

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS ROUT LABOUR AT ONLINE ELECTIONEERING

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Charles Kennedy scores 100 per cent at providing web answers

London, UK: The Liberal Democrats head the election pack in providing online answers to voters – both on party and individual parliamentary candidate sites. Labour comes off worst of all the major parties, unable to provide answers to 43 per cent of common voter questions online, according to research carried out by technology marketing company, Rainier PR into party and candidate web sites.

The survey shows the Conservatives close behind the Liberal Democrats, with Plaid Cymru performing worst of all, behind even the Monster Raving Loony Party.

Of individual candidates surveyed, Ann Widdecombe easily outscored her party leader Michael Howard, answering 100 per cent of questions to his 40 per cent. Several high profile Labour candidates, including Margaret Beckett and Stephen Byers, failed to answer any basic questions at all online. Half of the Liberal Democrat candidates surveyed, including party leader Charles Kennedy, successfully answered all questions. Tony Blair was not surveyed as he does not have an individual web site. Candidate sites surveyed were listed on the House of Commons web site <http://www.parliament.uk/>.*

With many voters now using the web as a research tool, being able to find answers online is vital both at a party and constituency level. Researchers checked party sites for answers on key election issues including health, education, law and order, immigration and business – all major voter concerns. For candidate sites, questions were modelled on those asked on the doorstep, covering benefits delivered for constituents and plans for the future. Answers were marked on whether they answered the question totally, partially or not at all.

“If the election was being run online, the Liberal Democrats would storm to power, with Tony Blair a distant third,” said Stephen Waddington, joint managing director, Rainier PR. “As the web is becoming an important channel for communicating with voters we carried out this research to see how politicians are managing their online presence. However the results show that even the most successful party sites couldn’t answer 17 per cent of questions – nowhere near the level of information the electorate expects.”

“Voters want to get basic answers to policy questions in a simple, straightforward manner. While all sites could answer why they should be elected, many were economical with answers to real voter questions. The poor showing of Labour and many of its high profile members should be a wakeup call to the party.”

Rainier PR surveyed 10 party and 30 randomly selected candidate web sites during the week of 18 April ahead of the General Election on 5 May. In total, 10 candidates were chosen randomly from each of the major parties, using web sites listed on the House of Commons web site <http://www.parliament.uk/>.

The party results were as follows. While the Liberal Democrats came top, their site still failed to answer 17 per cent of voter questions successfully.

Party Web site Percentage of questions answered
Liberal Democrats <http://www.libdems.org.uk/> 83 per cent
Conservatives <http://www.conservatives.com/> 80 per cent
Labour <http://www.labour.org.uk/> 57 per cent
Green Party <http://www.greenparty.org.uk/> 40 per cent
SNP <http://www.snp.org/> 40 per cent
Respect <http://www.respectcoalition.org/> 33 per cent
Veritas <http://www.veritasparty.com/> 33 per cent
UK Independence Party <http://www.independenceuk.org.uk/> 13 per cent
Monster Raving Loony Party <http://www.omrlp.com/> 10 per cent
Plaid Cymru <http://www.plaidcymru.org/> 7 per cent
Average 40 per cent

For prospective parliamentary candidates, the overall average of questions answered was just 52 per cent. However responses varied wildly. Half of the Liberal Democrats scored top marks, along with just one Conservative (Ann Widdecombe). No Labour candidates scored above fifty per cent (Anne Campbell and Derek Wyatt), with Margaret Beckett, Stephen Byers and Melanie Johnson scoring zero. Full results are detailed below.

Party Candidate Constituency Score %
LibDem Baker, Norman Lewes 100%
LibDem Cotter, Brian Weston-Super-Mare 100%
LibDem Harvey, Nick North Devon 100%
LibDem Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles Ross, Skye & Inverness West 100%
LibDem Teather, Sarah Brent East 100%
Conservative Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann Maidstone & The Weald 100%
LibDem Breed, Mr Colin South East Cornwall 80%
LibDem Cable, Dr Vincent Twickenham 80%
Conservative Burt, Alistair North East Bedfordshire 70%
Conservative Spink, Bob Castle Point 70%
Labour David, Mr Wayne Caerphilly 60%
Conservative Fabricant, Michael Lichfield 60%
LibDem Hughes, Simon North Southwark & Bermondsey 60%
LibDem Bruce, Malcolm Gordon 50%
Labour Campbell, Mrs Anne Cambridge 50%
Conservative Redwood, Rt Hon John Wokingham 50%
Labour Wyatt, Derek Sittingbourne & Sheppey 50%
Labour Cook, Rt Hon Robin Livingston 40%
Conservative Howard, Rt Hon Michael Folkestone & Hythe 40%

Conservative Loughton, Tim East Worthing & Shoreham 40%
LibDem Öpik, Lembit Montgomeryshire 40%
Labour Purchase, Mr Ken Wolverhampton North East 40%
Conservative Key, Mr Robert Salisbury 30%
Conservative Moss, Mr Malcolm North East Cambridgeshire 30%
Conservative Amess, Mr David Southend West 10%
Labour Hoon, Geoff Ashfield 10%
Labour Meacher, Rt Hon Michael Oldham West & Royton 10%
Labour Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret Derby South 0%
Labour Byers, Rt Hon Stephen North Tyneside 0%
Labour Johnson, Miss Melanie Welwyn Hatfield 0%
Results listed by score and alphabetically by candidate name

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* Rainier PR carried out the research in April 2005, following a set methodology. It acknowledges that research carried out at different times could provide different results.

About Rainier PR

Rainier PR is a leading business-to-business and business-to-consumer technology PR agency. Based in London, with an office in Cambridge, it employs more than 20 people and had 2004 revenues of more than £2 million. Rainier PR acquired Lighthouse PR in April 2005. It was recognised as one of the top five best PR agencies to work for in the UK in the Holmes Report 2004. For more see www.rainierpr.co.uk.

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