
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Secret Perils of the Blogosphere

Adam Leipzig · Monday, December 12th, 2011

She said her name was Bethany. “The quality of your content is excellent and I was wondering if I could get an opportunity to guest post on your website,” she emailed me.

When I asked her what she wanted to write about, she told me: “1. Ways of Composing Music. 2. Your Voice Is Your Individuality. 3. Knowing Dance Floor Courtesy.” Hmm, I thought. That’s pretty generic. Since we’re an online magazine that prides itself on people writing from their experience and passions, tell me, Bethany, what’s yours?

“I am very much passionate about writing, I started with this hobby from my teenage.” (That’s verbatim.)

And where do you live? “I born and brought up at New York. And I am currently living up there only.” (Verbatim, again.)

Seeded stories with advertising embeds

In her next email, she told me that “all” she wanted would be two links within the blog post. Ah, now it became clear: She was being paid to write posts and seed them on various sites, so those posts could contain advertising messages and build back-links for her client.

I have no idea who her client was; my guess is that “Bethany” wasn’t in New York at all, and was part of back-link content farming operation – a company that is paid to get client websites more incoming links. That supposedly puts a site higher in Google’s search ranking.

No, Bethany, we don’t work that way.

Fake comments, too

When you post a comment here, ever wonder why it takes a while before it shows up? That’s because the comments pass through a filter, and I approve them individually before they get onto the site.

Why, you may ask? Because sometimes, comments are not real either. They try to start off complimentary, but then they fall off the cliff: “I wish to all of us delight in a person your time and efforts you’ve made within writing this site publish. I’m hoping precisely the same best document by way of an individual later on in addition.”

Some of them seem more real, until I go to the comment-maker's web-link, and discover an advertisement for pharmaceuticals or Ugg boots.

Then there's payola

In the music industry, payola is the illegal practice of paying a radio station to play a song, as if it is part of the DJ's own selections. The online world has its own version of payola, which is legal, unregulated and in most cases invisible to readers.

I keep getting offers like this one, from someone at a "blog services" company: "My client, a company in the educational field, would like to sponsor 4 posts on your blog. They would pay you \$160 for you to link back to them within 4 existing posts that are already on your site (4 permanent links). As my clients are looking to build brand awareness authentically, they ask that the links are not titled as sponsored, paid for, or promotional."

It is hard to say no to money today, especially as this site isn't profitable, and if I said yes to a bunch of these deals I could start to pay our writers (which will be the first thing we do when we start making money here). But of course I said No. We're trying to build Cultural Weekly as an authentic place, too. We won't take payola.

Here's what we *will* do

There's no way for readers to know what a website is doing – where the content comes from, if it has been paid for, if it is secretly promotional.

Unless the site tells you. That's what we're doing. Cultural Weekly's content isn't for sale.

We *will* support, promote and advocate artists and ideas we believe in – "we" being the writers who post here, including me. Cultural Weekly is a place for people to express their passionate views and discuss them: openly, proudly, loudly.

Without fake posts, fraud comments, or secret payola.

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