

A templative tale from
Mischief Marketing

Mischievous Bee Gees

[excerpted from Chapter 6 (print edition) ...]

The Internet in General

The Internet is tailor-made for mischief marketing. In fact, the Web might as well have been fashioned *by* mischief marketers *for* mischief marketers.

Here are some reasons why, during this particular interlude in history, the Internet is so perfect for mischief marketing:

➤ **You can assume different identities (proxies) on the Net.**

This means that you can test your demented ideas experimentally without screwing up your reputation (if you have a reputation), or without being stopped by the knee-jerk prejudice that attaches to being unknown (if you don't have a reputation).

Mining Mystery

In 1967, a band released a new single and circulated it to radio stations — but didn't put their name on the label. Producers told disc jockeys only that the name of the group started with a B and ended with an S.

Assuming the new “mystery” single had really been recorded by the Beatles, the DJs played it, the public bought it, and “New York Mining Disaster, 1941” instantly became a huge hit. By the time the follow-up songs “Holiday” and “To Love Somebody” were released, everyone knew who the Bee Gees were.

But wait! There's more!

In the mid-Seventies, when the popularity of the Bee Gees had waned, producer Robert Stigwood again deployed the same tactic, this time to change perceptions that biased listeners against the group. He released “Jive Talkin’” — again without putting a name on the label, again generating an aura of mystery, and again launching a surprise new hit.

And so it happened that prejudice, pretension, and narrow-mindedness had once more been usurped, at least for a moment (but all it takes is a moment), by mischief marketing.

Of course, people like producer Robert Stigwood have been using pseudonyms (proxy identities) in precisely this way for centuries. But thanks to new encryption and anonymizing technology, only now has it become possible to create a proxy identity (a whole new you!) that satisfies the following conditions:

- Nobody can hijack your proxy and forge something using your proxy’s name. Why not? Because you can give your work a unique digital signature — a signature that may or may not be directly tied to the real you.
- Nobody can take ultimate credit for your work except you — again thanks to the power of digital authentication.
- You don’t ever *have* to take credit for your work (that, is you don’t have to reveal who you really are) unless you want to. So if your campaign bombs, you can just abandon it.
- If on the other hand your campaign succeeds, and you therefore decide to take credit for whatever offering you’ve mischief marketed using this technique, you can prove that you — and only you — were the person who created the digitally authenticated work.
- You can use multiple proxies — think of an onion— that progressively protect (or reveal) your true identity only in carefully orchestrated stages, if you wish. Which means you can test consumers’ reactions at each stage of your mischief marketing experiment. You can calibrate your campaign, and make mid-course corrections.

Mischief Marketing Using Via the DRUID Strategy: DRUID = “Deferred Revelation of User’s ID.” To test a new but potentially explosive mischief marketing campaign, use encryption and anonymizing technology to withhold your true identity until the moment comes (if it ever does) when you decide to reveal yourself.

➤ **On the Web, you can make yourself look as big as any major corporation.**

At the moment, the Web is the most egalitarian communication space in the world.

Soon, it will of course be militarily occupied by T-Rex sized corporations that will stop you from saying anything even faintly critical of, say, McDonald’s.

For example, you won’t be able to say, “I don’t like Big Macs” because lawyers for the burger chain will swoop down on your website, shut it down, and drag you into court. Eventually, that sort of thing will happen every day. Probably.

But it won’t happen right away. And what that means to you as a mischief marketer living in the here and now is that you still have a chance of using the Internet as a megaphone for your message or offering.

➤ **The Internet lets you hitch a ride on various popular subjects. It’s cobranding for the unwashed masses.**

In conventional marketing, there is a concept called co-marketing. It refers to how two companies will sometimes get together on a marketing campaign, because each wants to borrow a bit of the credibility of the other, or a bit of its image, and further its own brand in the process.

For example, if Nike sponsors an Olympic event, it acquires a redolence of athleticism, grace, and vigour. At the same time, however, the Olympic competition also benefits, because it acquires the redolence of a product that traps dog shit with a tenacity that is nothing short of supernatural. In such a case, you could say that Nike and the Olympics are comarketing.

Similarly, the Internet lets you comarket with just about every person and thing on the Internet. This is because it's still legal for anyone to link to anyone else.

Caution: It won't be legal forever, however, a fact you need to keep that in mind. Historically, this kind of window of opportunity always closes as soon as the control freaks finally realize — as they are just realizing now — that you caught them with their pants down.

At that point, they concoct some “danger” that your freedom of expression supposedly harbors and abets — communism, pornography, paternalism, child abuse, heresy, witchcraft, Judaism, Catholicism, atheism, evangelism, or whatever — and then they start censoring everything that falls within the penumbra of that cooked-up concept (which often has some validity).

But the window of opportunity for universal, egalitarian comarketing is still open to you now, so by all means make use of it to associate your offering with anyone or anything you like.

In mischief marketing, we don't call this cobranding, however, because a mischief marketer may or may not expressly solicit the permission of the other, associated party.

We call it **fly-tying**, because it's like something you do in fly fishing. You tie “flies” — little objects that attract fish because they look like the kind of food (bug or fly) that the particular type of fish you're after likes to eat at a particular time of the year.

Example: Suppose you sell spittoons. Sure, you could set up a website called spittoon.com, and hope that visitors show up. But that's not likely to happen spontaneously, because, let's face it: the market for spittoons is very limited.

Oh, it will soon become enormous, of course, because everything strange eventually becomes enormous. Look at Brando. But it isn't too big a market right now.

So what can you do to help sell your spittoons?

Well, you can mischievously **fly-tie** your offering to related products and services.

For example, you can set up a website directed at defiant smokers — people who perhaps stupidly continue to smoke no matter how hard other people try to stop them.

And on your site, you could rally smokers to chew and spit tobacco in public as a kind of protest against all the people who are upset about secondhand smoke. Then you could entice the smokers into viewing your catalog of beautiful, portable spittoons.

In other words, *you can hitch your offering to the bandwagon of the smoking debate*, which would be a kind of mischievous “comarketing” (or piggybacking or fly-tying).

And if your site causes controversy — well, so much the better.

Meanwhile, you could set up another, harmless website that’s simply all about brass. It could be an educational website with lots of good, solid information about brass. Then you could fly-tie (link) from that educational site to your catalog of brass spittoons.

In other words, by associating your offering with brass products, you can hitch your offering to the bandwagon of brass lovers and collectors.

The example I just gave is ridiculous, of course. But all kidding aside, whenever you mount an educational page that fly-ties to your offering, you’re bound to get more traffic. The Internet makes it easy for you to do this kind of thing.

By the way, just make sure your educational page really is meaty and helpful. Don’t try to con people with this technique. They’ll catch on immediately.

➤ **On the Internet, you can Bully-Bait corporations or politicians, and make the resulting fracas newsworthy.**

This is related to the tactic of fly-tying to a controversial issue. As the example below shows, the Internet can also be very useful for baiting big-money bullies into coming after you (while you get press coverage of their bully tactics, of course).

This is starting to happen more and more in politics.

People are mounting parody political websites that look just like the “official” websites of pompous politicians. Then what happens is that the politicians stupidly take the bait, and angrily try to shut down the critical websites — which of course only makes the candidates look like idiots, and therefore generates lots of free press for the mischief marketer who mounted the parody site.

[... Chapter 6 (print edition) continues at this point ...]

Know anybody struggling to get started on a shoestring budget?

Why not help them get started?

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