

# Pollster Lands Private Equity

By Dan Primack

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Only political junkies care about the polling business right now, but since I'm touched by that particular affliction...

Rasmussen Reports, one of the nation's best-known polling outfits, today announced that it has raised an undisclosed amount of private equity funding from Noson Lawen Partners. The deal closed on Monday, and seems to technically be for a control position, although Noson Lawsen partner Ted Carroll took pains to say that existing management would remain firmly in charge.

"We have very defined roles, and I've got no interest in interfering with polling methodology or anything like that," explains Carroll, a longtime media investor who once was the lead finance producer for The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. "I was working on the program when AT&T wrote a \$10 million check and became our sole sponsor, so realize that once big brands recognize credibility in an information source, they covet it. I sense Scott [Rasmussen] and the team here are close to making that sort of metamorphosis."

Rasmussen Reports currently makes some money off of online advertising, plus a premium subscription product that peaked at around 4,000 users. The Asbury Park, N.J.-based company's plan going forward is to use Noson Lawen's investment to supercharge both revenue streams, by hiring a sales and marketing and upgrading the breadth of its premium content.

It also wants to use some of the money to develop new research techniques. Rasmussen was the first national pollster to use robocalls, which has been widely adopted after initial derision. "Auto polling was cutting edge in 1995, but that was a long time ago," Scott Rasmussen says.

One thing Rasmussen Reports won't do is private polling for political candidates or causes, with both Carroll and Rasmussen saying that ideological neutrality is essential to the company's credibility. The company has been accused of tilting rightward, but Rasmussen insists the charges of bias are misplaced: "The biggest complaint, or comment has to do with our daily presidential

tracking poll. Our numbers traditionally show President Obama's numbers lower than Gallup or some of the others, but that's because they poll adults and we poll likely voters. Quinnipiac today had one with a registered voter sample, which is similar to likely voters, and its results look a lot like ours. The reason our sample shows lower for Obama is that groups like young adults are very supportive of him, but are less likely to show up and vote. When others shift to a likely voter model later in the election cycle, their numbers move closer to ours."

For the record, Rasmussen's final poll before last November's presidential election showed Obama beating John McCain by a 52%-46% margin. That's awfully close to the official 52-44.4 margin.