupled with declining circulation and readership of print media, as well as shifting priorities for Australia Post.

In line with Victorians’ changing appetite for quick access to information, their expectations about how to engage with services have also changed. Governments have responded to these changing expectations through technology strategies that seek to reform how citizens interact with government services. It is necessary for the VEC to consider how to properly discharge its responsibilities to communicate information more efficiently given the shift away from traditional media.

To facilitate this transition, the VEC proposes adding to the definitions in section 3 of the Electoral Act 2002 to capture electronic means for wherever the law requires the VEC to ‘publicly advertise’ information or ‘deliver’ material. This change will not necessarily exclude traditional methods but will add to the suite of permitted options available to the VEC.

See Recommendation 1 on page 108.

arrived at the portal from an email link, and a further 141,000 (38%) arrived via an SMS link.

Early voting

At the commencement of early voting, a total of 1,938,687 electors received VoterAlerts, after some electors chose to opt-out and invalid contact details were removed.

The VoterAlert early voting messages were sent between 8.00 am on Thursday 15 November and 8.00 pm on Monday 19 November. This resulted in 374,051 electors visiting the VEC’s Voting Centre Locator. Of those visitors, 52% arrived from an email link and 48% arrived via an SMS link. Most users came to the portal using a mobile device (83%).

Election day

On election day, emails and SMS sent through VoterAlert resulted in more than 170,000 electors using the Voting Centre Locator. Of those visitors, 59% arrived from an SMS link and 41% arrived via an email link. Most users came to the portal using a mobile device (93%).

A total of 90.22% of VoterAlert recipients cast a vote throughout the State election.

Online services

The VEC website was in ‘election mode’ from 15 August to 14 December 2018. The objectives of the website during this period were to:

- increase the number of visitors to the website compared to 2014
- encourage and facilitate enrolment
- provide voters with information about the election, including voting locations, the voting process and candidates
- provide candidates with information about their compliance obligations
- ensure equitable access of information
Traffic sources

The top source of traffic to the VEC website was via search engines, dominated by Google. In 2018, 71% of visits came from organic search, compared to 55% in 2014.

Paid digital advertising (Google ads) accounted for 9.3% of visits in 2018, compared to 0.7% in 2014. Other cost-per-click display advertisements accounted for 2.2% of visits.

Social media was also a key source of traffic, with almost 100,000 visits generated from social channels, compared to 40,000 in 2014.

Direct traffic (that is, users typing vec.vic.gov.au in their browser) decreased significantly both in overall numbers and in proportion. In 2018, 350,000 visits (9.6%) were direct compared to 428,000 (25.1%) in 2014.

Social media

The VEC’s social media presence continued to increase during the 2018 State election. The focus was on both sponsored and organic social media campaigns aimed at increasing awareness and participation, particularly among the 18-24 year old demographic. A greater volume of posts were published compared to 2014, and a dedicated social media monitoring roster was established to ensure that in the four weeks preceding election day, the VEC’s social media channels were monitored from 8.00 am to 11.00 pm, seven days a week. This enabled the VEC to respond promptly to enquiries received via its channels, the majority of which were received via Facebook’s private messaging app, Messenger. The VEC responded to 626 Facebook Messenger enquiries during the election period – mainly seeking information, requesting assistance, or making a complaint.

The top hashtags used by social media users were ‘vicvotes’ (approximately 102,100 mentions), followed by ‘springst’ (approximately 33,900 mentions). The overwhelming majority of social media coverage of the VEC during the election period was published via Twitter, with the VEC’s Twitter account @electionsvic tagged in 4,875...
posts from Saturday 1 September to Monday 31 December 2018\textsuperscript{3}. Interest in the election went well beyond election day, particularly in regard to participation and results. Ten media releases between election day and the end of 2018 ensured ongoing discussions on social media.

**Twitter**

The VEC’s election day tweet featuring voters in Antarctica attained number one on the list of ‘Great Oz Gov Tweets’ for Saturday 24 November 2018. This list ranks the tweets sent by government accounts in Australia based on audience size, retweets, and favourites. Furthermore, VEC tweets made up four of the top 10 Great Oz Gov Tweets for that day\textsuperscript{4}.

From Saturday 1 September to Monday 31 December 2018:

- the VEC’s Twitter following increased from 3,583 to 4,757
- the VEC sent 505 tweets
- the VEC had 1,531 retweets, 2,012 likes, and 451 replies.

