



UP THE CREEK

May 1, 2012

On The Value of Polls

You could tell there is a national election scheduled this year if by no other means than by simply listening for disclaimers about polls.

Nobody, it seems, who is remotely involved in an election ever pays the slightest attention to any poll result. Right. One wonders how all the polling outfits stay in business.

We at Up The Creek have undertaken some polls during our existence. I think probably the first one, conducted in 1955, was simply two questions put to the widely scattered residents at that time, (1) "Ought we to form a domestic water company?" and (2) "Shall we give it a name consisting of at least seven words?" The fact that they went ahead and did both things proves that nobody believed much in poll results back then either.

The most recent poll we conducted was last October, in which we solicited opinions on some different billing methods. The response from our readers was really impressive. Roughly ¼ of you responded, some with quite carefully written essays, some with just yes/no check marks, and one or two with a vehemence that made us wonder if we had inadvertently asked "Is your mother the devil?"

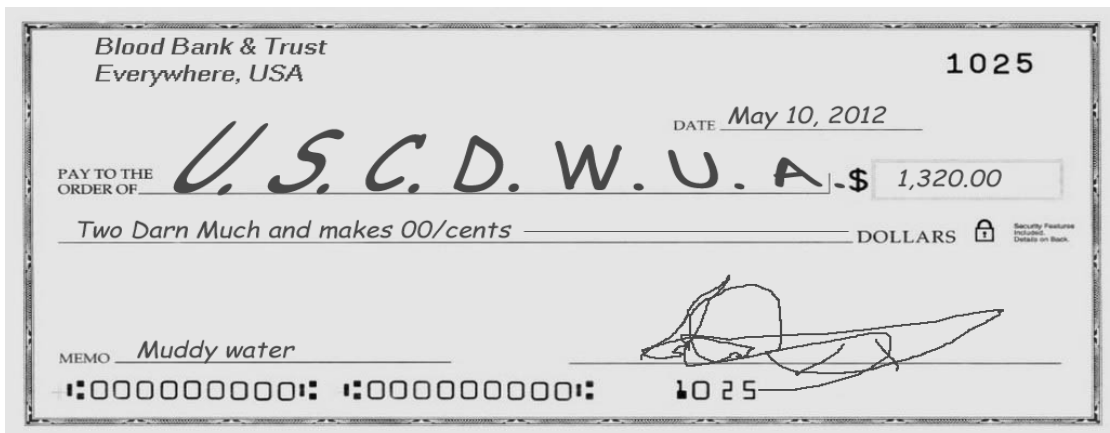
We are grateful to all who responded; it was helpful in pointing us in a direction when we were mostly milling about. So, in that sense, the poll was useful.

Had we stopped there, and simply honored the usefulness of the poll, we would have been better off. But no, we had to go to the next level and *interpret* the poll. Here's how the interpretation process went:

- 25 percent of our customers responded to the poll
- More than half of respondents favored receiving water bills by email.
- Leap of logic: more than half of our customers want e-billing
- Therefore, our expense in setting up the email system could be recovered in a couple of months.

Actual result? Fail. The number who responded that they wanted e-billing have signed up, period. We can take some comfort that our setup costs will probably still be recovered in 2012, by saving paper and postage. And we expect a few more email recruits as time goes on – please make your request for e-billing by sending a short message to billing@usc dwua.com.

Getting back to our seven-word, 46-letter name bequeathed by the jokers of 1955, please don't worry about cramming the whole thing on a check. Use our initials, but start small, or this happens...



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