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### Website Compare and Contrast Project: Presidential Campaign Websites

With limited financial resources, what's the best way for a presidential candidate to quickly reach 300 million people? With a campaign website, of course! The presidential election is one year away, and I thought it might be interesting to look at presidential campaign websites. After visiting many of the campaign sites, I wonder how the candidates and the public made it through the campaign season without these sites in years past. They provide a direct way for candidates to raise money, alert, collect, and connect with supporters, and introduce the candidate to the voters, present his (her) positions on the issues, and allow "virtual interaction" with the candidate. This has been done successfully and unsuccessfully. I decided to compare and contrast three websites: Mike Huckabee, [www.mikehuckabee.com](http://www.mikehuckabee.com), Barack Obama, [www.barackobama.com](http://www.barackobama.com), and Jack Grimes, [joanne21921.tripod.com](http://joanne21921.tripod.com). I will try to accomplish the following tasks on each website, and report how easy, difficult, or impossible it is to execute each task:



- Who is Candidate X?
- How do I give a contribution to the campaign and is the site secure?
- How do I contact the campaign?
- What is the media writing about Candidate X?
- What did the campaign blog say in August 2007?
- Where does Candidate X stand on trade issues?

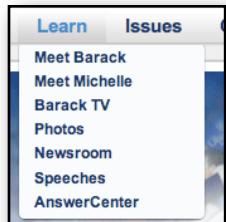
#### **Who is Candidate X?**

Who is Mike Huckabee? I logged onto the campaign website (next page), and immediately saw the link, **About Mike**. I clicked on the link, and a lengthy page of text was



<http://www.mikehuckabee.com/>

my email and zip code to **Join Us** (to the right) or I could **Continue to Homepage**. I chose this second option. I brought up the Homepage and was presented with many different graphical options, displaying information about the campaign. There was no **About** or **About Barack**, unlike on the Huckabee site. Instead, there was a **Learn** option. I moused over the **Learn** option, and a graphical drop-down menu appeared. I was presented with several choices. The **Meet Barack** option was



obviously the answer to my

question. I wish I could have gotten to it faster, or that the labeling had been clearer: **Learn** and **Meet**? How to do those two words go together? Also, the campaign placed several categories under the **Learn** navigational feature that I'm a little unsure if they fit into the **Learn** label.

Finally, I wanted to know who Jack Grimes is. I visited his

displayed, with biographical information about Huckabee.

On the far right, I could also **Meet Janet Huckabee** and visit the **Photo Gallery**. To navigate back home, I discovered that I needed to click on the **Mike Huckabee** graphic at the top of the screen, or the Home button at the bottom right of the window.

Who is Barack Obama? Finding this information out was a bit more complicated. I first tried to visit the Obama campaign site, and was presented with a request for



<http://www.barackobama.com/>



<http://joanne21921.tripod.com/>

website. After going through the 10 available web pages (including home), I could not locate any biographical information about “Director Grimes,” and there was no search feature or site map to help me out. The information was simply unavailable.

### How do I give a contribution to the campaign and is the site secure?

To give a contribution to the Huckabee campaign, there appeared to be three different ways I can give money. I could click on the **Contribute** button on the navigational bar, I could click on the **3-Contribute** link. Both links bring up the same contribute page. There was also a third way. Upon visiting the campaign’s **Interactive Timeline** (a fundraising gimmick), I can fill out a smaller contribute form. When clicking **Continue**, I was sent to the same Contribute page, like above. In terms of security of the page, I was informed on the Contribute page to “Please make your most generous contribution using our secure Online Donation Center”. There was a link (with the notorious “clicking here” contextual link) for a phone or mail contribution option, which was a nice touch for people without a credit card or online security concerns. I also knew that the website was secure, because the protocol changed to **https://** and a padlock icon appeared in the status bar and also the address bar. Why the three different places to contribute? Not quite sure.

On the Obama campaign homepage, I discovered that the campaign uses the word **Donate**, instead of **Contribute**. I could click the **Donate** button in two different locations, but I was sent to two very different **Donation** pages. One was a generic donation page. The other was a donation page that tells potential donors that if you donate and the campaign



meets a certain fundraising goal, you and guest could be selected to spend a day with Obama on the campaign trail. Both pages offered a mail-in option for donations, but not a phone number to call and donate over the phone. I knew that both donate pages were secure, because the protocol



changed to https://, the padlock icon appeared in the bottom right of the browser window and in the address bar, and a “Secured by SSL” graphic appeared on both pages. To get back to the homepage, then, since I didn’t donate, I had to hit the back button. All forms of navigation disappear when visiting the **donate** pages.

What was helpful about the Obama donation site is that it was a subdomain (donate.barackobama.com). The Huckabee contribution page was a “Contribute.Home” database query.

