

YouTube: The new campaign tool

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Welcome to politics in the age of YouTube.

Founded last year as a way to share personal video clips online, YouTube.com quickly became an Internet sensation. So it was only a matter of time before political campaigns -- and others with a political ax to grind -- began using the Web site to distribute videos, including campaign ads.

This week, the site made one of its biggest splashes with a video of Sen. George Allen referring to an opponent's volunteer, who is of Indian descent, as a "macaca" during a campaign event in southwestern Virginia. A macaca is a Southeast Asian monkey.

That video was one of the most-viewed clip on the site yesterday, with more than 70,000 viewings, according to YouTube. But that video is certainly not the first political footage to be broadcast on YouTube.

There are plenty of clips of Ned Lamont, who toppled Sen. Joe Lieberman in last week's Democratic primary in Connecticut by riding a wave of popularity on the Internet. A search of Mr. Lamont's name produces more than 200 videos -- some of which are official campaign ads and others are homemade hit jobs.

"MikeinCT" posted one of the most popular clips about the Lieberman-Lamont race. Titled "Dear Joe: A GOP Love Letter," it has been viewed more than 32,000 times since it was posted Aug. 1. The clip features dozens of conservatives such as Bill O'Reilly of Fox News and religious broadcaster the Rev. Pat Robertson praising Mr. Lieberman -- not exactly a desirable endorsement in a Democratic primary.

There also is a clip posted by "RusselTXbaker," who apparently is not a Lamont supporter. Titled "Lamont Victory Party: '60s Freakshow," the clip features Mr. Lamont accepting the Democratic nomination to the anti-war chant of "Bring them home. Bring them home."

Prominently behind Mr. Lamont on stage stand the Revs. Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, with Mr. Sharpton flashing a peace sign.

Although the viewership of these videos varies widely, YouTube says its library of clips is accessed more than 70 million times each day. And it's all free.

"As more people capture special moments on video, YouTube is empowering them to become the broadcasters of tomorrow," the Web site declares. "And tomorrow's writers of the edgiest campaign commercials, too."

The video titled "Allen's Listening Tour" shows Mr. Allen at a campaign event in Breaks, Va., where he was trailed by a volunteer from the James H. Webb Jr. campaign.

After telling the audience that he plans to run his campaign on "positive, constructive ideas," Mr. Allen singles out the young volunteer, named S.R. Sidarth. But Mr. Allen refers to him as "macaca."

"This fellow here, over here with the yellow shirt, macaca, or whatever his name is," the Virginia Republican says, to the amusement of supporters. After ridiculing the University of Virginia student for tracking him with a video camera, Mr. Allen then says:

"Let's give a welcome to macaca, here. Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia."

Posted Monday on YouTube by "WebbCampaign," the video was viewed nearly 2,000 times the first day. By Tuesday night, the video had been viewed more than 38,000 times, even though the site had crashed for six hours.