

**THE BLOG****Make Your Own Ad**

By Marty Kaplan

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An amazing thing is happening online. Across the country, ordinary citizens — for free — are coming up with terrific ideas for political ads. The campaign consultant monopoly is being broken; at least at the creative end of the business, the political media industry is being democratized.

For example, have a look at the comments, over at TPM Cafe, about the new RNC ad saying that Osama will kill you if you vote for a Democrat. There are plenty of funny, shrewd, well-detailed rejoinders to that ad. They're essentially storyboards awaiting execution. It wouldn't take more than a few hours for someone halfway decent with iMovie HD, or its PC equivalent, to turn any one of those proposals into an actual, professional 30-second spot.

The challenge, of course, is getting the ad seen. YouTube is one option; you can upload it there, or to sites like HuffPo, and hope that viral propagation will do its magic.

Another distribution option — but this one requires the help and savvy of the party apparatus — is the press conference scam. In every election year, the media fall for it: a campaign releases a new ad to the press, and it cuts so close to the bone that the footage airs all over the news. The candidate or the party may actually spend little, or nothing, on a media buy to air the ad, but as long as it's edgy or outrageous enough, the press will distribute its content for free.* Hey, DNC, DSCC, DCCC, what are you waiting for?

Of course the only guaranteed way to get an ad in front of eyeballs is to pay television stations for the time. In this election season, something like \$2 billion will travel from campaign contributors' checkbooks to media companies' bottom lines in exchange for the privilege of getting candidates' messages in front of voters. Free air time for campaigns is as unlikely to happen as public financing; if you think politicians despise the relentless need to wheedle and whore for dollars enough to want to put an end to the humiliation, or if you think that regulators would want to extract a public interest obligation from broadcasters in exchange for their free licenses, you would be wrong.

So that puts a premium on what the internet can do. If JibJab, OK Go, lonelygirl15 and a host of other Web phenoms can capture the country's attention, maybe the rest of us can, too. As long as net neutrality prevails, any garage ad has the same common carriage rights as any corporate marketing campaign... which is why a lame duck Congress might yet try its best to murder digital democracy.