Trying to figure out how to donate to Jack Grimes was extremely difficult. All I could find was a mailing address and a personal email address ([joanne\\_parker20@hotmail.com](mailto:joanne_parker20@hotmail.com)) on the **Contact Us** page and information about paying dues to the party on the **Becoming a Member** page. No security was present on the website, especially since it’s a hosted website (Tripod), and unrelated ads were present on the website.

### **How do I contact the campaign?**

To contact the Huckabee campaign, I had to do extensive browsing of the homepage for **Contact Us** information. A **Contact Us** link was at the bottom right of the browser window. This page listed five email addresses, a phone number, and a mailing address.

To contact the Obama campaign, I again had to browse the homepage extensively, before locating the **Contact Us** link at the bottom right of the browser window. The page began with an **Answer Center**, which could answer commonly asked questions, but I was looking for actual contact information for the campaign. It became complicated after this point. I could choose a **Non-media Scheduling request**, **Media & Press Inquiries**, **Signup to Volunteer**, or **Other Thoughts and Questions**. I could also select an **Internship Opportunity** from various states. Each of these options brought up a separate form. Below of these different options, I finally was able to find a campaign headquarters phone number and a national campaign mailing address.

To contact Jack Grimes, I simply needed to click on the **Contact Us** link, and the mailing address (a P.O. Box) and a personal email address of a Joanne Parker is listed.

### **What is the media writing about Candidate X?**

Mike Huckabee had a **Newsroom** area, as well as a **NewsFeed** on the campaign homepage. However, the **Newsroom** area of the website was a bit difficult to follow, as **Recent Press Releases** and **Recent Articles** are displayed side by side, in the same text, all with underlined links, which made it difficult to read all the available text. However, I was still able to find that the most recent news article about Huckabee is Newsweek’s “The GOP’s Best Bet?” (at the time of this review).

There are other problems with this area of the website. The current linked article on the news page (when I reviewed the site) was “Tied For 2nd Place Nationally.” It linked to the campaign blog section of the site, not the **Newsroom** section. The subnavigation system (see to the right) included these two categories, as well as video and audio. However, the video and audio sections of the site hadn’t been updated since August and September. Also, there was no way to search the **Newsroom** content. It could only be filtered by month, and even then, the filtering happens for each category.



The website would be much more powerful if these categories were at least integrated in a search. Also, the campaign **Blog** was sometimes used as a news tool for the campaign, but the blog was located in its own separate category. New videos have been posted on the blog, but are not integrated into the **Newsroom** section of the site. The blog was organized in reverse chronological order, and the blog page included a blogroll of supporters that had no sense of order to it at all. It’s only a lengthy list of a multitude of Huckabee blogs.

On Barack’s homepage, one could argue that the **In the News**, **Obama HQ Blog**, and **BarackTV** areas could all be newsroom categories. **In the News** looked like it presents the most recent articles written about Obama. However, the full **Newsroom** was available under **Learn** (a category that does not make sense for Newsroom to fit under), and the campaign **Blog** was a

separate category. On the homepage, I was able to see the most recent news article, found under the **In the News** ticker is “Obama stirs up S.F. crowd.”

No information was available about media writings about Jack Grimes on his campaign website.

### What did the campaign blog say in August 2007?

To get to the campaign **Blog** on the Obama site, I clicked on the **Blog** button at the top of most of the site’s web pages. When the Blog page came up, I noticed that it was 1 of 117 pages. The posts were listed in reverse chronological order. However, there’s no immediate way to sort through the blogs. There isn’t a search option or a list. The full blog posts are listed on the page. I scrolled down to the bottom of the page, and found a drop-down list that I could select August 2007 from. However, it was listed in chronological order (February 2007-November 2007), the opposite of how the blog posts were listed. I pulled up all the August posts, and found out I had to click through several pages to get to the August 15 posts. It was not easy to navigate the Obama campaign blog.



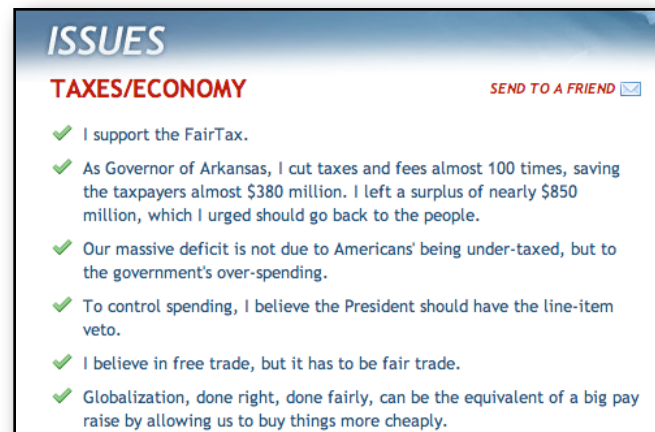
To visit the campaign **Blog** on the Huckabee site, I clicked on the **Blog** button at the top of most site’s web pages, just like the Obama site. The most recent posts were listed in reverse chronological order. There was a navigation drop-down menu, organized by month available on the right side of the site. I selected August 2007 from the list. All the blog posts from August were listed in reverse chronological order. I scrolled down and found the group of 08-15 posts. One of the posts from that day was called “Momentum Continues.”

