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eDemocracy and Citizen Engagement: The Delvinia Report on Internet Voting in the Town of Markham

Summary of Key Findings



This is a Summary of Key Findings from Delvinia's research report on Internet voting in the Town of Markham. For more information about how to purchase the full report, visit www.delvinia.com/dig

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The Future of eDemocracy and Citizen Engagement in Canada

By Adam Froman, CEO, Delvinia

The proliferation of technology is fundamentally changing the way governments and their citizens interact. In recent years we have seen how citizens in countries around the world have rallied using digital and social technologies to unseat dictators and elect presidents. In many countries, digital and social technologies have even become a primary channel in the delivery of government services. Digital technologies have transformed the way people interact with governments of all levels and governments are now working to catch up.



People are demanding more transparency in government and greater accountability of the elected officials that govern. There is much more open discussion occurring on the issues that affect all voting citizens, and the speed at which this information is disseminated has left many government agencies and politicians perplexed about how to address these newly empowered voters.

Governments are realizing that the future of eDemocracy is more than simply offering citizens a means to transact or obtain public service information. The future of eDemocracy is about listening to citizens and becoming part of the conversation. Government officials are realizing that simply allowing the conversations to occur without being involved can escalate to outcomes that they had never anticipated. They are also beginning to realize that they no longer have control over the conversation.

Delvinia, with the assistance of AskingCanadians™, will be producing a series reports on the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians regarding their experiences engaging with government and their opinions about how digital and social technologies are achieving the goal of improving citizen engagement with government.

Similar to the business world, the idea of creating meaningful and relevant customer experiences has reached government. Under the Voice of the Customer concept, governments are now exploring ways that they can leverage digital technologies to engage their citizens by creating better experiences and more opportunities to interact with government.

Internet voting is one such way.

About the Delvinia Report on Internet Voting in the Town of Markham 2010

Since 2003, Delvinia has been at the forefront in promoting the awareness of Internet voting as an option to vote. In the 2003, 2006 and 2010 municipal elections, we worked with the Town of Markham to help the municipality implement voter outreach and awareness campaigns to not only inform voters about the importance of voting in a municipal election, but to educate them about their options to cast a ballot.

The challenges that municipalities face are unlike those at the provincial and federal levels. The average citizen does not realize the importance that municipal governments have in their everyday lives and as a result, the average voter turnout for most municipalities in Canada has historically been less than 30 per cent.

Working on the past three elections in Markham has taught us that designing a voter awareness campaign for an election where Internet voting is being offered is not simply about letting people know that they can vote “in line or online.” It’s also about informing the electorate about why it is important to vote, and why being engaged with municipal government is so important. As a result of Markham’s voter awareness campaigns, voter turnout in Markham has been steadily increasing since 2003, reaching more than 38 per cent in the last election.

Although there is still resistance to the idea that Internet voting is a viable option to engage citizens to vote, the tide is turning. Discussions among voters about their support for Internet voting have made it to the social networks. And, as various elections agencies continue to discuss their interest in piloting Internet voting, and the media continues to write about it, public interest will continue to grow.

“ Designing a voter awareness campaign in an election where Internet voting is being offered is not simply about letting people know that they can vote ‘in line or online,’ it’s also about informing the electorate about why it is important to vote. ”

While the risks surrounding voter authentication and technical security are valid concerns, these are being overcome through rigorous and well-managed implementation processes, demonstrated by the success in Markham and other municipalities. In the nine years since Markham first implemented Internet voting we have seen public awareness reach a level where the train has left the station and there is no turning back.

The significance of Markham's decision to implement Internet voting is larger than simply offering an alternative voting method to increase voter turnout and impact accessibility. Markham has embarked on a journey where they have accepted the responsibility of what could go wrong with Internet voting and the municipality has taken on a leadership role to pave the way for other governments to realize Internet voting as an option for citizens to vote.

Recognizing the importance of the role that Markham took on in 2003, Delvinia received funding from Canada's Advanced Research and Innovation Network (CANARIE) to study the impact of Internet voting on voter turnout in the municipality. We released our first report, "**Internet Voting and Canadian eDemocracy in Practice: The Delvinia Report on Internet Voting in the 2003 Town of Markham Municipal Election,**" in 2004. This report not only helped Markham validate its decision to embark on this path, but it provided the first documented study of Internet voting in Canada.

