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The Lonelygirl15 Hoax – Home Schooled Entertainment Or Viral Marketing?

By Madison Lockwood

Do you remember where you were when Lonelygirl15 was exposed as a hoax? Perhaps the

revelation was not quite worthy of such importance, but it is the case that millions of people were not only wondering, but, more importantly, watching– for months on end. Was this one of the most successful attempts at viral marketing in history, and if so, what was being marketed? First, a little background for those who haven't been connected to the Internet or exposed to mass media in the past few weeks.

Social Networking on Digital Video Online exhibitionism is a social blockbuster. Sites like MySpace (56 million members) and FaceBook(9 million members) have proven to be enormously popular websites where those who engage in the no-fee registration can post personal profiles, daily blogs and photos and develop lists of cyber-friends along with cyber-groups with whom to "chill." YouTube is the video version of this virtual socializing phenomenon. Members can upload home made videos (60,000 a day) and use moving pictures to convey their personas and artistic talents (100 million views a day).

YouTube members develop their own "channels" with strings of video uploads; those that have talent find large numbers of subscribers enlisted to follow their channel postings. YouTube has been a particularly successful vehicle for new bands to develop followings and for established bands to market their performances and recordings. Some record companies use YouTube in much the same way that they sought distribution on MTV a decade ago. Others sue because their artists' videos are being posted without authorization.

But YouTube is still principally a playground for the young and the goofy – which doesn't necessarily tighten the "young" classification much. And like all gathering places for young people, there's going to be a lot of hormonally challenged males in search of eye candy. Young, attractive women who post video logs gather substantial followings in relatively short order.

Enter "Bree" So it was with "Lonelygirl15," the on screen title for a sixteen year old, self described "home schooled" teenager named "Bree" with a pretty face, big eyes and an every-button-in place female adolescent personality. Over the course of the summer she posted twenty nine videos that built an enormous audience with nothing much more than the charm and innocent wit of the typical teenage

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girl: hormones with feet. Oh, and, as it turned out, a pair of professional writers.

Most of the videos were filmed in her bedroom, although she did go on an outing or two with a male friend. She made some obscure hints at matters occult and mysterious, heightening the interest for her testosterone-soaked fans.

There was something of a story line built into the string of videos, although nothing that would hold the interest of even an art-house movie crowd. She was invited to a party, she defied her father and went anyway, she was punished for it. But there was enough intrigue and popularity (and suspiciously high quality to the videos) to spark a lot of text posts about just who this girl might be. There were also videos from fans posted regarding her identity, its mystery and caricatures of her persona.

So it came to pass that some computer-savvy detectives lured "Bree" to an email site on MySpace that had some tracking software attached. The reply Bree sent was traced to one of the biggest talent

agencies in Los Angeles, Creative Artists Agency (CAA). Busted. The crew that had solicited the email posted a message of their discovery and because of the origin of Bree's reply, concluded that the entire caper was some sort of marketing device related to Hollywood and its principal products. Bree joined a reasonably exclusive fraternity of "celebrities" who were "famous for being famous."

A True Viral Epidemic The two guys who had been scripting and making the videos were "filmmakers" named Ramesh Flinders and Michael Beckett. Since their outing, they haven't missed a step. The actress who played Bree is a young Los Angeleno named Jessica Rose who has since appeared on national talk shows discussing the months-long scam as an artistic venture. She found the casting call on Craigslist, read for the role, went back for two more tests, and got the job. Some of the scripts were written, but she was given the freedom to ad-lib.

The filmmakers themselves claim that Bree was never meant to portray a real person – a little hard to believe, in the absence of any disclaimers or asterisks in the footage. Nor, they say, was it a promotional device for any sort of Hollywood studio or organization. However, they are currently represented by CAA, they were in that office when responding to emails under her nom-du-Tube and Ms. Rose was paid \$30,000 for her portrayal of the Lonely Girl. Somebody invested in this caper for a reason.

All of the exposed parties declare without a hint of remorse that the show will go on. Jessica Rose sees the future as continuing posts that develop a storyline. Presumably, the film makers see this as a ticket to bigger screens. And if Lonelygirl15 remains a current fixture on YouTube, there's going to be an entire school of video art devoted to the on-camera responses, commentary, caricatures and other spins on the original YouTube hoaxette.

