

Sharing is Caring: You Can Learn a lot from a Frivolous Lawsuit

So Viacom is suing YouTube for a Billion dollars. Yes, that's billion with a giant capital "B." Basically that's 6 times Viacom's annual revenue and about 2/3 of what Google paid when they bought YouTube a few years back. Viacom is suing YouTube because someone discovered that the managers and employees of YouTube were turning a blind eye to the copyrighted material that was being uploaded to the site. And because this is the 21st century, the lawsuit is well documented with email correspondence between the guilty parties. (Note to self... be careful what you email).

Viacom is the media giant that owns MTV networks, Paramount Pictures, and among other things The Daily Show and The Colbert Report. Think back to when you first laughed at a Daily Show clip. If you're like millions of others, you discovered that clip on YouTube; probably because it was forwarded to you by someone else who discovered it on YouTube. Clips of the South Park, snippets of Saturday Night Live, and favorite bits of movies were what made YouTube so popular in the beginning. Instead of saying "...do you see the Natalie Portman rap song?" you could queue it up on YouTube and share.

So Viacom's lawsuit is partly about damages, but it's also about profit sharing. Viacom's content helped YouTube's rise to online media dominance. But let's not forget the integral role that YouTube played in bringing a mass audience to The Daily Show, or reminding a generation that Music Videos could be cool again. YouTube made Viacom a ton of money as Viacom was making YouTube famous.

Suing People is Not a Long Term Business Model

There's a special circle of Hell reserved for companies who sue the pants off the groups that make them money. Currently, the RIAA and MPAA – Recording Industry and Motion Picture Associations of America – are filling up that circle for driving fans into Bankruptcy, shutting down Napster, and chasing The Pirate Bay across Europe. There's a sad irony to the exchange and it feels like everyone sees it, but that doesn't stop the lawsuits. It seems when you have money and law on your side, there's no stopping to notice the scorched earth behind you.

Embrace Sharing

On the flip side, there are the bright shining stars that recognize how powerful the idea of sharing can be. Wilco was one of the first bands to put the entire album Yankee Hotel Foxtrot online for download and sharing. It's still their number one selling album and the perfect combination of beautiful pop songs and fan-centric generosity made them internationally famous. Glee, the new Fox TV show about high school show choir used YouTube and social media to create an enormous amount of buzz before the show was even aired. It quickly became one of the most talked about and critically acclaimed shows of the year. Paranormal Activity, made for \$10,000, used social media buzz and shared clips to generate \$62 million in ticket sales.

By embracing the universal human desire to share cool stuff with each other, those who get it will continue to thrive. Those who don't get it deserve their hellish time battling it out in court.

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