

Mrs. O

From Blog to Brand in Under Six Months

Introduction

Explore a personal passion.

Trust your instincts.

Build a brand that treats people like you would.

Believe a planner can do more than plan.

Those are just a few of the philosophies at the heart of Mrs-O.org, an agency developed blog that celebrates first lady Michelle Obama's style, and in six months time, with no paid media, has infiltrated popular culture. It is now commonplace for the media to refer to Michelle Obama as "Mrs. O" when discussing her style; when we began, there was no reference. With a buzzing site community, a successful merchandise venture and a six-figure book deal, this is a story of a blog that became a brand, and the planning firepower that drove it.



Unexpected Inspiration

Perched on my couch in August 2008, I intently watched the Democratic National Convention coverage. I had already tuned into Michelle Obama's style as media stories began to surface every few months – a profile in Vogue, a feature story for the New York Times, and who could have missed the frenzy sparked by the black and white Donna Ricco dress worn on The View?

But it was during the last week of August that I found myself captivated. By the second night of the convention, I was excitedly Googling to find out more. Who had designed Michelle Obama's dress? Was the fabric a brocade? And what did others think? To my surprise, I was unable to find an authority on Michelle Obama's fashion and style. I wanted more information and a central online resource – and I imagined others did too.





The Opportunity: Exploring a Personal Passion

As a young woman, my mother had taken to giving me a Jacqueline Kennedy style book each year at Christmas. *The Clothes of Camelot*, *Jackie Style* and the venerable *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years* continue to be treasured books in my bookcase, their pages worn thin from being revisited so many times. I sensed, in watching Michelle Obama on stage during the convention, that my generation had found its Jackie O.

So here, I found myself in a perfect storm of opportunity:

- A subject that engaged me personally and passionately.
- A “brand lag”: growing interest in Michelle Obama’s style with no voice or brand satisfying the demand.
- A truly creative and open-minded employer, that above all, values a good idea, regardless of its form, scale or source, and was willing to help me explore mine.

The Idea

A Michelle Obama style forum was in order. The website would chronicle Michelle Obama's ensembles, provide information about the designers she had worn, and give people a place to share their enthusiasm.

Michelle Obama had all the makings of a modern style icon. Mixing high and low end designers had quickly become a hallmark of her style. It was a real-world, democratic approach to fashion that deeply resonated with a wide range of people. The 'Democracy of Style' idea would be at the core of this style forum.

With comparisons to Jackie O top of mind, a fellow planner suggested, "Why don't we call it Mrs. O?" in a quick email exchange. It was short, sweet, stylish and it stuck. From this point forward, the strategic and creative idea became one and the same.

Mrs. O
Home

Follow the Fashion of Mrs. O:
What & Who She's Wearing

Debut in Blue

Posted on September 22nd



Photo credit: Flickr user [Tracy Russo](#) // Creative Commons

Maria Pinto has become one of Mrs. O's signature designers, so it wasn't a surprise to see Mrs. O step onto the DNC stage in her design. The classic lines and rich, saturated color made this dress feel like the late summer edition of the purple Maria Pinto shift that's been in nearly all the Mrs. O fashion coverage. We love the fact that Mrs. O chose a dress from her favorite hometown designer, paired with a brooch [rumored to be from her personal jewelry box](#).

Date: Monday, August 25, 2008

Venue: Democratic National Convention

Designer: Chicago-based, [Maria Pinto](#)

Description: Turquoise blue, three-quarter-sleeve sheath in double-face wool, adorned with a turquoise and silver star pin



Rating: 4.2/5 (43 votes cast)

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Posted by Mrs. T

Mrs. O's Style Talk

these geometric floral brooches are her signature touch, adding a dash of femininity to the bold lines and strong cuts of her dresses...nice

[\(Report comment\)](#)

georgia on 29 September, 2008 at 3:20 pm

Do we really need to say anything???????????? I loved everything EXCEPT the black patent shoes and the low heel.

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Demetris on 7 October, 2008 at 11:26 pm

[...] gorgeous shade of cerulean blue. We can't confirm the designer, but with its resemblance both to this favorite from the convention and that now iconic violet shift-and-Alala-belt combination we strongly suspect [...]

