

An excerpt from

Mischief Marketing

Mischievous Bully Baiting

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

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[Click here for masterful examples of bully baiting by Ralph Nader](#)

Tools of the Mischief Marketer

Now that you something about your VLP, how do you reach them? How do you get in touch with him or her?

Well, it just so happens that, luckily, there are all kinds of tools you can use to carry out a good mischief marketing campaign. Here are just a few of them.

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).

Here's a story that makes the point:

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.

~ **Idea Joggers** ~

- Can you present your offering anonymously, in a way that makes people suspect you might be someone they already know and admire?
- Recognize when people think they've already “got your number.” Recognize it soon. Don't necessarily waste time trying to rehabilitate their impression of you. That's a losing battle. Instead, create a new and better impression — then, when the time comes, reveal the truth.

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 under 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 traceable to the real you (until *you* decide to reveal yourself).
- 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 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.

What I've just been describing is something called DRUID.

Mischief Marketing with 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.

DRUID is an extremely powerful tactic that we predict will soon be the tactic of choice for mischief marketers who want to have some *serious* fun.

Example: My friend Uta holds a controversial point of view on a particular topic. In fact, it's so controversial that I can't even talk about it in this book.

So how can Uta market her point of view without jeopardizing her own personal safety (or reputation) and that of her family? By using DRUID.

Now, I hope you'll excuse the fact that this is necessarily a highly simplified account, but here is basically how DRUID might work in Uta's case:

- First, Uta sets up her controversial website with an anonymizing host — a company that isn't interested in your true identity, but that will host websites for

you. She signs up for the service using a money order (that doesn't have her name on it, of course). And she uploads her web pages to the server using publicly accessible computers (at libraries and cafes) so snoops can't trace her FTP activities through her ISP.

- Second, Uta offers an encrypted file on her site. This file is what she will use later — IF she so chooses — to identify herself as the author of the material on the site. (For only she has the key to this file.) Better yet, she publishes her public key on the site, too, so people can get in touch with her via anonymous email, and can therefore be sure that the answers they're getting really are from her — even though they don't know Uta Ellisatt.
- Third, she archives and encrypts a copy of her entire website, and sends the file to a timestamping service that can (later) validate that Uta — and only Uta — “certified” these particular documents at that particular date and time. This is an extra precaution to ensure that nobody else (say, at the host company) will be able to claim credit for Uta's site.
- Finally, she calls attention to her site (again using public computers), advertises it, sits back, and sees what happens. If she likes what she sees, Uta can claim credit for the mischief marketing campaign; if not, she can forget the whole thing.

Again, this is an almost simplistic presentation of the DRUID tactic, which is actually very powerful and flexible. For further details, see MischiefMarketing.com.

Mischief Marketing by FIAT (“Freedom of Information via Anonymous Transmission”)

Closely related to DRUID is the FIAT technique. Both DRUID and FIAT can be used together, too, by the way.

The easiest way to explain how FIAT works is, as usual, by telling a true story that shows how you might use it.

Not long ago, a Utah couple named the Tanners (their real name) posted some stuff on a website about a huge religious body we will call The Church of Holy Jesus Christ Almighty (not its real name; we don't dare infringe on any trademarks, and you'll soon see why).

On the site, the Tanners told visitors where (that is, specifically at what URLs) to view some material that happened to be protected by the Church's copyrights. Merely for providing the *location* of that information, however (not the copyrighted information itself), Church lawyers promptly bullied the Tanners into court, and sued them, successfully, for "contributory copyright infringement."

It's as though you'd told a friend something like, "There are prostitutes at Washington Square Park" — then later got arrested as a "contributory prostitute" simply for having indicated that location. Or so the Utah judge ruled, anyway.

(Incidentally, no — this was NOT the Church of Scientology.)

Big corporations and other control freaks are doing more and more of this kind of thing, by the way. It's called 'cybersmearing': using trademark and copyright law to intimidate critics like the Tanners — or you and me.

Eventually, these giant organizations will erode the First Amendment of the Constitution, and completely gut our freedom of speech. And individuals (especially politicians) will soon start trademarking their names, too, which means you won't be able to say, "Senator Slubgob's voting record stinks" without infringing on the Senator's trademark, for example.

