

# O'DWYER'S PR REPORT

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SPECIAL VIDEO & BROADCAST ISSUE

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## Cyberspace gets serious about safety

By Greg Hazley

The young demographic is a key element of traffic and marketing online, but major portals like social networks and search engines must also advocate safety programs as the threat of predators and salacious content provides a unique PR challenge.

News stories about online predators or cyber bullies frequently mention the names of networking sites used to commit crimes, posing a negative backlash against companies that do business with teens and young adults as key users online.

Such businesses are increasingly turning to educating parents and social network users via PSAs, partnerships with online safety non-profits and dedicated websites.

MySpace has made several moves to step up its online safety education efforts as the News Corp.-owned top social networking site has seen its name mentioned in scores of news stories about cyber bullying and pornography over the last few

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## Net Neutrality returns to Washington as top broadcast news issue of 2008

By Jon Gingerich

Wrestling for control over the Internet has become a top-tier issue for telecom companies and consumers, if recent rumblings from tech experts, advocacy groups and bills currently making their way through Congress are any indication.

Video's move online is perhaps the biggest impetus for the struggle. With some experts foreseeing online broadcast capabilities rivaling cable's within five years, big phone and cable companies have stepped into the ring with consumer advocate groups to secure their stake in the 'Net's future.



This is the notion of Net Neutrality, which in its broadest terms seeks to keep the Internet an egalitarian playground, available for equal access by everyone. Telecom companies like AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner and Verizon have repeatedly lobbied to kill Neutrality since it first appeared in the House two years ago. Supporters say Neutrality legislation would keep telecom companies from becoming Internet "gatekeepers" over what information is allowed in cyberspace.

In late March, Comcast agreed that it would stop interfering with file sharing on its network. The about-face

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## Cloud looms over Net video future

By Kevin McCauley

Video firms expect to reap great riches from the Internet as it offers more and more placement opportunities for clients.

New developments last month bolstered the bullishness of video-on-the-web fans.

NBC Universal and News Corp unveiled their much-anticipated Hulu site via a wave of publicity generated by Edelman.

Hulu allows on-demand viewing of episodes/clips of TV shows like "Saturday Night Live," "Family Guy," "Kojak," "Flipper," "Hart to Hart," "The Rockford Files" and "The Simpsons."

Wall Street Journal technology dean Walt Mossberg praises Hulu as the first web property from "mainstream studios or networks that shows a real understanding of both modern web design and the Internet's culture of sharing."

Mossberg predicts Hulu will flourish "if the service can add more content," which is music to the ears of video pros.

Walt Disney Co. CEO Bob Iger further lifted the spirits of the video world when he told the McGraw-Hill Media

Summit that the computer will replace TV as the primary entertainment source.

That future is already here for a majority of U.S. kids who consider the computer more important than the TV set when it comes to entertainment.

YouTube added to the fun by announcing a joint venture with TiVo, the maker of digital video recorders, to further blur the line between Internet and TV. That deal promises to deliver tens of thousands of web videos directly to TV screens.

There is a dark cloud on the horizon. The embarrassment of video riches could backfire, choking off the Internet.

The *New York Times* ran a front page story (March 13) warning about a glut and raising the

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## Guerrilla PR blamed in hoax

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### Exception to the rule

Metzger said she made “repeated attempts” to engage Hunter professors in conversation regarding the course, but they never returned her calls. She said Portlock’s claims that he never felt comfortable teaching the course was a matter that was never brought up to her or IACC.

Metzger said the Hunter instance is an anomaly for the College Outreach program. She referred to that class’ use of fictitious characters to deceive publics as a violation of the PRSA code of ethics. She said similar College Outreach programs at other universities have gone “extremely well.”

“Hunter was the only instance where we didn’t have much communication,” she said. “We didn’t know it was happening, and it’s something we would never endorse.”

Tim Howard, Assistant Professor at Sacramento State, has found the College Outreach program highly beneficial to his classroom. He said the program allows stu-

dents to put PR theories into practice, and it allows him to transform static lectures into real public relations theatre.

“My kids have just come to life because of this. They get practice as real PR counselors and it’s been a fantastic learning experience,” he said.