All of this begs the question: should we care? If so, how? About what? There are thousands of videos on YouTube that are works of comedic fiction, humorous commentary, amateur entertainment of every stripe. Why not a series? The fact that it was a spoof doesn't seem to have offended anyone; after all, YouTube is a platform for every sort of video expression dispensed in small bites.

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What it was meant to accomplish might be a question worth caring about, if there was a way to follow the money. If it was done for self-promotional purposes by the film makers, they succeeded brilliantly in one of the most massive examples of viral marketing in our time. The problem is that they have been recognized for producing footage that no one would buy a ticket to go see. The fact that they manufactured a cultural phenomenon in a matter of weeks is probably closer to the import of this stunt.

The term "viral marketing" has become high on the list of Internet capabilities in the tech advertising and marketing shops. Like most of the things that move with the speed of the 'net, no one has figured out quite how to harness it. What the Lonelygirl15 production proved is that under the right circumstances, it is possible to create instant recognition for a virtual entity among enormous numbers of people. But Howard Dean did that in 2004 – with a purpose. For that matter, MySpace and YouTube branded themselves via word-of-net over the course of two or three years and are now billion dollar properties.

What's interesting is that no one, including Rupert Murdoch, is quite sure WHY they are billion dollar properties. Ad success is measured in terms of exposure to eyeballs, and these sites have eyeballs by the tens of millions. But no one quite knows how to turn that fact into sponsorship cash. It's possible that the Lonelygirl15 caper will give some ad genius an idea on how to cash in on video viral

marketing. If so, you can look on Bree as an evolutionary step in the process.

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Viral Marketing...Is Your Website Infected?

By Bret Forster

Viral...Viruses...Infections...not pleasant subjects for most situations. Unless you're discussing Viral Marketing! Viral marketing techniques can help you create huge increases in both targeted traffic and customers for your website. In this article we'll briefly discuss some of the most effective methods of Viral Marketing.

Before we discuss the different Viral Marketing Techniques, let's clarify what Viral Marketing is. Viral Marketing has nothing to do with computer viruses, causing damage to someone's computer or property, or using deception to create traffic and customers. Viral Marketing includes using legitimate techniques like viral opt-in email, viral ebooks and reports, viral ecourses, and many more!

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Let's discuss some great examples of Viral Marketing...

Jimmy D. Brown, the Master of Viral eBook Marketing, has created an Internet Business Empire using free and paid-for viral eBooks and eReports! He creates eBooks and eReports and then allows his affiliates and customers the ability to brand them with their own website and affiliate links. His website, Profits Vault Monthly, offers a monthly membership where he creates a great new eBook product each month. He then allows his members to brand the website links with their own affiliate program links. You can find out more about his program at:

Creating Viral eBooks and eReports and distributing them to your affiliates and website visitors is one of the most effective ways to create viral traffic explosion on your website!

Free Viral Opt-in Ezines -

Viral Opt-in Ezines are another great Viral Marketing technique that uses a very powerful combination. Opt-in Email newsletters or ezines combined with word-of-mouth marketing. The ezine can be HTML-based, email-based, or website or BLOG-based. The key element that makes the ezine viral is getting your subscribers involved. Allowing your subscribers to participate in discussions, creating content, etc. can create a viral word-of-mouth traffic stampede to your website!

Free Viral Reprint Articles -

Viral Reprint Articles are short articles that you allow other webmasters, affiliates, and ezine publishers to reprint or use on their website for free. The only rule for the use of your viral article is that they have to leave your resource box at the bottom of your article. This resource box includes your website link. This creates a viral effect because your viral article gets passed around the Internet on websites and ezines.

Free Viral eCourses -

Last but not least, there's Viral eCourses. Viral eCourses are divided into a series of articles and lessons and are published on an autoresponder. When a person e-mails the autoresponder address, he will receive his first lesson via e-mail within seconds or a few minutes. Then usually every one or two days they will receive the another lesson until the e-course is complete. I've seen e-courses that have ranged from one lesson clear up to 52 lessons long. The most common are 7 lesson or 7 day e-courses. Viral eCourses are extremely popular! Allow other webmasters to use your viral eCourse full of useful information, and watch the highly-targeted web traffic epidemic occur.

In this article, we have covered several Viral Marketing techniques. But we haven't even scratched the surface! Use your creativity and come up with some other great ideas. Just don't discount the power of using Viral Marketing!

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offers

the Secrets of How To Unleash Your Own Marketing Virus That Generates More Traffic, More Customers And More Money In Record Time – Or Your Money Back Guaranteed! Visit his website at

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