

Saturday, July 30, 2005

Negative blog posts: How not to handle them.

Quick Boy's Movers became upset because of a negative comment posted about them on Joey DeVilla's weblog. The comment became the #2 result on Google for "Quick Boy's Movers" and they did not like this.

What should they have done?

Well they shouldn't have called Joey up, threatened to go over his head to his employer and made a lot of noise that he take the comment down. Now the whole saga has exploded into the blogosphere. When Corey blogs it on Boing Boing it's game over.

If you Google "Quick Boy's Movers" now, guess what comes up first? That's right. The entire Accordion Boy blog saga, complete with the threatening call from Quick Boy's and the shill posts on his blog.

So what should they have done, really?

They should have gone into their records for Jay Goldman, the original commenter, dug out his billing records, called him up, apologized. Bonus points for giving him a refund. Eat the loss and then the president or the owner of the company should have followed up with a comment of his own: "We're very sorry that Jay Goldman and his girlfriend are unsatisfied with moving services provided. We have refunded his payment in full and have issued a formal apology. This kind of service is not indicative of our company and we strive to provide complete satisfaction. If anyone has any questions or concerns about our services or policies, please don't hesitate to call or email me at.....

You can bet that that would have been blogged as well.

If it were your company, which would one of these scenarios would you rather have come up on Google at #1 or 2 for your name? For Quick Boy Moving, the decision has been made and there is no putting this cat back in the bag.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Tech Wreck 2.0 at 13:02

I stand corrected.

It looks like I made a poor choice of an examples in my How To Detect a net.myth in 4 easy steps post the other day. The original article in American Conservative magazine is available from their website here, so the article itself is real. I must have overlooked it the first couple times I was on the website.

In tracking down an "original sighting" of the article I left a message in Larouche Publications general mailbox after reading their Guns of August press release on the matter. Anton Chaiktin was kind enough to return my call this morning and point me to the original article on the website. Further, he added that White House Chief-of-Staff Scott McClelland was asked about this on thursday and the exchange was picked up by CNN.

I can at least tell that the exchange happened, since full transcripts of the White House briefings are available from the White House website and thursday's session contains this exchange: Q: Scott, an article in the American Conservative by Philip Giraldi, former intelligence operative, indicated the Vice President has revamped strategy towards Iran where there are now 300 to 400 missiles targeted various sites in Iran, including tactical nuclear missiles, especially aimed at the Iranian nuclear capabilities. These are now, according to Giraldi, also under command of the theater commander. Given our problems with Iran and the fact that now that they have decided to go for the full cycle of their peaceful nuclear program, might we be anxious that if there were a terrorist incident here in the United States in any way connected to Iran, that there might be a knee-jerk reaction of utilizing this hair-trigger against the Iranians? MR.

McCLELLAN: One, I appreciate your question. I'm not going to get into accepting anything that you alleged in your comments. I'm not going to get into discussing matters relating to national security of that nature.

Two, in terms of Iran, Iran made some commitments to suspend their uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities. We expect them to abide by that commitment. If they were to begin those activities again, they would be violating the commitment they made under the Paris agreement with the Europeans. And we have made it very clear that Iran has a history of hiding their nuclear activities from the international community. That's why it's so important that you have some confidence-building measures, or objective guarantees in place, so that they show the international community that their nuclear program is not being used to develop weapons, or that they're not developing weapons under the cover of a civilian program.

And if Iran is going to violate their agreements, then we would, obviously, be looking at discussing with the Europeans, who have also committed to doing so, looking at going to the Security Council.

So I stand corrected on doubting the veracity of the original quoted article. It is real, and perhaps this post emphasizes my earlier point, now that I've found citations outside the original circular linkages.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Nutjob Watch at 11:42

Friday, July 29. 2005

Can't time the market? Try timing terrorism or earthquakes. Aug 6th and 9th loom.

I've been picking up some chatter from the fringe of a "terrorist event" on Aug 6 or Aug 9, having to do with a "dirty bomb" or a suitcase nuke detonation in commemoration of the A-bomb's on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The first I've heard of it laid it on a politically extremist splinter group of the Japanese Yakuza: payback after 60 years. Others are calling it "the next false flag" op, and lot of readers in some places are reading a lot of "meaning" into the 9-stripe US flags behind Bush at his Fort Bragg speech, portending ominous events to gel on these dates.

Then of course there's always George Ure and his web bots perpetually predicting "the big megaquake" to hit the west coast "any day now".