But this won't happen right away. We still have a few years to use mischief marketing techniques like DRUID and FIAT.

So anyway ... Here's what the Tanners can do to transmit their message by FIAT:

1) They can set up an account with an *anonymous emailer* (there are several), or with a Web-surfing *anonymizing service* like ZeroKnowledge or Anonymizer.

Note: At the time of writing, Anonymizer and ZeroKnowledge were among the services dedicated to shielding your real identity as you surf the Net. But by the time you read this, they may already

have competitors — or someone may have started some “accidental” fires in the offices of all such firms. (You never know with stuff like this. Free speech threatens people.)

2) They can tell website visitors something like this: “If you’re interested in *studying the legal issues* behind why we don’t have the freedom of speech to tell you certain things about the Church, sign up for our FIAT mailing list.”

Note: The italicized text in Step 2 above indicates a legal fine point we can’t discuss here. For details, see the Mischief Marketing website.

3) Then they can send BOTH (a) anonymous information about the Church to their subscribers — along with (b) legally “safe” information under their public name. The anonymous info should be sent at some random interval, by the way, not immediately after being requested.

4) The Tanners will want to claim, of course — should the question arise — that they sent only B-list stuff, the harmless info.

5) Now, when the powerful Church — or tobacco company; or whatever — again tries to silence their critics (which they will), the bullying lawyers will first need to establish, in this case, that the Tanners are in fact the people who sent the A-list stuff, the anonymous information.

This is possible, of course, but very, very difficult technically. (And there are ways in which the Tanners can make it quite impossible, too.)

6) **The result:** The Tanners will have reclaimed their freedom of speech, and we will have access to information people tried to cover up.

Again, this is a highly simplified presentation, of course.

It assumes, furthermore, that your motives are pure, that your information is accurate, and that the public really has a “need to know” (and wouldn’t be harmed by) the data you’re offering. In some cases, these assumptions may be quite wrong. As we’ve said before, you can use mischief marketing for good or evil.

As usual, for further details on all this, see MischiefMarketing.com.

- **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.

And what that means to you as a mischief marketer 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 co-marketing 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 something of Nike's aura. In such a case, you could say that Nike and the Olympics are co-marketing.

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

But again, 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 ParaSiting.

- **ParaSiting**

Parasiting means designing a website around a popular topic, and then using that ParaSite as a gateway to your other websites.

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 start mischievously **parasiting** 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 make them stop.

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 parasite 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 links to your offering, you're bound to get more traffic. The Internet makes it easy for you to do this kind of thing.

Let me caution you about one thing, though. Make sure your educational ParaSite really is meaty and helpful. Don't try to con people with this technique. Don't try parasiting, say, a sudden, huge surge of pop interest in astrophysics by mounting a cheap page featuring little more than a picture of Stephen Hawking, and a half-dozen "Fun Facts about the Solar System."

In other words, don't a schmear job on the parasite. Do a great job. Because if you try to fake it, your visitors will never come back.

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

This is related to the tactic of parasiting 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 often 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.

There are so many good books about Internet marketing that it really would be silly to try to summarize their contents here. Your best bet would be to read a few of these books, then try to find or devise mischievous twists on the techniques they discuss. See [MischiefMarketing.com](#) for a listing.

But here are some questions that should help you get a feel for what other Internet-related tools are available to you as a mischief marketer:

- **Can you get some crazy cartoons “virally” circulated around the Internet?**

People love cartoons, and they love to pass them on to all their friends with frenzied, obsessional zeal. So if you can create some mischievous cartoons and link them to your website, do so. The same goes for clever animations and videos.

This process, by the way, is sometimes called “viral marketing” because the message in such cases tends to spread like a virus.

Remember the Dancing Baby animation? That’s a perfect example of viral marketing. In fact, the people who made that animation also used a form of DRUID, actually: It was only when the animation had been circulated all over the world that the Baby’s creators (people at Kinetix, a division of AutoDesk) decided to raise their profile and capitalize on the craze.

- **Can you start some bizarre rumor in a newsgroup?**

If so, then maybe you can then also parallel-mount a *corrective*, educational page that dispels that rumor (and links to your offering). At this point in history, it isn’t hard to start rumors on the Internet. In fact, it’s a snap. But please be sure you correct whatever rumor you start.