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Third Time Lucky? | Mrs. O on 16 October, 2008 at 7:26 am

[...] we took in the store, a familiar turquoise frock, Mrs. O's dress of choice for the first night of the DNC, immediately caught our eye. Upon [...]

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Chicago Fashion, Part II | Mrs. O on 20 October, 2008 at 6:35 pm

[...] the night Mrs. O took the stage of the 2008 Democratic National Convention. A perfect accent to her turquoise Maria Pinto sheath dress, this is a statement piece we hope to see come out of Mrs. O's jewelry box again soon. [...]

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Erickson Beamon Starburst | Mrs. O on 3 December, 2008 at 11:01 am

Oh wow, I don't remember this outfit, but it rocks!

Kristan

<http://lbu.phuzyzmath.net/>

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Kristan on 3 December, 2008 at 3:44 pm

[...] color of Mrs. O's dress seems to foreshadow the night, fourteen months later, when she wore the muted turquoise dress (also by Pinto) while speaking at the Democratic [...]

[\(Report comment\)](#)

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Time: The Meaning of Mrs. O
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Categories

Art (5)

Making It Happen

Bringing this idea to fruition would necessitate the blurring of roles, and a hands-on “ask for forgiveness, not permission” mentality. The role for planning, foremost, was to “do”.

I presented the idea to the Chief Creative Officer at my agency with a passionate verbal pitch. To my delight, he bought into the idea and said we could use agency resource to make it happen. From there, a few ground rules were set by management: Don’t spend too much money, and don’t do anything illegal.

A blog – easy and cheap to set up, with a “comment” feature that enables outside participation – was our logical vehicle. Images were sourced from Flickr, used through Creative Commons licensing or with permission from the photographer. All writing and research for posts were completed by myself and colleagues.

Aesthetics were important. A blog about the future first lady’s style needed to be stylish in its own right. A graphic designer created our logo, and a technologist suggested a stylish blog template. Our last step was to purchase Mrs-O.org, for an economical \$20. The site launched in late September 2008, just three weeks after the idea was first conceived.



Our Principles for Creative Execution

At its very core, Mrs-O.org is designed to be:

- **Respectful:** We intend the site to be informative and positive. At all costs, we avoid the cynicism and snark that is commonplace on many blogs.
- **Democratic:** We've given our site community a voice. The site is inclusive, interactive and human.
- **Stylish:** Aesthetically, the site aspires to be elegant, feminine and modern, just like its muse.
- **Substantive:** Through highlighting the First Lady's style, we also profile Michelle Obama's personal and social interests, as well as the rich history that surrounds the clothes and designers. Capturing a well-rounded perspective is important; women love Michelle Obama's style because of what it says about her.

Mrs.O
Home
Follow the Fashion of Mrs. O:
What & Who She's Wearing

Mrs. O on J. Crew: "We ladies know"

Posted on October 28th



Mrs. O made an appearance on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno last night wearing yet another J. Crew ensemble. Mrs. O was at her most stylish in this look. A bold yellow, classic lines, all put together with personal flair.

Mrs. O was dressed head to toe (or knee that is) in J. Crew. She wore the [Italian Deco tank](#), [Crystal-button colorblock cardigan](#) in Silver Honey and [Metallic-cloque-pencil skirt](#) (Update: the skirt appears to be the [Pembroke-dot pencil skirt](#) in Yellow Gold. The color is available exclusively through the J. Crew Collection store.) Mrs. O added a bit of sparkle with a multi-colored jeweled brooch to close her cardigan. The designer is unconfirmed, but it has the look of Tom Binns.

When Mr. Leno brought up the subject of Mrs. O's style, "I want to ask you about your wardrobe. I'm guessing about \$60-grand? \$60-, \$70,000 for that outfit?" Mrs. O replied, "Actually this is a J. Crew ensemble. We ladies, we know with J. Crew. You can get some good stuff online."

Mr. Leno, perhaps surprised to hear about Mrs. O's online shopping habits then asked, "Do you order it online? Doesn't that take the fun out of it?" to which Mrs. O replied, "When you don't have time, you've got to click."

