

## Meet the man behind WhiteHouse.gov

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Macon Phillips understands the new media scene, one that combines politics and technology to talk directly to the people. Phillips works for President Barack Obama as the White House's new media director, a new job for an administration that embraces technology.

Since he introduced the revamped WhiteHouse.gov on Jan. 20, Phillips has spent more time managing the daily flow of news from the White House during a challenging economic environment than considering the big picture of how to build the administration's new media message.

But he's happy to provide more government transparency.

"We're serving as a connector between the policymakers and the citizens that put them in office," said Phillips, 30, who worked for Blue State Digital, a political consultancy that leverages new media tools. "There's a lot to learn. I don't have any experience in government other than being a taxpayer."

With social media tools sweeping the Internet, led by interactions on Facebook and YouTube, politicians can put out their messages first, without interference.

"A lot of the work we're doing hasn't been done before" for a president, he said.

Obama used the tools of modern communication masterfully to help him win election to the White House.

There will be criticism of the White House's new media efforts "if the level of transparency they talk about isn't met," said Kelly Cutler, chief executive of Chicago's Marcel Media, a Web development agency.

But that should be tempered, at least initially, because the White House is making the effort to reach out, as Obama said during the election.

Phillips' "job is a big part of who Obama is," Cutler offered. "What he did with social media during the campaign made us think we were getting a president in step with technology. I don't think that would have been the case with John Kerry or John McCain."

Phillips acknowledges that the White House site will draw critics.

"We're not the only viewpoint," he said. "I don't anticipate anyone else being quiet now that we are here."

With social media, one of the challenges is allowing your critics to speak, even on the Web sites you control.

"The Internet has open standards," Phillips said. "We're thinking of ways that we can be part of the process."

Phillips joined the Obama campaign during the general election.

"I was out in Grant Park the night Obama won the election," he said. He had celebratory beers later that night and went straight to the office at 8:30 the next morning to "turn on Change.gov."

That site was the forerunner of the rebuilt WhiteHouse.gov.

The old WhiteHouse.gov was "boring, not informative and static," Cutler said, calling the new version timely. "There's a Web 2.0 philosophy

behind it. It's being used for interactivity and transparency, it's not just pushing information onto the Web."

WhiteHouse.gov not only includes videos (such as the president's recent trip to Canada) and photo slide shows, but it also details Obama's homeowner stability program and speeches by other administration officials, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. There's a blog that's updated several times a day.

What excites Phillips is the opportunity to spread the message of new media \_ direct communication, interaction through a blog, the use of videos - to help Washington's career politicians.

"The career people are thrilled to tackle this," Phillips said.

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