

## As Shakespeare Wrote, TV or Not TV?

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Picture this: Every day, a major candidate for the highest office in the land spends a few minutes talking into a video camera held by an aide. Then the recordings are posted, with very minor editing, to the his Web site. On some days, they show him on the street, talking casually about the visit he's making to a local business or a day care center. On other days, he's sitting in his office, giving candid responses to the top five questions that have been posted to his blog, as chosen by visitors to his site.

The videos are all generally unscripted; the settings are unencumbered by props; and the camera work is about as good as any tourist's visiting the zoo.

If you think this is a fantasy, don't. This, in a nutshell, is how David Cameron, the youthful leader of Britain's opposition Conservative Party, has been taking advantage of online video since he launched his "Webcameron" site ([www.webcameron.org.uk](http://www.webcameron.org.uk) <

<http://www.webcameron.org.uk>>) last fall. His casual and extended videos have not hurt his popularity; right now, Cameron's Conservatives are leading the ruling Labor Party by 13 percentage points in a recent poll.

For all the talk of this being the "YouTube Election," however, none of the current candidates for president of the United States is doing anything close to what Cameron is doing. Yes, they know they can use their Web sites to broadcast video to potential supporters. But so far, not one presidential campaign has demonstrated that it understands the difference between video online and video on TV. That's because they all apparently think video online is just television on a smaller screen.

In the old world of televised politicking, broadcast time is expensive and scarce. Because of that, politicians learned to speak in sound bites to get their message across quickly. On-camera "gaffes" are feared for what they might reveal. Campaign commercials are rehearsed and scripted as much as possible. The voter gets a carefully packaged view of the candidate. Spin rules, and media consultants get rich from their commissions on buying TV time.

But this approach deprives voters of a real "unscripted" view of the candidate. We pounce on gaffes, believing, as Michael Kinsley memorably said, that a gaffe is when a politician tells the truth -- "or more precisely, when he or she accidentally reveals something truthful about what is going on in his or her head."

In the new world of online video, broadband is cheap and plentiful. Instead of sound bites, a candidate can speak in full paragraphs. He or she can do a daily video blog, or even several, because digital storage is practically unlimited and bandwidth costs are minimal. Like Cameron, he or she can talk to us in the context of their actual lives in relation to the issues at hand. They can talk while washing the dishes, walking to work, reacting to the news of the day or responding directly to questions that we, the voters, have chosen. The voter can get a more realistic view of the candidate as a sometimes fallible human being who, like all of us, struggles to be heard and has something real to say.

There's nothing stopping any of the presidential campaigns from adopting this approach before the 2008 race heats up. Instead of relying on spin, they can give us authenticity.

But first they have to understand that the Web is different. It is a world of abundance, not scarcity. Power, reach and influence will flow to the first campaign that grasps this difference.

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