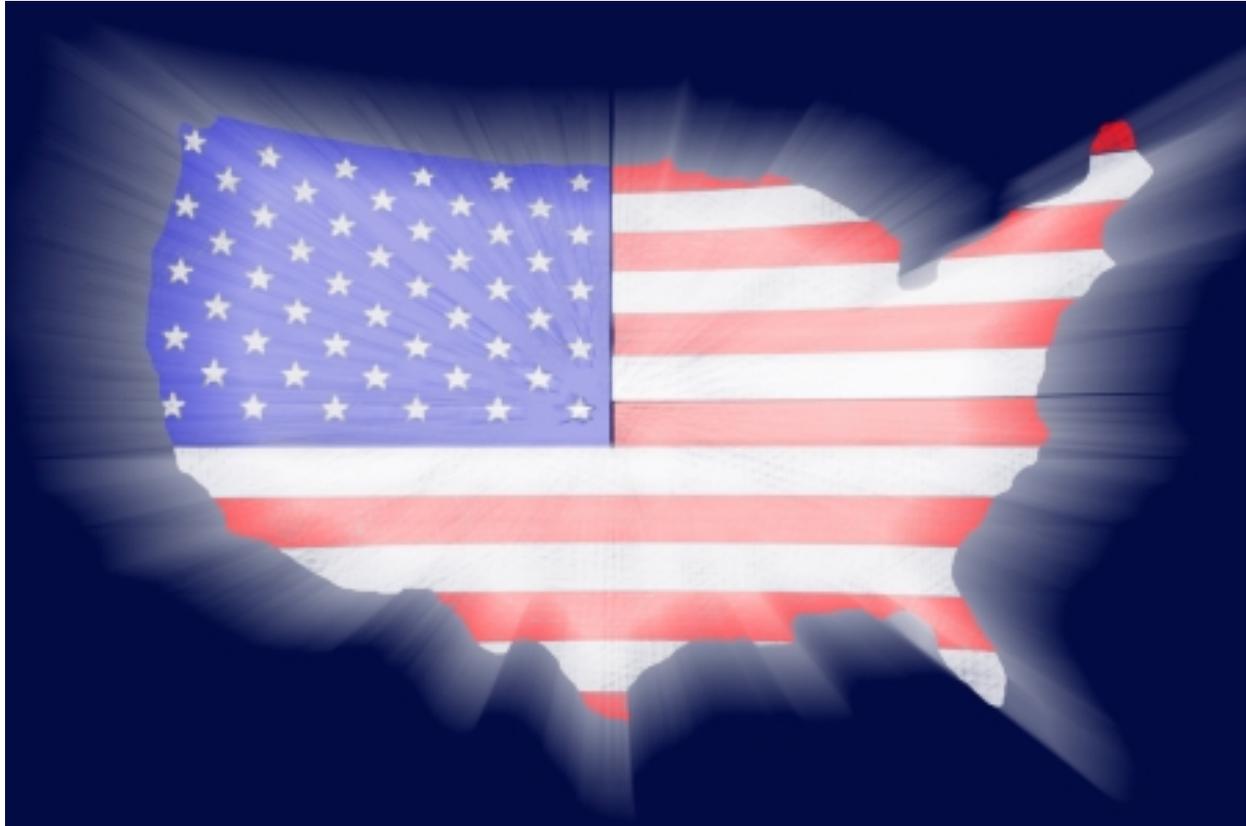


## Political Ad Database Debuted by FCC

Brian Heaton | July 17, 2012



The FCC unveiled the Web-based interface for its new database of TV political advertisements on Tuesday, July 17.

In a public demonstration at FCC Headquarters in Washington, D.C., the agency gave an overview of the system that broadcast TV stations will soon use to upload public inspection files. The files contain information about which political campaigns have purchased ads and how much they paid for them.

The database was developed so that TV broadcast entities could comply with the FCC's new rules that require stations to post their public inspection files online in a central location hosted by the FCC. The rules go into effect Aug. 2.

TV stations had already been required to provide public access to political ad spending information. But in order to get the data, a person had to go to the station in-person. The new rules make the information more accessible.

Greg Elin, chief data officer of the FCC, said the interface incorporates aspects of [social media](#), in an attempt to make the system more intuitive. For example, each station will have its own profile page and there's an activity feed showing what information was updated by a particular broadcast station.

“We’re keeping a log file of different transactions, much in the same way if you post an image to your Facebook,” Elin said.

Broadcast station representatives using the system will have a navigation area on the left side of the screen that contains all the different components of a public inspection file. In addition to the political ad information, other documentation such as applications filed with the FCC, agreements with citizens and correspondence from the public are included.

The FCC plans to have a robust help area complete with videos and its usual hotline for further support. A settings page will also be available for a station to modify its logo. A history page shows more details regarding the work recently done on a particular station’s public inspection file.

## **Ease of Use**

Elin said one of the main concerns the FCC had in designing the system was to make sure it was easy to use. So the FCC incorporated a drag-and-drop method of filing instead of the more traditional “one-by-one” process for uploading files.

Elin called the change a “fairly slick and significant improvement for moving documents around” and added that while the FCC has a policy of taking all documents it receives and converting them to .pdf format, the agency plans to accept all common document formats with the new system.

For large files, the new database will be able to connect with file sharing services. Elin said the FCC’s intention is to support the major file-sharing services that people use the most. The system supports Dropbox, and plans are in the works to support Box and Microsoft Skydrive.

By enabling this feature, a broadcast station can organize its files, drop the folder into Dropbox, synch with the cloud and ultimately have those files transmitted and effectively filed with the FCC.

“What we’ve done is given you control about when you want to synchronize that folder,” Elin said. “You can organize your folders, and then when you’re ready, you just synchronize.”

## **Work in Progress**

The control interface of the new database is nearly complete, but Elin said work on the system continues. He said the system works fine in the Firefox browser, but a few more tweaks are needed to keep the same level of functionality in Internet Explorer.

In addition, users first will have to log in to the FCC’s website in order to “synchronize” documents placed within Dropbox or another file sharing service for transmittal to the agency. Over time, Elin expects the FCC to explore a method where users could upload locally to a file sharing service and sync to the FCC without actually visiting the agency’s website.

The ability to search is also something that will be improved. While those looking for information in the database can be helped by the “Facebook-like” activity ticker, Elin said additional search functionality will be added to make it easier to find documents.

“Our intention is to support those types of features to find the new material [and] navigate around, etc.,” Elin said. “At this current time, our focus has been to make sure this is easy and robust for the stations to get started. So we haven’t implemented some of those additional improvements.”

<http://www.govtech.com/e-government/Political-Ad-Database-Debuted-by-FCC.html>