

## IT'S THE ECONOMY ... SITE

*WE ASKED AREA WEB DESIGNERS TO SIZE UP OBAMA'S NEW RECOVERY.GOV*

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Author: Andrew Ratner  
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### Document Text

When he addressed Congress and a prime-time audience about the economic recovery plan, President Barack Obama made a point of highlighting a new Web site his administration created called [recovery.gov](http://recovery.gov), "so that every American can find out how and where their money is being spent."

It's the most innovative example so far of Obama using the Internet to change governing, which was anticipated after the success he had in using it to help build support to win the presidency. His naming last week of Vivek Kundra, the chief technology officer for the District of Columbia, as the first chief information officer for the federal government, is seen as buttressing that effort.

Macon Phillips, the director of new media for the White House, said the site will become more valuable as more data become available from the recovery program.

"Recovery.gov is a groundbreaking effort that's involved a lot of groups within government," said Phillips, who also worked on Internet strategies for Obama during the campaign. "One of the most exciting parts for me has been working with career government employees who are really challenging themselves and getting the opportunity to try out a lot of new ideas."

We asked Web designers and strategists to kick the tires on the new site. In general, they were impressed with its detail and user-friendliness, but they also offered pointers to keep it from becoming an online "brochure" for the administration. That will be the ultimate test: whether democratic government can credibly report on its progress in a way the public would accept as more than spin, regardless of how sharp the Web site looks.

### The suggestion box

I learned of and Twittered about the [recovery.gov](http://recovery.gov) site last week. At the time, it was in reaction to another threaded conversation I was having with fellow Baltimorean Tracy Gosson about getting money from the economic stimulus package to fund better/more power outlets in public places and private "pit stops" for laptop users. My complaint about it at this point is that there was no clear place on the site that I could find for me to submit any of my suggestions. I didn't really assess it for look/feel, but I can say that I felt frustrated being sent there and then not finding what I wanted. Regardless, I do think it's great that the president of the U.S. wants to give the citizens a direct line to such information. This is (once again) precedent-setting, and I think that's really, well, cool!

- Hollis Thomases

President

Web Ad.vantage, Baltimore online marketing company

### The tracking

At this point, it is not much more than a brochure site. What they need is real-time tracking of the information such as geographic maps of distribution, performance and change over time. We specialize in performance visualization and have a product, [edualizer.com](http://edualizer.com), that would be brilliant to visualize where all the money is going and its effectiveness over time.

- Todd Marks

Technical specialist and founder

Mindgrub Technologies, Oella Internet app designer

## The data

What I see when looking at the site is the timeline for reporting of information and then some very big, macro level analysis of what is being spent. Great start! However, what we need on the site is the ability to get to the raw data. Where and how things are being spent and the impact.

- Matt Madigan

Director, operations

FortiusOne, Arlington, Va., Web data

analysis

## THE LOOK

The tone of recovery.gov is more conservative than Obama's campaign site. ... The color palette has shifted to a more subtle pairing of royal blue with grays, golds and variations on the blues that dominated his campaign site. ... Where it may lack in vibrancy, it shines in its use of interactive elements. ... All in all, it is an exceptional start to what will be a very important Web site.

---- Matthew DeVille

Creative director

G.1440, Baltimore information technology consultant

## THE LANGUAGE

Overall site is very good. ... The target audience for this site is "everyman/woman" - so the slightly low-tech, friendly overall look mixed with the simple navigation is a big success for me. Plus - the language is really simple. "Where is Your Money Going?" - not trying to be too smart, clever or political. ... One criticism: There isn't a strong sense of other voices, or resources for other community or local resources. ... For example - are there any members of the Cabinet or recovery plan that can be followed on Twitter or who have blogs? Otherwise - great start.

----Tracey Halvorsen

Creative director and co-founder

Fastspot, Baltimore Web designer

## THE SUBSTANCE

If the "track the progress" section became an interactive dashboard that let people really get in and explore the progress and compare and analyze, it would start to seem like true transparency. The site is all about the site - make it about the results. Obviously this site is very new, and with the act just passing, it is hard to have much substance. But right now the self-referential nature of the writing and the giant video of the president talking about the site reinforce the fact that recovery.gov is all sizzle, no steak. That main area with the video should be transitioned to talk about results and important updates on the progress. (By last week, the president's video had become secondary on the page to pie charts illustrating where assistance was going.)

---- Lee Gatchel

Director of user experience

Carton Donofrio Partners, Baltimore marketing agency

## THE SEARCH

The site seems to have been built with search engine optimization (SEO) best practices as a passing thought. The content does not seem to target specific keywords; in fact, the phrase appearing most is "learn more." ... I did a Google search for "accountability and transparency in Obama's budget" and couldn't find the site on the first 10 search results pages.

Of course the administration's marketing strategy will ultimately dictate how people find the site, and I'm sure that as they build out the content and as more Web sites link to recovery.gov, the site will rise in the ranks. ... It's important that the administration do what it can to make this information not just accessible, but easily findable by people searching the Web. ... By yesterday, there were 3,410 sites linking to recovery.gov. This is a good sign that they'll soon be rising in the search ranks.

--- Daniel Kaplan

Founder

periscopeUP.com, Baltimore Internet marketer

#### THE COMMITMENT

It has more content than I expected. He created a video piece for this Web site choreographed especially for the Web, which is very interesting. Instead of taking a piece of his address to Congress, which would have been the easy way out, to do a custom piece says a lot about his commitment to this.

--- Mike Rosenfeld

Founder

WebConnection, Baltimore Web designer

Credit: [andrew.ratner@baltsun.com](mailto:andrew.ratner@baltsun.com)

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#### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

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