Mrs. O has been spotted in J. Crew at least three times in the past few weeks. Seen [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Last night's ensemble, however, was by far our favorite. The best part? The tank and cardigan are now on sale.

As a side note, there was a [great retrospective](#) on J. Crew as part of a profile on Creative Director Jenna Lyons in this month's Domino Magazine - worth a quick peruse.

Date: October 27, 2008
Venue: Appearance on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno



Crystal-button colorblock cardigan
Sold Out



Italian Deco tank
Sold Out



Metallic cloque pencil skirt
Sold Out

Powered by SHOPSTYLE [See More...](#)

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2009 Wardrobe Necessities

Five wardrobe staples that are necessities in 2009!
[www.shelknows.com/style](#)

Forever 21 @ Silk Dresses

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Posted by Mrs. T



Growing the Brand

The site was, and continues to be, unapologetically “work in progress.” Filling the void was more important than being perfect. But also – a democratic site is always an evolving conversation. We would improve and adapt both the aesthetics and functionality of the site over time, as an iterative process that took into account input from our growing community. Users have guided the development; asking for site registration and a discussion board, these features are part of our current upgrade.

The site has benefited from tremendous media attention that has built over time. We began by reaching out to relevant blogs to propose link exchanges. Those links helped to reach initial traffic of 500 visits per day. As national media increasingly took note of Michelle Obama’s style, “there’s even a blog dedicated to Michelle Obama’s style, Mrs-O.org” began to appear in online and print newspapers.

On November 4, Barack Obama did us an enormous favor by winning the election, which in turn, made Mrs. O our First Lady in waiting. The day following the election, the site experienced more than 18,000 visits, and was mentioned in a front page story in the Los Angeles Times.

From that point forward, site traffic has been on an upward climb. Peaks during the Inauguration and trip to Europe in early April generated traffic upward of 35,000 visits per day each, aided by national and international media coverage from the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Reuters, Associated Press, USA Today, CNN, NPR, Vanity Fair and more.

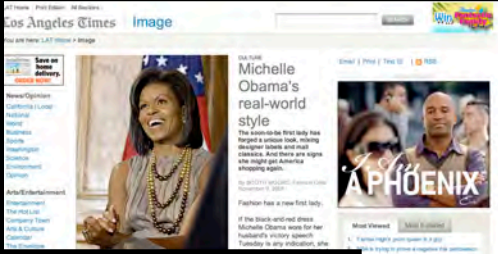
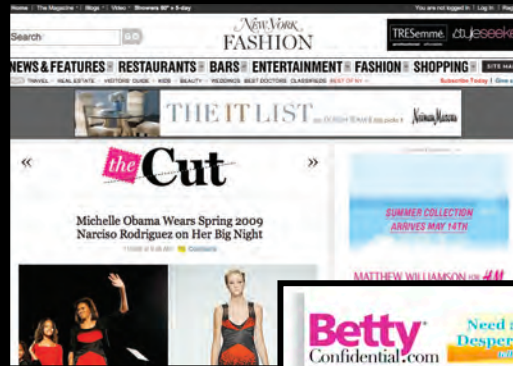
From November 2008 to April 2009, the site has averaged 7,300 visitors per day, and over 220,000 visitors per month. Average time spent on the site is more than 2 minutes, 30 seconds. On Google, Mrs-O.org is first site that appears when searching for “Mrs. O” and “Michelle Obama Style”. We have 2,000 followers on Twitter, and more than 6,000 friends on Facebook.

Perhaps more remarkable than the sheer volume of traffic is the strength of the community. The number of comments per post has reached more than 100 on average, with peaks as high as 400. Site members have even begun to meet-up offline to share Mrs. O inspired interests, such as gardening.

In one of many unexpected developments, I, “Mrs. T”, as I’m known on the site, have become an expert on Michelle Obama’s style, making appearances on The Today Show, MSNBC, Access Hollywood and BBC Radio to comment on the first lady’s style.

