

---

**February 4, 2008**

LINK BY LINK

## Is Obama a Mac and Clinton a PC?

By [NOAM COHEN](#)

STYLES make fights — or so goes the boxing cliché. In 2008, they make presidential campaigns, too.

This is especially true for the two remaining Democrats, [Hillary Clinton](#) and [Barack Obama](#). Reporters covering the candidates have already resorted to traditional analysis of style — fashion choices, manner of speaking, even the way they laugh. Yet, according to design experts, the candidates have left a clear blueprint of their personal style — perhaps even a window into their souls — through the Web sites they have created to raise money, recruit volunteers and generally meet-and-greet online.

On one thing, the experts seem to agree. The differences between [hillaryclinton.com](#) and [barackobama.com](#) can be summed up this way: Barack Obama is a Mac, and Hillary Clinton is a PC.

That is, Mr. Obama's site is more harmonious, with plenty of white space and a soft blue palette. Its task bar is reminiscent of the one used at [Apple's](#) iTunes site. It signals in myriad ways that it was designed with a younger, more tech-savvy audience in mind — using branding techniques similar to the ones that have made the [iPod](#) so popular.

“With Obama's site, all the features and elements are seamlessly integrated, just like the experience of using a program on a Macintosh computer,” said Alice Twemlow, chairwoman of the M.F.A. program in design criticism at the School of Visual Arts (who is a Mac user).

It is designed, she said, even down to the playful logos that illustrate choices like, Volunteer or Register to Vote. She likened those touches to the elaborate, painstaking packaging Apple uses to woo its customers.

The linking of Mr. Obama with Mac and Mrs. Clinton with PCs has already become something of a theme during the primary. Early in the campaign, a popular YouTube parody of Apple's “1984” [Super Bowl](#) ad made Mrs. Clinton the face of oppression. This week on The Huffington Post, Douglas T. Kendall, the founder of the Community Rights Counsel, a public interest law firm, [made the connection more explicit](#).

But the designers believe the comparisons — but not perhaps the Orwellian overtones — are apt. In contrast to [barackobama.com](#), Mrs. Clinton's site uses a more traditional color scheme of dark blue, has sharper lines dividing content and employs cookie-cutter icons next to its buttons for volunteering, and the like.

“Hillary’s is way more hectic, it’s got all these, what look like parody ads,” said Ms. Twemlow, who is not a citizen and cannot vote in the election.

Jason Santa Maria, creative director of Happy Cog Studios, which designs Web sites, detected a basic breach of netiquette. “Hillary’s text is all caps, like shouting,” he said. There are “many messages vying for attention,” he said, adding, “Candidates are building a brand and it should be consistent.”

But Emily Chang, the cofounder of Ideacodes, a Web designing and consulting firm, detected consistent messages, and summed them up: “His site is more youthful and hers more regal.”

Mr. Obama’s site is almost universally praised. Even Martin Avila, the general manager of the company responsible for the Republican [Ron Paul](#)’s Web site, said simply, “Barack’s site is amazing.”

But the compliments are clearly double-edged.

While Apple’s ad campaign maligns the PC by using an annoying man in a plain suit as its personification, it is not clear that aligning with the trendy Mac aesthetic is good politics. The iPod may be a dominant music player, but the Mac is still a niche computer. PC, no doubt, would win the Electoral College by historic proportions (with Mac perhaps carrying Vermont).

While Mr. Santa Maria praised [barackobama.com](#) for having “this welcoming quality,” he added that it was “ethereal, vaporous and someone could construe it as nebulous.” He said there was a bit of the “Lifetime channel effect, you know, vasoline on the lens” to create a softer effect on the viewer. The “hectic” site that the Clinton campaign is offering could actually be quite strategic, exactly in step with her branding. After all, Mrs. Clinton repeatedly emphasizes how hard she will work for the average American “starting on Day 1.” If she comes across as energetic online, that may simply be her intention. If she shouts a bit more, typographically speaking, that may be the better to be heard.

Unlike the Republicans, the Democratic contenders have incorporated social-networking tools to their sites — allowing supporters to create their own groups, for example, though Mr. Obama is considered the pacesetter in that regard.

“Obama’s campaign gained attention here in the Bay area tech community early on when he launched the [My.BarackObama.com](#) portal that allowed for personal blogging from the public, messaging with other supporters, and a host of other tools,” Ms. Chang wrote in an e-mail message.

On the big Internet issues like copyright, [Lawrence Lessig](#), a Stanford law professor who is supporting Mr. Obama, said there was “not a big difference on paper” between the two Democrats. Both tend to favor the users of the Internet over those who “own the pipes.” He is impressed by Mr. Obama’s proposal to “make all public government data available to everybody to use as they wish.”

In the long run, however, Mr. Lessig believes that it is the ability to motivate the electorate that matters, not simple matters of style. And he's a Mac user from way back.

[Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

---