The report was based upon an exit survey conducted at polling stations and for those that voted online. We obtained a 50 per cent response rate, demonstrating the willingness of voters to acknowledge the importance of what they were participating in. One of the major lessons we learned following the release of the report was that the implementation of Internet voting would not simply be an exercise of build it and they will come, rather, it would be an evolution in the way we, as eligible voters, think about casting our vote in an election.

In 2006 Delvinia worked with Markham once again to implement the municipality's voter outreach campaign. We did not have a government sponsor to help us continue the research, so we chose to invest in continuing on our own. Our second report, titled, "**Understanding the Digital Voter Experience: The Delvinia Report on Internet Voting in the 2006 Town of Markham Municipal Election,**" (produced with the help of research firm Research Strategy Group) validated our findings from the 2003 election.

Both reports have been well read and over the years Markham has begun to receive recognition as the model to emulate for Internet voting in Canada. However, while the issue of Internet voting has been widely studied around the world, Markham has often been overlooked by the academic community. Not only is Markham a perfect example of how Internet voting is being successfully implemented in a binding election; with other municipalities following suit, Canada is becoming a global leader in the implementation of Internet voting.

In early 2010, when we began discussing Markham's plans for the 2010 election, we decided to engage the academic community to find an academic researcher interested in building on the research we conducted in the previous two elections. Nicole Goodman is that researcher. Nicole is a PhD candidate specializing in Canadian political institutions and alternative voting methods. We called on her to provide a scholarly perspective on the data collected following the 2010 election as well as a comparison to the data produced following the 2006 and 2003 municipal elections in Markham.

With the support of Ryerson University's department of Research and Innovation, Delvinia secured an Engage Grant from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) to engage Nicole, giving her the opportunity to become the first Canadian researcher to study Internet voting in action and to ensure the findings would not only be relevant in business and government circles, but would also withstand the scrutiny of the academic community.

The following is an executive summary of our report, **"eDemocracy and Citizen Engagement: The Delvinia Report on Internet Voting in the Town of Markham."**

This report is here to provide those interested in better understanding the impact of digital technologies on citizen engagement with tangible data along with an unbiased, balanced and independent perspective.

“ Not only is Markham a perfect example of how Internet voting is being successfully implemented in a binding election; with other municipalities following suit, Canada is becoming a global leader in the implementation of Internet voting. ”

A special contribution by Environics Analytics using its PRIZM_{C2} segmentation allows for some additional explanatory insight into the attitudes and demographic characteristics of online voters and is attached as a separate portion of the report.

In the next municipal election, Delvinia hopes to expand our study to include a sample of non-voters, those voters that cast ballots using traditional methods of voting, and electors that registered to vote online, but did not end up casting an Internet ballot.

– *Adam Froman*

eDemocracy and Citizen Engagement: The Delvinia Report on Internet Voting in the Town of Markham

Prepared by Nicole Goodman, PhD Candidate

1. Introduction

The October 2010 Ontario municipal election marked the third consecutive electoral contest in which the Town of Markham offered remote Internet voting as an alternative voting method to its electors. Markham was the first major Canadian municipality to embrace remote Internet voting in 2003 and has since established a model of development for other communities seeking to make the voting process more accessible and convenient for electors. The Markham experience is also significant because in all three elections it partnered with Delvinia, a Toronto-based digital agency, to develop online and offline voter outreach campaigns and to collect systematic public opinion data regarding Internet voting. Collection of this information is something that, for various reasons, has not been practiced by other municipalities and yet is an important step toward shedding light on the behaviours and attitudes of Internet voters and their thoughts about the Internet voting experience. Using the data collected by Delvinia, this report provides an analysis and summary of key findings regarding Internet voting in the Town of Markham in the 2003, 2006, and 2010 municipal elections. A more fulsome analysis of the 2010 results is presented and, where relevant, brief comparative analyses of the three elections are provided. Drawing upon a 2010 survey of candidates the report also explores the impact of Internet ballots on other election stakeholders and its effect on the campaign process from their perspective. Finally, highlights from a special cross-national survey, also conducted by Delvinia, discuss the potential for online voting nationally in Canada.