Jack Grimes didn’t have a a campaign blog at all, on his website.

## Where does Candidate X stand on trade issues?

For Jack Grimes' site, I was able to locate positions on trade issues -- with some translating. Reading between the lines, I was able to find some information on trade policy (maybe) on the **Presidential Priorities, Statement of Candidacy, and FAQ** pages. But the information was unorganized, and unspecific, and political and party jargon were both used. For this task, I actually was able to begin to find what I was looking for, but still did not find where Grimes stood on trade.

For Mike Huckabee, I clicked on the **Issues** button from his homepage. I could have clicked on **Issues** from any page on his website, because that universal navigation bar is always present on all pages on the Huckabee site, from what I was able to browse. On the **Issues** page, I could either scroll down the different categories of Huckabee's positions on different issues, or I could use the sub-navigation system on the right. Neither list has anything about trade, though. If I were an ordinary voter, I would give up, thinking that Huckabee didn't have a position on



trade issues. However, I understand the political jargon, and realize that trade positions might be under the **Taxes and Economy** category. I clicked on it, and sure enough, the information I needed was right there, listed in a quick breakdown of Huckabee's positions on taxes and economy, and then further details could be found, scrolling down the page.

On Obama's site, I saw the **Issues** navigation button, available from most pages on the site. I rolled my mouse over it, and a drop-down menu appeared, that was cut off by the bottom of my browser window. It was too long for my screen-size. However, the categories are interesting. Several verbs are used as labels (Protecting and Meeting are two), and they're used fairly consistently. I couldn't find anything remotely related to trade or even economy on the list. I tried using the **Overview** Issue topic, thinking that maybe taxes or economy or trade would be

listed there, or at least in one of the Issue category descriptions, but I couldn't find it listed either. As the site had no search available, I gave up on my search. Maybe Obama doesn't have a current position on trade issues, hasn't put a category up about trade yet, or maybe it was a matter of bad organization. I don't know.

## Interesting Content

Both the Huckabee and Obama sites have several social networking links to where the campaigns have a presence on sites like Facebook, MySpace, MeetUp, BlackPlanet, Eventful, YouTube, and Flickr. These campaigns are recognizing the impact of the interact and trying to connect with the younger crowd. Jack Grimes **Links** page looks like it is a generic Tripod Links page.



## Conclusion

Overall, I learned a lot about Internet architecture by looking at these sites. As someone who does have a strong political interest and does visit many political sites on a regular basis, I still found it difficult to navigate the sites at times. The campaigns have a lot more work to do, if they're going to reach potential voters in the best, most efficient way possible, through their websites. To conclude this discussion, I've got some final thoughts about each site.

After seeing the Jack Grimes site, some might think it is a hoax. It's honestly sad in many ways, but it's a legitimate site. Project VoteSmart has a page on this candidate at [http://www.vote-smart.org/bio.php?can\\_id=15772](http://www.vote-smart.org/bio.php?can_id=15772). His site highlights many of the bad features of websites, including no "scent" use, as in, his pages were the generic Tripod pages, id21, id22, and so on. His site also highlights how important the Internet has become to campaign sites. People visit the campaign portals to find out more about candidates and to connect with the candidates. If this man wanted to win the presidency, he would need to develop a much better website, and also have it hosted at his own domain, not a free web-hosted site.

With the Huckabee site, its biggest strength is its streamlined theme. The navigation bar stays at the top, as well as the Mike Huckabee symbol and campaign theme. Then, on the right-hand side of the screen, there is always a tan subsection of an area, then a **Help Mike Today** section, with three areas. This is present on all pages. The **Recent Blog Posts** area is sometimes present.

However, the site content is not searchable, and it can be difficult to follow. The most generated content comes from the campaign blog, as supporters are able to talk to one another in the comments section, and the information is left on the pages, and not used by the campaign on the website in any other way.

Barack's site has more content than Huckabee's, and even has a section where a visitor can create their own "my.barackobama.com" page. There is also a section called **People** (located on the universal navigation bar) that shows special content for different communities of people. However, his site doesn't have the simplicity that is present on Huckabee's website. There's too much happening on Obama's homepage. A potential supporter or voter would be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of content that is not organized in any manner.