- **Can you spark a good conspiracy theory?**

Like their cousins (rumors), conspiracy theories also make good parasites.

Case In Point: Uta has a conspiracy theory she actually almost believes in. She suspects that the major pharmaceutical companies have discovered something useful about nicotine — or about some other component of tobacco.

But because nicotine is so readily available in tobacco, they don't want to announce their discovery until they can get tobacco outlawed or outpriced. Once they succeed in doing that, you'll have to go to a doctor to get a prescription for nicotine (or some derivative thereof) to cure whatever it cures, and the whole process will therefore cost you a fortune. You won't be able to stuff your own capsules with tobacco, because you won't be able to get tobacco anymore, or afford it.

Uta almost believes this wacky theory because she finds it curious that people are spending millions upon millions of dollars on ad campaigns designed to protect her health (Uta is a smoker, and therefore should of course be imprisoned immediately).

Why, just this morning, Uta said to me, "How nice of them! How saintly! I suppose that, any minute now, they'll also start spending millions upon millions of dollars to save us from another major cause of death — speeding. Or from eating high-fat foods that cause killer heart disease. I'm sure those millions upon millions of loving, caring dollars are rolling in as we speak."

Experience tells Uta, however, that whenever you see massive amounts of money being spent generously on you, it's NOT because your benefactors are so caring and wonderful. It's because they have some motive for "helping" you.

Uta suspects, therefore, that the big pharmaceutical companies, having learned their lesson about aspirin (which they can't patent or overprice) are now applying what they learned to nicotine — or to some other component in tobacco.

"Did you know that the Wall Street Journal reported not long ago that pharmaceutical companies have quietly been buying up tobacco farms?" Uta asked me (once she had reconnected her electronic voice box which, in her excitement, had tumbled to the floor). "Think about it, Ray. Even the writer of the *article* thought that was strange."

Anyhow, there you have an example of how to construct a conspiracy theory. If you can devise a theory that has any plausibility at all, people will link to your website — and from there you can shepherd them to whatever it is you're offering. Perhaps you're offering the truth.

- **Can you parody some famous movie or advertisement?**

Again, your goal in such a case would be to get your parody circulated — and get people to link back to your website.

Incidentally, if your parody is very well done, you can combine this tactic with BullyBaiting, and try to get the people you're parodying to come after you for trademark violation. Just make sure you're protected legally.

For information on how to invoke that legal protection, familiarize yourself with the laws regarding trademark law, fair use, parody and satire.

One excellent starting point: Visit MischiefMarketing.com for links to legal resources.

Mischief Marketing Tip (“Know the Law”):

Every mischief marketer needs to know something about the law.

And some mischief marketers need to know a LOT about the law.

For instance, here are some of the legal questions you'll need to tackle and understand:

- What's the difference between violating someone's trademark, and simply using the name of their product or service?
- What First Amendment rights do you have to parody someone or something?
What legal criteria are used to establish that something is a parody — and therefore protected speech?
- Is speech that calls for violence protected?
- What constitutes libel or defamation — specifically?
- Is it okay to do “deep linking” to a page on someone else's site?
- What laws govern obscenity and pornography?
- When you press an “I Accept” button on a website, are you really bound by the underlying agreement?
- Can you specify, in a legally binding fashion, that certain people — or people in certain locales — may not view your site?

Because Internet law is still evolving, a good mischief marketer will try to keep up with recent rulings — and may even decide to do something (mischievously) that will test a particular issue in court.

Non-Internet Tools

Yeah, sure, the Internet is a good mischief marketing tool. But many old-fashioned tools are available to you as well. In fact, the old-fashioned tools often work better than the new-fangled electronic ones.

Take email, for example. Be honest: Isn't it incredibly fricking irritating?

Oh sure, it's useful and terrific and all that. But c'mon, tell the truth — isn't it nice to get something *physical* in the mail once in while, something written on real paper with a real pen by a real human?

Well, guess what. Your prospects feel the same way.

So when you're taking inventory of your tools, ask the following questions, too:

➤ **Can you mount a letter-writing campaign directed at your VLP?**

We're talking about a ground mail campaign using beautiful paper, gorgeous envelopes, exquisite wrapping or filling (if you're mailing packages), and so on. Contemplate Michael Shurtleff's story to get a feel for this technique.