2. Historical Context

The first instance of Internet voting in Canada occurred in January 2003 when the federal NDP used Internet ballots to conduct its leadership vote. Ten months later a group of 12 Ontario municipalities and townships introduced Internet voting as a complementary voting method in their local elections. With an electorate of 158,000 at the time (Markham's electorate is now about 187,000) Markham was the largest municipality to offer online ballots.

In an effort to study the effects and outcomes of Internet voting, Delvinia created exit poll surveys to gather data from electors who chose to cast a ballot online. Data was collected in the 2003, 2006, 2010 elections. Given the infancy of Internet voting and the little research addressing it in a Canadian context, the Delvinia surveys are particularly significant because they represent the first attempt in Canada to collect longitudinal data.

Whereas the 2003 and 2006 surveys were entirely developed by the Delvinia team, in 2010 the company partnered with Ryerson University, and with the support of an National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) Engage Grant sought to both expand the scope of its Internet voting research to include candidates, electors that did not vote online (both non-voters and voters) and to refine the existing survey instrument being used to probe online voters' experience with the service.

While Delvinia does not directly deal with Internet voting technology, the scope of this project is relevant to its commitment to, and research interests in, eDemocracy, citizen engagement, and digital customer experiences. In the end the 2010 study was expanded to include a candidate survey tool to gather information from online voters.

3. Methodology

This report draws upon data obtained from multiple surveys, all administered by Delvinia. These include a 2010 exit poll survey of online voters, a 2010 survey of candidates, a 2010 national poll of citizens from the Delvinia's AskingCanadians™ research panel¹ that probed public attitudes toward Internet voting, and past Internet voting surveys from the 2003 and 2006 municipal elections in Markham.

The bulk of the analysis comes from the 2010 exit poll survey of online voters. Internet voters were prompted with the survey once their ballot was cast and completion was optional. The survey opened with the polls at 10 a.m. on October 16, 2010 and closed with them at 6 p.m. on October 21, 2010. Of a total of 10,597 online voters 3,037 participated for a response rate of 29 per cent.

The survey of candidates ran from 5 p.m. on November 29, 2010 to 5 p.m. on December 16, 2010. Candidates were sent a total of three reminders to complete the survey via email and completion was optional. A total of 38 candidates of a prospective 44 filled out the questionnaire.

Some additional data comes from a special national survey carried out by Delvinia from September 7, 2010 to September 13, 2010 in support of an academic research project examining electoral obligation and civic engagement among young people. A group of Internet voting questions were included in the survey in hopes of gaining additional insight into the public attitudes of electors (both voters and non-voters). This survey is significant because it was not carried out in an election context, like a majority of the surveys that address voting or engagement.

The survey was administered through Delvinia's AskingCanadians™ research panel. This survey sample is random and representative of the AskingCanadians™ panel and percentages of demographic characteristics are aligned with those of Statistics Canada surveys. A total of 1,132 respondents completed the survey, with an oversample of young people aged 18-26 (256 respondents).

Finally, throughout the report comparisons are drawn between the 2010 data and surveys conducted by Delvinia in relation to the Markham elections of 2003 and 2006. The 2003 survey was administered to online voters and in-person voters in the advance poll and on Election Day. A total of 4,649 surveys were completed, 3,655 from online voters and 995 from traditional poll locations.

In 2006, this survey was administered to online voters only between November 6, 2006 and November 10, 2006. Of the 10,639 online voters 4,633 chose to complete the survey for a response rate of 44 per cent. Taken together these data sets represent the first step to systematically study public opinion of Internet voting use in Canada.

4. Key findings

The following are key findings from the report. Specific details, evidence and additional support for each of these findings can be found in the full report.

The online voting process

- The extension of Internet voting is about **convenience**.
- There is **overwhelming satisfaction with the Internet voting process**, as 99 per cent of online voters reported being satisfied.
- In fact, the proportion of those who reported being **'very satisfied' rose from previous election years** in 2010.
- **91 per cent of online voters chose to vote from home**, indicating that is the preferred voting location when it comes to Internet ballots.
- Nearly all online voters (99 per cent) say they would be likely to vote online in future municipal elections.