**Facebook**

From Saturday 1 September to Monday 31 December 2018:

- the VEC published 125 Facebook posts
- the VEC’s Facebook following increased from 6,619 to 7,890 followers
- there were 17,798 reactions, comments and shares on VEC posts.

The organic reach of several election posts was noteworthy. The VEC’s top 10 performing posts in the lead up to election day attained an average organic reach of almost 12,000 users.

\textsuperscript{3} Victorian Electoral Commission Meltwater Insights Report, February 2019.

\textsuperscript{4} https://oztweets.measuredvoice.com/top/2018-11-24/

**Instagram**

From Saturday 1 September to Monday 31 December 2018:

- the VEC published 66 Instagram posts
- the VEC’s Instagram following increased from 143 to 277
- there were 894 likes and 47 comments on the VEC’s posts.

**Public Enquiry Service**

The VEC conducted a tender process for the provision of an outsourced Public Enquiry Service (PES). The purpose of the PES was to cater for a high volume of public enquiries over a 9.5 week period – from 1 October through to 4 December 2018. See Figure 9 for statistics relating to the services provided by the PES.

A VEC project team (comprising project manager, subject matter expert, and up to five supervisors) worked onsite at the PES location to help ensure high quality, accurate, and appropriate responses.

Operating hours for the PES were from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm weekdays (8.00 pm on close of rolls day) from 1 October 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 2018 was 105,082, virtually the same as in 2014 (108,536). The major difference in 2018 was the change in the pattern of calls: rather than a slow build to the close of roll, call volumes were higher earlier on and then lower than expected closer to election day. Operators handled 13,000 more calls in 2018, whereas in 2014, more callers were satisfied with the information from the Interactive Voice Response. The PES received 4,362 emails from electors, which is also very similar to 2014 figures.

### Election Guide

Election guides specific to each of the 88 electoral districts were mailed to every household listed on the enrolment register from Monday 5 November.

*The Election Guide* included dates, times and voting locations; accessibility ratings for each voting centre within that district; information about early and postal voting options and telephone assisted voting; instructions on how to correctly complete both ballot papers; and interpreter contact numbers for 20 languages other than English. In total, 2,576,484 election guides were mailed to households.

### Easy English Guide

The VEC produced an *Easy English Guide* to the election, with the assistance of Scope Australia. The guide provided key information in a format that could be easily understood by people who do not speak English as a first language, or have a disability, learning difficulties or low literacy.

The guide covered Victorian State elections, how to vote, what to do at a voting centre, and how to become a candidate, using illustrations and simple language to convey concepts. It also included a list of meanings of words. The Guide was published on the VEC website, available at election offices, distributed to participants at community outreach sessions, and available on the Voters Voice app.

Key pages of the VEC website also included an Easy English button, which allowed users to translate the page into Easy English, inclusive of illustrations and simple language.

### Contact with the Public Enquiry Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calls handled by operators</td>
<td>73,000 (67.26%)</td>
<td>86,304 (82.12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls handled by Interactive Voice Response</td>
<td>30,728 (28.31%)</td>
<td>18,810 (17.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls abandoned</td>
<td>3,033 (2.79%)</td>
<td>841 (0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call diverted to voicemail</td>
<td>1,775 (1.64%)</td>
<td>1,775 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call handled through interpreter</td>
<td>1,186 (1.09%)</td>
<td>772 (0.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total calls</td>
<td>108,536</td>
<td>105,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average call handing time</td>
<td>294 seconds</td>
<td>287 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails answered</td>
<td>3,941</td>
<td>4,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail sent as result of enquiry</td>
<td>11,778 items</td>
<td>13,737 items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average caller satisfaction score (of 10)</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: Comparison of contact with the Public Enquiry Service from 2014 to 2018.
Voters Voice app

The Voters Voice app was designed to help people with complex communication needs including people with low literacy, English language difficulties and people who use Auslan, to vote in person at Victorian elections. The Commission worked closely with disability support agencies, primarily Scope, in the development and testing of this application as part of a co-design project. The app is available for use on tablets and smart phones on both the iOS and Android operating systems.

The app includes information on enrolling and voting in plain English, Easy English, audio and visual formats. Central to the app is a communication board for those with little or no speech to use to communicate with election staff in voting centres. The communication board converts text to speech and contains pre-prepared voting phrases. The app can incorporate the personal details of up to six individuals.

A digital advertising campaign and advertising through disability networks supported awareness of the app. Throughout the election the app was downloaded 2,280 times (1,371 on iPhones, 129 on iPads and 780 on Android).