The site generates revenue through Google AdSense banners, which pays for a small contract with Getty Images. In January we signed a six-figure book deal with Hachette Book Group to write a Mrs. O style book. “Mrs. O: Democracy of Style” will debut in October 2009. In February we launched a limited edition t-shirt inspired by a signature Michelle Obama look; we sold more than 100 in the first week.

Press



A large advertisement for Betty Confidential.com. The headline says "Need a vacation? Desperate to chill? \$500 is yours! Betty pays the Bills". Below this, there is a "Meet Mrs. O.org" section with a sub-headline "The New First Lady inspires dedicated fan web site". The ad includes a "Hot List" of related topics, a "Live from BettyTalk in SoCal" section, and a "Get your" button.

The advertising agency behind the blog, work for Mrs. Obama fashion designers the fact, mrs-o.org is not for It is an entirely new business by the division of B started to invent new Mrs. O and are part transformation in the a parlaying their expertise companies into creating "Advertising is a massive it's become a lot harder for ideas," said the strategic director of ourselves from scratch and having 100 percent of it."

A screenshot of the TimesOnline website. The main headline is "From mint to Black, Gao WAGs do their bit for mint (rag) trade". There are several smaller articles and images visible on the page.

Advertising agencies have dabbled in side businesses for brand, not dependent on clients' largess, is the big new agency consultant and writer of AdScam, a blog about wags and ad budgets tighten, "the creation of intelligent something you're going to see a lot more of," he said.

The ad agency Brooklyn Brothers, for example, makes a furniture line. Anomaly has created the Avee Eric tee the personal blog of chef Eric Ripert, and I/dentite/te, Bartle Bogle started Zag in Britain in 2006 and put ne business this year. It has produced Pick Me, a line of p a personal security alarm; and Dogside, a social network owners.

Zag got into the fashion blogging business in Septembe account planner at Bartle Bogle in New York, hatched Mrs. Obama's style during the Democratic convention, what she wore.

An advertisement for a book or publication. It features a photograph of a woman and text that reads "Think of three faces from your past." There is a "Find a Fan" button and other promotional elements.

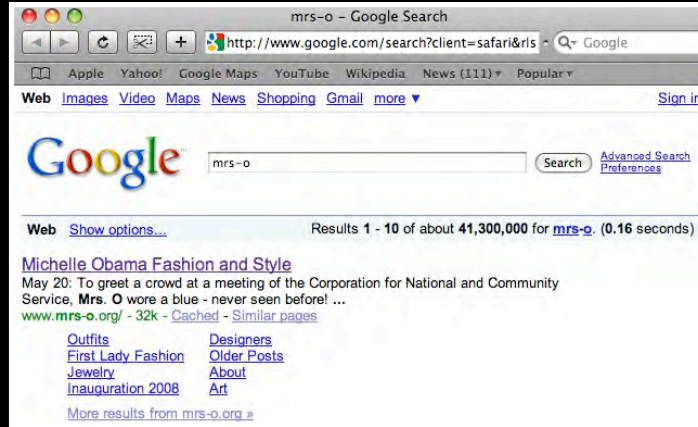
A large advertisement for Vanity Fair magazine. The headline is "THE FABRIC OF OUR COUNTRY". It features a photograph of a fashion show and text about the magazine's content, including a "Subscribe Now" button and a "Need a plan for tonight?" section.

TV Media

The image displays a collage of screenshots from the TODAY show website, specifically focusing on the 'FIRST LADY OF FASHION' segment. The top left shows a navigation menu with categories like 'Fashion & beauty', 'Topics', 'News', 'Concert Series', 'Diet & health', 'Entertainment', 'Fashion', 'Food & wine', 'Home & garden', 'Money', 'Parenting', 'Pets', 'Relationships', 'People', 'Tech & gadgets', and 'Travel'. Below the menu is a large, stylized 'TODAY' logo with a sunburst background. The main content area features three video player thumbnails, each with the title 'FIRST LADY OF FASHION: WHAT WILL MRS. OBAMA WEAR?' and a 'Related link: TODAYshow.com home page'. The thumbnails show different scenes from the segment, including a host speaking and a woman in a yellow jacket. The bottom right corner of the collage shows a small EA Sports Active logo and a 'Wii' icon.