Internet voting at other levels of government:

- **Support for Internet ballots at other levels of government is rising**.
- 99 per cent of online voters indicated that they would be likely to vote online in a provincial election if it were available.
- An equal number would be likely to vote online in a federal election if it were available.

What does the average Internet voter look like?

- **Middle-aged electors** (those aged 45 to 54 years) are the **most likely group to make use of Internet voting**.
- The average Internet voter has some university education and falls into an income bracket between \$55,000 and \$84,999.
- They report voting in most elections at all levels of government.
- The technological profile of a majority of **online voters** suggests they **have access to the Internet at home, use the Internet frequently, and have good quality access**, commonly referred to as broadband.

- Users are more likely to be non-immigrants and report English as their mother tongue.
- In terms of social values, online voters are less concerned about their personal information being gathered by databases are not overly worried about the impact of technology on their autonomy and/or privacy.

Young people:

- The **rate of use of Internet voting** among young people appears to be declining with each election cycle, while it **is increasing among older electors**.
- Slightly more than a third of young people aged 18 to 24 say they either probably wouldn't or definitely wouldn't have voted had **Internet voting** not been an option.
- Evidence suggests online voting may be **a useful way to make the electoral process easier for students away at college or university**.
- The youngest and oldest online voters are most likely to cite accessibility as their main motivation for voting.
- **Traditional media sources are least effective for informing young voters**.
- **When it comes to informing electors, young people need to be reached differently than other types of potential voters, particularly using technology and the Internet**.

Older electors:

- Despite the fact that middle-aged and older electors **report less frequent Internet usage than young people, they make the most use of Internet voting**.
- The likelihood of voting online because of a 'positive past experience with it' increases with age.

Is there such a thing as a habitual Internet voter?

- Small percentages of online voters claim to have voted online in 2006 and 2003. This suggests that a lot of online voters are new and raise questions as to where previous online voters have gone.

What is the impact of Internet voting on voter turnout?

- There is evidence to suggest turnout can experience modest increases from the extension of online voting.
- Analysis suggests that **Internet voting may be an important electoral motivator for younger electors with less committed voting records.**
- About 40 per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 that self-identify as occasional or non-voters at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government were encouraged to vote because of the availability of online ballots in 2010.

Candidates:

- **78 per cent of candidates report that the option of Internet voting had a significant impact on the campaign,** namely its effect on campaign strategies, mobilization tactics, and with respect to voter turnout.
- **92 per cent** of candidates indicated they were either 'completely' or 'mostly' in favour **of the implementation of Internet voting in the 2010 Markham municipal election.**

Support for online voting among all eligible electors in Canada:

- On the whole, there is **broad support for the introduction of Internet voting** as an alternative voting method in elections and **people report being likely to use the service.**
- There is a **public perception** that the option of **online ballots would enhance** the **accessibility** and **equality of the electoral process.**

5. Conclusion

Overall, the data suggests that there is broad public support for the introduction of Internet voting in Canadian elections at all levels of government. Based on the cross-Canada survey of eligible electors, the general public perception is that the introduction of Internet ballots would make the electoral process more accessible and would enhance the equality of the process, particularly for certain groups of electors. In the specific case of Markham, Internet voting has been proven to produce some positive effects on the electoral process, namely enhancing electoral convenience and accessibility and by that fact encouraging electoral participation. There is also some evidence to suggest that Internet voting can encourage the electoral involvement of people who previously identified as non-voters. Finally, online voters are extremely satisfied with Internet ballots and report being likely to continue using them in subsequent elections.

Taken together, this report represents a first step at shedding light on the potential for Internet voting in Canada and the impact of its deployment on election stakeholders such as electors and candidates by looking at public opinion data from the Town of Markham. Markham's experience with Internet voting teaches us some helpful lessons and imparts valuable insights regarding the implementation and development of online ballots in Canada. Many of these findings are also important for Internet voting programs that are being researched or becoming established abroad.

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Special Contribution: PRIZM_{C2} Profile – Who Votes Online?

