Creator of anti-Clinton ad is identified - Los Angeles Times

The man behind the Internet hit has ties to Obama's presidential campaign.

By Dan Morain, Times Staff Writer
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A Democratic operative with ties to Sen. Barack Obama's presidential campaign claimed credit Wednesday for creating and posting a mystery video on the Internet that slammed Obama's main rival, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Obama's campaign repeated its denial of any involvement in the matter. The operative, Philip de Vellis, said he created the spot and posted it on YouTube while employed by a firm that is advising the Illinois Democrat on his Internet presence. The firm, Blue State Digital, said De Vellis, 33, was "terminated" Wednesday; De Vellis said he resigned.

Obama spokesman Bill Burton said in an e-mail that Obama's campaign and its employees "had no knowledge and had nothing to do with the creation of the ad." Burton said Blue State Digital, a Washington firm, assured the campaign that De Vellis "did no work on our campaign's account."

Obama's campaign continues to work with Blue State Digital, Burton said. However, he would not disclose the amount that Obama has paid the firm. Campaign finance reports showing the payments to Blue State Digital won't be filed until April 15.

Clinton spokesman Phil Singer declined to comment on the matter.

The video, a takeoff on a famous Apple Computer ad that aired in 1984, created buzz on the Internet and in the press in part because it was provocative but also because the creator identified himself as ParkRidge47, a reference to Clinton's year of birth and the place in suburban Chicago where she was raised.

Given that the Internet is all but unregulated and the cost of producing such spots is minimal, the episode is probably a harbinger of what is in store for the 2008 campaign, at least the part that will play out on the Internet.

"The 2008 campaign is going to be dramatically different because of YouTube, because of citizen involvement, and because of people like Phil de Vellis doing an ad that becomes explosively viral," said Arianna Huffington, who oversees the Huffington Post, which first disclosed De Vellis' identity.

Huffington exposed De Vellis by urging her contributors to work their contacts to identify ParkRidge47. It took about a day, Huffington wrote Wednesday that she called De Vellis to ask him about the spot and invited him to explain himself, which he did later Wednesday.

De Vellis, who could not be reached by The Times, wrote on Huffington Post, which first disclosed De Vellis' identity.

He added that he made the ad "on a Sunday afternoon in my apartment using my personal equipment (a Mac and some software), uploaded it to YouTube and sent links around to blogs." He said the "underlying point was that the old political machine no longer holds all the power."
"The game has changed," De Vellis wrote.

In its statement, Blue State Digital said, "Pursuant to company policy regarding outside political work or commentary on behalf of our clients or otherwise, Mr. De Vellis has been terminated from Blue State Digital effective immediately."

Blue State Digital was founded by techies who worked on Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign. It is viewed as one of the top Internet firms working for Democrats.

The company has provided technology, software development and hosting for Obama's campaign, and one of the firm's founding partners has taken a leave to work for Obama. According to the company's statement, De Vellis initially refused to respond to Huffington, but later acknowledged that he had created the video.

"Mr. De Vellis created this video on his own time. It was done without the knowledge of management, and was in no way tied to his work at the firm or our formal engagement [on technology pursuits] with the Obama campaign," the company statement said.

Meanwhile, a spot that rips off the anti-Clinton ad and lampoons Obama continues to attract attention. Its creator remains unknown.

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