Google Search and Social Networking Outlets



Login Join Twitter!

Hey there! Mrs_O is using Twitter.

Twitter is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? Join today to start receiving Mrs_O's updates.

Join today!

Already using Twitter from your phone? Click here.



Mrs. O

Public Perfection: The Evolution of the Mrs. O Logo

Mrs O

Mrs. O

Mrs. O

Mrs. O Inspired T-Shirt



The Inspiration: Michelle Obama at presidential debate.



Our interpretation of the look



Mrs. O [Shop Home](#) [Mrs. O](#)

Limited edition T-shirt, inspired by Mrs. O

One of our absolute favorite Mrs. O looks from the past year came at the final Presidential debate. Against the backdrop of her cerulean blue Maria Pinto dress, Mrs. O wore an ingenious mix of accessories, pinning a trio of Erickson Beamon floral brooches atop a single-strand pearl necklace – a creative twist on classic accessories, that in an instant, became a signature of Mrs. O's style. This same look was our inspiration for a limited edition, printed t-shirt.

This two-sided custom design is printed on an American Apparel T-shirt and with only 250 printed, is a true limited edition.

[Click on the image of the shirt to order.](#)

Mrs. O Inspired T-shirt by Mrs. T

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E-commerce on Mrs-O.org



Mrs. O reader wearing the Mrs. O inspired t-shirt.

Upcoming Book
Mrs.O: Democracy of Style



CHAPTER III DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

Making
an
Entrance



At the time of the 2008 Democratic National Convention, many Americans were still just getting to know Michelle Obama. It was during the convention that she would step onto the national stage, giving Americans an opportunity to connect with her on a more personal level. Quickly they would realize her warmth, commitment to her husband's campaign, and of course, her captivating, iconic style.

The convention was a week-long affair held in Denver, CO, during August 2008, consisting of both day and evening activities. While Michelle Obama would make a primetime speech and host a large service effort, her presence was undeniably felt through her style as well. The week proved to be one Mrs. Obama's most rigorously, well-styled efforts, in great part thanks to the discerning eye of Ikram Goldman, who served as a behind-the-scenes fashion advisor.

With each passing night, Mrs. Obama's fashion choices seemed to grow more chic: the unexpected choice of designers, the clever use of accessories, the confidence and ease with which she wore each ensemble. There was an unparalleled thoughtfulness and cohesive attention to detail with each look that made for a dramatic, lasting impact. It was during this week that many American women—this author included—found themselves captivated with Michelle Obama's style.

"Michelle Obama was so integral to the landscape of American fashion from the first moment she hit the campaign spotlight with her husband," said Joe Zee, Creative Director of *Elle* magazine. "Here was this incredibly chic, well-respected, smart and not to mention—beautiful—woman that represented all the integrity and foundations of every woman in this country, and all eyes were on her."

FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 2007

PERRY, IOWA

The political strategy of the Obama campaign centered on winning the caucuses in Iowa—the first primary vote of 2008. Both the Obamas visited the state repeatedly, getting to know the voters through small gatherings.

On a beautiful spring day, Mrs. Obama attended a neighborhood coffee in Perry, Iowa. For this backyard gathering, she chose an ensemble by Maria Pinto: a sleeveless blouse in apricot silk charmeuse paired with a pencil skirt in cotton. The gently draped neckline is a signature Pinto detail, and the matte texture of the skirt provided an interesting contrast with the sheen of the blouse. Overall, the look conveyed a ladylike accessibility—an ideal message for meeting voters.





Conclusion

This story may appear to be one of anti-planning as it focuses on what we did, rather than the usual suspects of research, insight and charts. However, I believe that my experience as a planner is at the heart of its success. An instinctive reading of the market helped me to identify the opportunity. A personal passion (a skill often overlooked but essential) drove things forward. And a relentless, single-minded vision guided the brand elements of voice, style and content. This has allowed the site to build organically, without paid media. These are all values we often encourage our clients to embrace. Finally we've had the opportunity to deploy and test them (publicly) on our own. The overarching lesson is one of intuition, personal passion, community engagement and quick action. In combination, they built a brand: Mrs. O.