Prepared by: Environics Analytics
Rupen Seoni, VP Practice Leader
Hugh Hibbert, Client Advocate

Introduction

The purpose of this exercise is to help Delvinia learn more about the demographics, lifestyles and behaviour of the 10,526 early online voters in the 2010 municipal election held in the Town of Markham

Methodology

The following steps were used to gain insight about early online voters in the 2010 municipal election held in the Town of Markham:

- 1) EA created a PRIZM_{C2} profile of 'Early online voters benchmarked to eligible voters in the Town of Markham'
 - A PRIZM_{C2} profile will highlight neighbourhood types that are more likely to vote online
- 2) EA created a Social Values ranking report
 - Environics Social Values is a national survey that measures human motivation and social relations to understand the mindset of Canadians
 - The survey is based on over 10,000 respondents, and contains 85 values which are all linked to PRIZM_{C2}
 - This information will help Delvinia understand the attitudes and motivations of the individuals who voted online in the last election, so that Delvinia can reach and serve them better by crafting targeted messages

Key Findings

- The Town of Markham is a mix of upscale and affluent families, but those who vote online tend to be less multicultural, with household maintainers that are middle-aged and older
 - **Demographic Highlights***
 - **Less ethnic** - more likely to be a non-immigrant; more likely to report English as their mother tongue
 - **Professional Occupations** - more likely to have a job in fields such as management and health
 - **Highly Educated** - more likely to have a college diploma or university degree
 - **Average Income** – household income tracks the average for the Town of Markham
 - **Key Social Values**
 - **Control of privacy (Low)** - less concerned about the gathering of personal information in various databases
 - **Technological anxiety (Low)** - less concerned about new technology, and its impact on our autonomy and privacy

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge Nicole Goodman, our principal researcher, for taking on this project and for the great work demonstrated in providing a truly independent and insightful perspective on the data we helped her to collect. I would also like to thank Andy Taylor, the Chief Administrative Officer at the Town of Markham for his vision and support of Internet voting in Markham and also this project. Thanks must also be given to Kimberley Kitteringham, Town Clerk, and Andrew Brouwer, Deputy Clerk, for allowing us to collect the data on the exit polls as well as providing us with valuable data after the election. Thanks also to Jan Kestle, Rupen Seoni and Hugh Hibbert at Environics Analytics for graciously providing an analysis of those who voted online in the 2010 election against their Prizm_{C2} data. We would like to thank Ryerson University and its Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation for facilitating our NSERC funding to engage Nicole and for its desire to partner with Delvinia. And finally, I would like to thank Dr. Anastasios Venetsanopoulos, without whom, the funding to include Nicole would never have been realized.

– Adam Froman

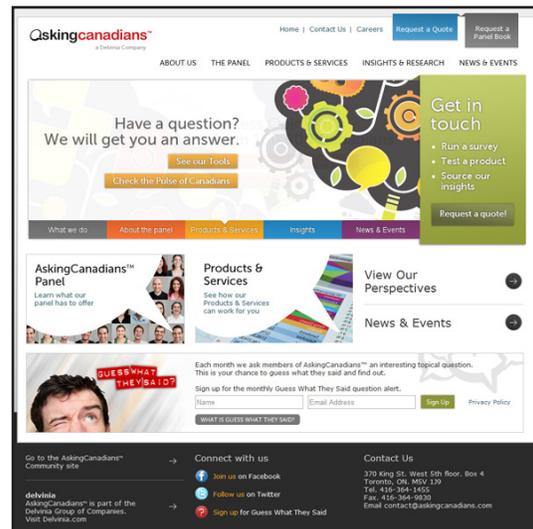
About Delvinia

Delvinia is a fusion of market research, strategy consulting and digital product design.

Founded in 1998, Delvinia is a privately held organization located in downtown Toronto with a full-time staff of 28 employees and eight contractors.

The name Delvinia is derived from the phrase “delve in and dig deeper.” We have a track record of working with many tier-one organizations in meeting their business objectives through customer insights, strategy consulting and digital product design. Clients include: RBC, Scotiabank International, Manulife Financial, Rogers, Microsoft, the Weather Network and Sympatico.ca, to name a few.