My wife and I were actually slated to travel to Victoria on the 4th thru the 8th but those plans have been scrapped. No, we didn't cancel because we wanted to avoid militant Yakuza nuclear reprisals and we aren't trying to "time the big one". I think we both feel pretty silly for changing our honeymoon plans 3 years ago on account of the Iraq War. We were planning on going to England and then Europe, we changed our minds because the war looked to be a certainty and we were worried about terrorism.

The silliness of that attitude comes hot on the heels of the dual bomb attacks in London, years after we scrapped our trip "on terrorism fears". Ironically I knew two separate sets of people visiting London on the exact dates of both recent attacks. It never even occurred to me to wonder "if they were ok". I didn't even have to bother doing the math to come to a reasonably certain conclusion that they were fine.

This brings me back to my "Law Of The Expected Unexpected" and I can go on record right now and say that August 6th and 9th will be the two days this year that a nuclear terrorist event can't happen (Refresher: The Law of The Expected Unexpected states that any given future date upon which a catastrophe is posited to occur is the one date upon which the actual event predicted is impossible. An example is if anybody goes on record to state that the stock market will crash on X date, that is the one date in the future on which it is impossible for the stock market to crash. Same goes for asteroid hits, earthquakes, alien invasions and terrorist events)

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Nutjob Watch at 15:54

Thursday, July 28, 2005

How to detect a net.myth in 4 easy steps.

I've mentioned George Ure's UrbanSurvival many times here. Always interesting, one of my daily rituals is to read it while I eat lunch at my desk. The problem when you make your mainstay exploring the wider fringes of culture, technology and economics is a lack of third-party verification on many things. George falls prey to this from time to time. Take this week's report that Dick Cheney has asked StratCom to game out an attack on Iran in the event of "9/11: the sequel", whether Iran was involved or not. Truly chilling stuff. "The Pentagon, acting under instructions from Vice President Dick Cheney's office, has tasked the United States Strategic Command (STRATCOM) with drawing up a contingency plan to be employed in response to another 9/11-type terrorist attack on the United States. The plan includes a large-scale air assault on Iran employing both conventional and tactical nuclear weapons. Within Iran there are more than 450 major strategic targets, including numerous suspected nuclear-weapons-program development sites. Many of the targets are hardened or are deep underground and could not be taken out by conventional weapons, hence the nuclear option. As in the case of Iraq, the response is not conditional on Iran actually being involved in the act of terrorism directed against the United States. Several senior Air Force officers involved in the planning are reportedly appalled at the implications of what they are doing – that Iran is being set up for an unprovoked nuclear attack – but no one is prepared to damage his career by posing any objections."

Scary as that is, it looks bogus to me, and I'll outline the steps I take to weed these things out:

1) Google an excerpt of the excerpt.

Look at the results. On any given issue you should see a mixture of mainstream, fringe and blogosphere hits from all sides of the issue. If the issue is real and white hot, then everybody and their hangnails will have something to say about it, from all sides of the spectrum.

These results are pretty consistent and homogenous. They all come from the "conspiracy fringe" and they're all pretty inflammatory ("Cheney to Nuke Iran In Event of Another 9/11", etc)

2) Cross reference against news sources.

We all know what passes for "news" in the mainstream is more like Orwellian soma, but if something is real it will at least get picked up there if only to downplay it and declare it a non-issue.

At this stage you don't want to use the excerpt, you want to do a new search with a keyword dense query.

In this case we see use +Cheney +Stratcom +nuclear +Iran +Terrorism and we get a couple hits, from more sources that seemed to have picked up the meme "as is". But for a "something real" we should see a lot more sources here. If not the national services then at least a smattering of regional affiliates of mainstream news conglomerates and wire services should have some chatter around it. There isn't any.

3) Look for natural "drift".

At this point, a real article that is this inflammatory, we would see different excerpts quoted and commented by different people with different viewpoints. If you keep seeing the exact same excerpt quoted in exactly the same manner and find the citations to be circular rather than linear (everyone links to the next nutjob's blog and nobody links back to the original source), the story is further suspect.

4) Try the source.

This one will settle it. I don't have access to the latest issue of American Conservative and wouldn't know where to get one up here in Canada (where American Conservatives loathe to tread). I did call their office and found that they're closed from July 22 thru Aug 12th, now that's convenient and also a huge red flag.

So my guess is this is either a bogus story or the one excerpt has been taken in a very narrow context and then jumpstarted out the blogosphere. People eat this stuff up, it isn't hard to whip people into a frenzied countdown to armageddon. (As I've noted before, there seems to be a certain class of people who are truly disappointed when stuff like this fails to transpire as advertised).

