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## **FCC Seeks To Build A Better Website**

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Depending on whom you ask, 2010 may or may not be the start of a new decade. Depending on who answers, 2010 may or may not be the start of a new FCC. That's because the FCC is relying on you (and you and you, the guy in the brown shoes reading this during his lunch break) to help decide on the direction in which the agency should be moving. They've labeled this process "Reboot.FCC.Gov" and, like all the kids are doing nowadays, they've not only set up a website at that domain, but also tied the whole thing together with the Blogging, and the Twittering and the Facebooking, and the YouTubing (there's a bunch of other social media connections as well, including, for some reason MySpace, in case the next big indie band wants to participate).

A more conventional format was used to launch the rebooting process on January 13: a press release (the website does contain a one minute "welcome" video from FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski). As that release explains, the Commission is "soliciting public input on ways to improve citizen interaction with the FCC." The Chairman elaborates on this, explaining that the goal is to "get input from all corners of the country on ways to improve usability, accessibility, and transparency across the agency."

The project's efforts focus on five key elements:

**Redesign of FCC.gov** – Because the public's first point of contact is the FCC website, the bulk of the efforts (and, hence, the name of this project) are focused on FCC.gov. In addition to airing your complaints about the site, you can tell the FCC how to retain those aspects that work. This is, we assume, the best place to leave comments that don't neatly fit into the other categories.

**Data** – In the White House's recently-released "Open Government Directive" discussed in a bit more detail below, the Obama Administration accentuated the need for public access to the original data underpinning agency decisions. It said that "[w]ithin 45 days, each agency shall identify and publish online in an open format at least three high-value data sets...and register those data sets via Data.gov. These must be data sets not previously available online or in a downloadable format."

The FCC is implementing this requirement through a new [www.fcc.gov/data](http://www.fcc.gov/data) webpage that is part of this Reboot.FCC.gov process. You can not only gain direct access to FCC data, but also suggest to the FCC the types of data you feel the Commission should emphasize on its website and in what format that data should be presented.

**Engagement** – Consistent with its enthusiastic embrace of social networks, the Commission is focusing on increasing direct engagement with the public – not just in terms of presenting more data to the public or redesigning existing databases, but also in terms of turning these one-way streets into the proverbial (Warning: 1990s cliché dead ahead) “Information Superhighway” that allows information to flow in both directions.

The FCC wants you to share how you’d like the agency to share information with you. Should there be more streaming of live events, or is it more important that the FCC offer the public the opportunity to engage in real time feedback? You’ll learn more about the FCC’s new print and video logs, Twitter feed, video workshops and even how to break down those walls and directly interact with staff as never before.

**Systems** – This might be the area that excites us most: the potential redesign of the Commission’s public databases, like the Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS) (which has already undergone a recent facelift), the Consolidated Database System (CDBS) and the Universal Licensing System (ULS). These are among the most accessed portions of the FCC’s website, allowing anyone to get basic information about most any Commission licensee or proceeding. No need to travel to the FCC’s reference room or even file a Freedom of Information request. All the information you want, when you want it.

Except, not always. Many of these systems tend to be clunky, difficult to navigate and sometimes out of date. They’re difficult to use, even for attorneys who use these databases every day! As big believers in maximum access to government information, we’re hoping that user comments strongly support upgrading these databases to achieve their promise of delivering accurate and useful government information in a timely fashion.

**Rules and Processes** – This is probably the section that most correctly wears the “inside baseball” tag: the revision of FCC rules and processes. That’s because the FCC’s rules and processes are largely the domain of specialized FCC practitioners like the attorneys of this very law firm.

But arcane as it may be, this section is important for two reasons. First, as our colleague Mitchell Lazarus has aptly explained on several occasions, the FCC’s byzantine rules and processes have a tendency to hinder the development of new technologies. Second, the

FCC wants you to be able to participate in these proceedings to the greatest extent possible. Does that mean you'll ditch the lawyers? Well, of course we'd hope not, but we firmly believe that we are able to do our jobs better when our clients understand and take an active role in FCC proceedings.

### *How to Participate*

This is all part of the Obama Administration's larger efforts to increase transparency and public participation in government. The Reboot.FCC.Gov website has a very similar look and feel to a site the White House launched in 2009 as part of its government-wide "Open Government Initiative" that promoted open government through transparency, participation and collaboration.

This make sense, of course, as Reboot.FCC.Gov is the required response to the Open Government Initiative's edict that "[w]ithin 60 days, each agency shall create an Open Government Webpage located at [http://www.\[agency\].gov/open](http://www.[agency].gov/open) to serve as the gateway for agency activities related to the Open Government Directive and shall maintain and update that webpage in a timely fashion". (If you click on [www.fcc.gov/open](http://www.fcc.gov/open) you get redirected to Reboot.FCC.Gov). It not only *looks* the same, but it *acts* the same, right down to the main function of taking user suggestions and allowing other users to comment on those suggestions as part of reinventing agency processes where possible.

So, if you're wondering how *you* can participate in this highest of democratic callings, well, it's quite easy. The Commission is soliciting open comments and ideas from anyone and everyone about improvements that can be made in all these areas. At the bottom of each substantive area's home page (all these home pages can be reached by going to the "Reform" page of Reboot.FCC.Gov), there is a section marked "Join the Discussion" where you'll find a short list of suggestions offered by other folks. Click on any of them and you'll be able to comment on existing ideas that others have already offered. You'll also be able to suggest your own ideas for reforming the FCC. Every idea, no matter how crazy or outlandish, will stand for public scrutiny. All you need to do is login and, at least in theory, you've got a direct path to the FCC Chairman, the kind of access that you usually only enjoy by hiring a highly connected, Washington-based attorney specializing in FCC matters.

Now, by no means do we suggest you ditch your highly-connected, Washington-based attorney specializing in FCC matters. Quite the opposite, in fact. But we do encourage you to check out Reboot.FCC.Gov. Kick the tires, take her out for a test drive. Our early nosing around the site indicates that it's pretty user-friendly and easy to understand. You read some stuff, you vote or comment on some stuff, and you post some stuff of your own. As the Commission says, "No one knows how to reform FCC.gov better than the

collective public opinion of the website's users.” If you've had a gripe or a constructive suggestion for the FCC, now is the time to make it.