At the centre of our business is our AskingCanadians™ online research panel and its French counterpart Qu'en pensez vous^{MC}, a unique community that provides Francophone panel members with a French interface and experience. Launched in 2005, AskingCanadians™ is an online research community of 160,000 Canadians. Panellists are profiled by more than 3,000 variables enabling a robust research community to meet the specific sampling needs of researchers. AskingCanadians™ core service offerings include survey programming and hosting, online tools for testing rich media creative, one-on-one interviewing, custom recruitment and online panel management.



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Delvinia and Markham

Since 2003, Delvinia has worked extensively with Markham using digital technologies to foster public engagement and participation in government. In 2003, Delvinia worked with Markham to implement a communications plan to introduce Internet voting and secured \$200,000 in funding from Canada's Advanced Research and Innovation Network (CANARIE) to study the impact of Internet voting in a municipal election.

In 2006, Delvinia worked with Markham once again to promote the option of online voting which saw a 10 per cent increase in voter turnout. Delvinia continued its research from 2003 and produced its second report on Internet voting in Markham.

In 2007, Delvinia worked with Markham to build and host Click with Markham, an online forum to gather public input on Markham's strategic direction. With more than 7,000 participants, Click with Markham was one of the municipality's largest public consultation forums and certainly the largest online forum for public consultation. The initiative included building an e-mail database of more than 3,000 Markham residents willing to participate in future research initiatives.

In 2008, Delvinia worked with Markham to develop a Facebook page and dedicated interactive website to engage residents, particularly youth, to share ideas about its GreenPrint Strategy—a multi-faceted plan to promote awareness of our environment and specific tactics to affect climate change and environmental protection. This initiative included a contest that drew more than 3,000 submissions and the GreenPrint Facebook page continues to be a major communications channel to connect with Markham youth on the environment.



For the 2010 municipal election, Delvinia designed and implemented the DIY Markham social media campaign to inform local residents about the upcoming municipal election. Launched by the Town in September 2010, the campaign centred on the use of humorous online videos—distributed through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube—to engage voters and increase awareness about the delivery of municipal services and the importance of voting at the local level. The easy-to-share videos depicted a world in which residents were responsible for their own municipal services—such as garbage removal and water treatment—and illustrated how, in the end, the easiest way to address these issues is to vote. Overall, the Facebook page received more than 3,300 views and of the 17,231 Markham electors who registered to vote electronically, 10,597 used the Internet to cast their ballots.



About the Town of Markham

Markham, a municipality of more than 300,000 residents centrally located in the Greater Toronto area, is Canada's most diverse community and home to many of Canada's leading life science and technology businesses. Recipient of a 2010 Canada Award for Excellence – Silver for outstanding achievements in quality, customer service, and a healthy workplace, Markham is renowned for its rich heritage, vibrant neighbourhoods and leadership on the environment and urban design. For more information, please visit www.markham.ca.

About Environics Analytics

Environics Analytics is one of the premier marketing and analytical services companies in North America. Specializing in segmentation, site modelling and custom analytics, EA provides government agencies, healthcare, and businesses with data-driven consumer insights and market analysis to help clients find and keep more customers. Its team of veteran modelers and geographic experts are industry leaders in sales forecasting, developing demographic and spending projections, and site location modeling. And it provides powerful micromarketing tools, including the online platform ENVISION, that offer easy-to-use business applications for customer insights, site analysis and media planning. To learn more about Environics Analytics, please visit its website at www.environicsanalytics.com.

About Nicole Goodman

Nicole Goodman is a PhD candidate at Carleton University in the Department of Political Science. She is currently preparing to defend her dissertation, which explores how feelings of civic responsibility are changing among the young and how they relate to voting, as well as their impact on electoral participation. More broadly her research interests include Canadian political institutions and culture, elections, turnout, political participation, survey methodology, citizenship and civic duty, and the effect of the Internet on elections and participation. Some of Nicole's recent work can be found in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science* (to be published later in 2011), the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, and the *Central European University Political Science Journal*. Her work on Internet voting was recently presented at the European Consortium for Political Research Conference in Iceland, which brought together experts from around the world, and the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association.

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How to purchase the report

The Delvinia Report on Internet Voting in the Town of Markham 2010 is available for purchase at \$4,995 plus HST.

This report can be ordered by emailing info@delvinia.com or by filling out our online order form at www.delvinia.com/dig.

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