

# Bloggers get high-tech home for DNC

By Mark Washburn

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Quick history of bloggers at political conventions:

At the 2000 conventions, a handful showed up. Considered oddities.

At the 2004 conventions, bloggers were accredited as news media representatives for the first time. There were about a dozen. Considered curiosities.

At the 2008 conventions, Democrats and Republicans accredited about 300 bloggers. Many were well-known, respected pros.

At the 2012 conventions, there will likely be a thousand or more. Nowadays, they get respect. They come from mainstream websites like Politico or Huffington Post.

For the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, a grass-roots organization called The PPL will be offering workspace and support to the blog community.

Packard Place, a five-story, 1928 auto showroom renovated as a center for entrepreneurial startups, will be the hub for operations. PPL founders Desiree Kane, Justin Ruckman and Matthew Tyndall are organizing the space at 222 S. Church St.

Bloggers who want to use it as a base during the September convention will get work space, fast Internet connections and other services, including bike rentals. One room will have a stage and theater-style seating for panels and speakers on convention-related topics.

A second space at the McColl Center for Visual Art on North Tryon Street will offer specialty services for filmmakers, documentarians, artists and others needing recording or studio space.

Also planned at McColl: A tech-free zone where people can just flop down in a bean-bag chair to escape from

- Blog central

For more information on blog operations during the Democratic National Convention:

**Web:** [www.thepppl.us](http://www.thepppl.us);  
[www.Facebook.com/thePPL](http://www.Facebook.com/thePPL).

**Twitter:** PPLdnc.

**YouTube:** <http://bit.ly/Mc15On>.

- More information

DNC walk-through

Democratic National Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz will be in town Tuesday as hundreds of media representatives get a close-up look at venues for the Democratic National Convention.

Journalists will get technical and logistical briefings as they tour Time Warner Cable Arena, Bank of America Stadium and the Charlotte Convention Center. The convention begins in three months. Jim Morrill

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their screens. “There’s something to be said for getting away from the technology to clear your mind,” says Kane.

Between the two sites, The PPL expects to have space for about 1,000 bloggers and new media correspondents.

## **Growth in digital media**

Numbers of bloggers and other digital media specialists have grown exponentially with the rise of the Internet in the last decade. Mainstream media outlets including The Washington Post, The New York Times and major TV networks now use digital-only journalists as part of their workforce.

On the other end of the spectrum are independent digital entrepreneurs, and that is the target group for The PPL’s services. They also expect to host new media enthusiasts who want to be part of a national-scale media event, says Ruckman.

Traditionally, the political conventions draw about 15,000 mainstream media representatives, including technicians and support forces. That number has remained stable in recent conventions, while the number of bloggers has soared.

While some bloggers are known for mainstream political coverage, most focus on special-issue niche topics. When signing up for space with The PPL, which is offering a week’s worth of services for an introductory rate of \$45, the terms of service direct people to ethical guidelines from the Society of Professional Journalists. They’re expected to adhere to those rules. Neo-Nazis or hate groups won’t be allowed to participate at the centers, organizers said.

So far, 45 people have signed up for the services and more are expected as the convention draws closer, says Ruckman. Through grants and contributions, The PPL hopes to raise about \$500,000 for the project. Already, the Miami-based John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has given the group \$25,000.

## **Building on past events**

At the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver, Daily Kos founder Markos Moulitsas and Michael Huttner of Denver-based ProgressNow set up a two-story, 9,000-square-foot tent to cater to bloggers. Moulitsas declared that bloggers deserved work space (as well as pizza and beer) and helped organize the effort with others. It became a focal point during the convention. Charlotte’s operation will have about three times as much space.

Accreditation of bloggers for both conventions this summer is still under way and it is not yet known how many will come.

While no similar independent new-media center is planned at the GOP convention in Tampa, bloggers will still be able to work at the Tampa Bay Times Forum and have access to the Google Media Lounge and the Press Filing Center, said James Davis, RNC communications director.

“We’ve received a strong response from the blogging community requesting credentials through the DNCC press gallery,” says Joanne Peters, DNC committee press secretary.

Organizers of the Charlotte blog center have looked to other new-media gatherings for insight on services that would be needed. One major complaint at the annual Austin, Texas, music conference South by Southwest was that there wasn’t enough space to recharge electronics.

“We’ll have tons of power,” says Tyndall, and something even better – a station where participants can leave their gear to get recharged while they go out to collect stories.

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