Howard said IACC never told him or his students how to shape the Sacramento State campaign. In his class, a grant of \$5,000 was given by IACC and students chose how those funds were allocated. Students then set up a voluntary executive committee and created a plan of action.

Howard said he uses PR textbooks and lectures to show how each component of “classroom PR” fits into the IACC campaign. Howard said guerrilla PR tactics were never a point of discussion among his students for the campaign, but if they were he would have “put an end to it real quick.” Students instead relied on traditional PR strategies, marching at the state capital and setting up booths on campus and at local sporting events to raise counterfeit awareness.

“I can’t speak for Hunter, but looking at it

from the standpoint of the PRSA code of ethics, it appears somewhat deceptive,” he said.

So why was the Hunter case so different? There is a certain irony of creating a counterfeit class to preach the pitfalls of counterfeit, though you’d be hard-pressed to find anyone in the involved parties laughing. While Paul Werth officials said they do not condone Hunter’s actions, there is no question that the college’s IACC campaign attracted a news swarm for the group, albeit for all the wrong reasons. In the world of PR, campaigns often backfire. When those campaigns are put in the hands of people with little or no communications experience, however, the margin of error is increased ten-fold. Perhaps the most valuable lesson here is the age-old adage that you get what you pay for.

“We’ve learned the value of forging a strong relationship with professors from the beginning,” Metzger said. “We still believe that it’s meant to be controlled by the professor, and we expect students to adhere to their rules. It’s not our place to control the classroom.” ■

## Net Neutrality becomes top issue

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comes after the company became the subject of a Federal Communications Commission investigation for “packet-forging,” or using data encryption to prevent customers from peer-to-peer file sharing. Company officials said they only blocked connections because file sharing was clogging up their networks. In January, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin questioned whether the company “actively interferes with Internet traffic as its subscribers try to share files online.”

Neutrality is also making a comeback on the Hill. In February, Reps. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) and Chip Pickering (R-Miss.) introduced the “Internet Freedom Preservation Act 2008” (HR 5353), a bi-partisan bill that would require the FCC to be proactive in ensuring all broadband networks remain free from discrimination. The bill, which is still gathering co-sponsors in the House, hasn’t advanced out of committee. Supporters said the public can expect to see the committee mark-up surface in early May.

In the past, Neutrality opponents have said that legislation isn’t necessary, that such laws were premature, or a “solution looking for a problem.” Neutrality sup-

porters claim Comcast’s recent actions prove that laws should be enacted to protect consumers from companies that own the networks.

“For years and years they said they weren’t doing this. Now, they’ve been caught red-handed doing it,” said Craig Aaron, spokesperson for nonprofit media policy group SavetheInternet.com. “It just goes to show that they can’t be trusted.”

Net Neutrality first showed up several years ago, when Congress began amending decades-old federal telecommunications laws to include multi-tiered Internet platforms. Telecoms saw the re-writes as an opportunity to lift many of the regulations and restrictions that are imposed on broadband service providers. Many argued that lifting these regulations could potentially allow companies to discriminate what does and what doesn’t travel over their networks. A line was drawn in the sand, and Net Neutrality was born.

The movement created an unlikely group of bedfellows among Neutrality supporters. The American Civil Liberties Union, The Christian Coalition, The American Library Association, the Gun Owners of America and companies like Ebay, Google, Microsoft and Yahoo! have all spoken out in support of Net Neutrality

legislation.

Opponents of Neutrality regulation legislation generally include the national cable and telephone providers: AT&T, Comcast, Verizon, Cingular and AOL. They’ve received support from organizations like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Conservative Union.

It’s also gotten ugly. In February, Comcast was accused of “stacking the deck,” or packing a Harvard public meeting that was called by the FCC to address complaints leveled at the company.

Comcast admits that it hired stand-ins to arrive at the meeting early, but said it only did so to hold seats for Comcast employees who planned on attending. Photos taken at the event by Free Press members show many of the paid Comcast “plants” sleeping in the seats. Many would-be attendees arrived at the packed meeting early only to be turned away.

The FCC has scheduled a new make-up Comcast hearing on April 17 at Stanford University. Aaron said it goes without saying that Neutrality supporters have planned on arriving “very early” to ensure a presence.

“It’s hard to image that they’d try to pull this trick again, given all the grief they got last time.” ■