If anyone has "the latest" copy of American Conservative (an exact issue number cite usually accompanies most real stories), or contact info for Philip Giraldi (the article's author) then let me know.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Nutjob Watch at 17:05

Wednesday, July 20, 2005

The new four letter F-word is: FAIL

Apparently there is an initiative underway in the UK to drop the use of the word "fail" for children who don't pass onto the next grade, in favour of "deferred success".

This makes all the sense in the world if we want to train our children that life is always fair and that everyone succeeds (even when they don't). With the pervasiveness of political double-speak in the world, where politicians say one thing, do another and then revise what they say they said or redefine the meaning of what they claim to have meant when they said it, then it is no surprise that it seems ok to delude ourselves and our children into thinking this kind of deceptive claptrap is ok.

We are now taking the final steps of indoctrinating the children into believing a load of horse manure is ice cream because we serve it to them with a cherry on top.

What a world we live in.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Nutjob Watch at 14:35

Saturday, July 9, 2005

All Extremists should be lined up against a wall and shot

In fairly short order today I've read some pretty emotional posts from varying sources on some closed boards I'm on. One advocates the US "nuke" the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan to (paraphrasing) "make sure we get Bin Laden before he gets a suitcase nuke into NYC". Another posits that we are in the midst of the "Third Holy Jihad" being undertaken by Moslems to bring the world under Islamic Law.

The latter quoted Jordan's King Abdullah who noted "The real struggle is between moderate and extremist Moslems" and it occurs to me that everywhere The Real Struggle is between moderates and extremists. The same conflict arises in Israel, Palestine, the USA. Everywhere. What we have are minority extremists getting into pissing contests with each other and getting the majority moderates slaughtered like lambs in the crossfire.

The "Them or Us" cornerstone of almost every extremist ideology is basically irreconcilable with the inevitable "Chicken or Egg" paradox which is at the center of every militant ideological conflict occurring in the world.

Neocon extremists in the USA would have us believe that "The War on Terror" began on Sept. 11/2001. Militant Islamists would have us believe the conflict started earlier, a lot earlier than that. Perhaps with the establishment of Israel. A militant Zionist would say that's nonsense and that their beef with the world has it's origins elsewhere.

Nothing changes but the names, all of these camps are defined by a burning hatred of "the other" and I can guarantee you they all have one other thing in common: They ALL believe "the other guys started it".

In normal times, extremists are at best harmless nutjobs and at worst criminals. They provide comic relief, ample material for the "what not to do" files. They make themselves easy targets for talk show monologues and when they go over the line and take things too far and people get hurt or killed, we round them up and throw them into the prisons they belong or in certain jurisdictions, execute them. In any case the extremists are noise against the signal of life and dealt with by the prevailing cooler heads of society.

These are not normal times. There are places in the world where the extremists are in charge. We have ideologues calling the shots and setting policy. (These places aren't all "over there").

The problem with this is when extremists take shots at each other, they hit the other guy's moderates. The vast majority of the population are ordinary people who would routinely treat others with courtesy and respect each other's differences in cultures and lifestyles. Most people just want to be left alone to run their own lives and raise their families. Then all of the sudden a useful idiot on errand set by some far away extremist nutjob comes along and kills you or your family. It enrages enough victims that a few of them become local extremists and they eventually return the favour.

So then somebody from the former victim's camp goes over and kills off a bunch of ordinary people who had nothing to do with the prior incident as "revenge". Repeat, ad infinitum.

This isn't rational and it's pretty self-evident to moderates. To extremists, saying this much is blasphemy or treason. (A handy self-test which is probably accurate to within a few percentage points: If you are going to leave a disparaging comment to this post, you are closer to being an extremist than you are to being a moderate)

Extremists believe they can do no wrong, have never done anything wrong, don't make mistakes, have God on their side and will be ultimately victorious against The Other Guy. They believe they are justified when they go kill a bunch of ordinary people "over there" that had nothing to do with the last round of ordinary people some other extremists killed over here.

Extremists are bad for business.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Armchair Analysis at 14:24

Wednesday, July 6, 2005

Widespread PHP vulnerability in XML-RPC

I didn't bother mentioning the new PHP XML-RPC vulnerability to somebody yesterday, assuming they already knew. Alas, they got burned by it so I'm making it a point to mention these things in a widespread generic sense from now on. As such: if you are running PHP content management systems like blogs, postnuke or anything that uses PEAR XML_RPC

Posted by easyDNS: of Interest in via easyDNS blog at 14:58