
Hughes Hubbard & Reed

Technology and the Obama Administration

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While there are clearly more pressing issues to be addressed immediately after the inauguration (the economy, anyone??), the incoming Obama administration has a detailed, comprehensive roadmap already in place to guide its technology policies and initiatives. This probably should not come as a surprise considering how Obama leveraged technology and the Web to transform presidential politics during the campaign (remember the campaign ad that appeared in Burnout Paradise on the Xbox 360?). The technology platform promises that the incoming administration “will work to ensure the full and free exchange of information through an open Internet and use technology to create a more transparent and connected democracy” and “will encourage the deployment of modern communications infrastructure to improve America’s competitiveness and employ technology to solve our nation’s most pressing problems — including improving clean energy, healthcare costs, and public safety.” These are pretty lofty goals. But there are a few specific issues in the platform that are worth mentioning. First, in unequivocal terms, the incoming administration states its support for net neutrality. This is a topic we’ve written about before ([here](#) and [here](#)). The net neutrality issue may also become a higher profile issue on Capitol Hill when the next Congress convenes. Senator Byron Dorgan, who introduced the Internet Freedom Preservation Act in 2007 (a bill which went nowhere), has indicated that he will introduce the legislation again, in the hopes that support from the White House may give the bill needed momentum. The second issue worth noting in the platform is a pledge to appoint the nation’s first CTO. This position appears to be different from the position of IP enforcement “czar” that was created by the IP-PRO Act (discussed [here](#)). While there has been speculation as to who will be appointed (some familiar names have been tossed out and at least one (Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google) has already said he’s not interested), the more critical issue is what the CTO will be able to accomplish. According to the technology agenda, the CTO’s role will be “to ensure the safety of our networks and lead an interagency effort, working with chief technology and chief information officers of each of the federal agencies, to ensure that they use best-in-class technologies and share best practices.” Again, lofty goals and perhaps the makings of a major bureaucratic turf war. But it appears that the incoming administration wants its CTO’s primary focus to be on transparency to ensure that the government operates in an open and accessible environment. Lastly, even though the long presidential campaign is over, the Obama administration will continue to use the Web as a primary means for communicating to and involving people in its policy decision-making and implementation process. The centerpiece of that effort will be www.change.gov, the website established the day after the election,

which, along with news, videos, information on the transition and detailed policy papers, enables visitors to register on-line to receive e-mail updates directly from the administration. Whether or not this will make for more effective governance is a judgment that will have to wait. But we appear to be on the verge of the first Web 2.0 presidency.

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