➤ **Do you know someone who knows someone who can put you in touch with your VLP?**

There's something called the theory of "six degrees of separation" — a statistics-based idea which asserts that any two people in the world are separated socially (whether they know it or not) by not more than about four or five people.

That is, you *very probably* know someone who knows someone (... and so on ...) who knows Martha Stewart. Wouldn't that be SIMPLY WONDERFUL?

But the good news is that you *also* know someone who (blah blah blah) who knows your VLP. So start asking around. You may be surprised to find out how well connected we all are on this planet.

➤ **Can you produce a truly interesting press release?**

This is another subject about which entire books have been written.

For the mischief marketer, however, the essential question is how to write a genuinely amusing — perhaps even somewhat bizarre — press release.

Case In Point: My friend Sue Doanim once wrote a conventional press release — but she completely forgot to include the most basic information: namely, when and where the announced event was to take place.

Once she'd spotted her embarrassing mistake, Sue realized that the only possible way to save face would be to use a mischief marketing weapon: the *Simple Truth Tactic* (Chapter 12).

So she issued a second press release that essentially said, “The previous release failed to tell you when and where this event will take place. This is chiefly because, as a publicist, I am what is known in the trade as an incompetent jerk. If I were on a supermarket checkout line, you would recognize me immediately as the idiot clutching a fistful of coupons and fumbling with a checkbook on the Cash Only No Coupons line.”

And what happened? Sue got something publicists often covet but too rarely get — primetime television news coverage for her event.

➤ **Can you perform some odd public demonstration?**

This is an old trick, but it does sometimes work.

Case In Point: In 1977, musician Elvis Costello was first starting out. He had signed a contract with Stiff Records, and he was happy enough about that. But he also wanted to get an international record deal. So he strapped a pignose amp on his back, planted himself outside the London hotel where CBS Records happened to be holding its annual international convention — and started playing. (He also got arrested. But hey.)

This was not a PR stunt, by the way, but an authentic mischief marketing move — because Costello first identified a very specific group of VLPs, and also conducted background research to find out where they were staying.

Conventional Marketing and Guerrilla Marketing Tools

Every mischief marketer should learn as much as possible about conventional and guerrilla marketing. There are lots of perfectly good concepts in these fields — ideas that have passed the test of time. Why waste such good information?

Here are some examples of tools drawn from this arena:

- **Principle of Integrating Interests** — a sales technique in which the salesperson knows the buyer's personal interests or buying motives, and emphasizes these in the presentation rather than the features or benefits of the product. Also known as one-to-one marketing.
- **Kinesic Communication** — communicating through body movements such as head nodding, stance, posture, hand gestures, and so on. Nonverbal communication. Body language.
- **Advocacy Advertising** — a communication or message that presents information or a point of view on a controversial public issue, idea or cause.
- **Microsegmentation** — the process of dividing a market into smaller groups of customers on the basis of very narrowly defined needs and wants.
- **Note:** Here you can see what we're thinking about when we say that targeting VLPs is really a special case of what conventional marketing calls microtargeting. In a sense, mischief marketing is actually microsegmentation and microtargeting taken to its logical limit, coupled with “Word of Mouth” (leveraged) marketing.
- **Missionary Selling** — a sales technique in which the salesperson's role is to give information to an individual having the power to influence others to buy an offering, rather than to sell directly to that individual. A missionary salesperson is sometimes known as a Detailer. Also called Bottom Line Selling: selling to the top decision makers who value bottom line improvements above all else.

- **Image Differentiation** — also known as branding. To create a competitive advantage, a company might differentiate itself from competitors by crafting a unique image. The specific image or personality it acquires derives from the unique mix of its logo, atmosphere, advertising, events, and personalities. Other types of differentiation include product differentiation, services differentiation, and personnel differentiation.
- **Note:** In mischief marketing, the very strangeness of your approach constitutes a kind of services and/or personnel differentiation.

For more information on how to incorporate conventional and guerrilla marketing tools into your mischievous campaigns, visit MischiefMarketing.com.

Mischievous Pop Review Quiz:

1. When, especially on the Internet, you conduct a perhaps controversial mischief marketing campaign under cover of anonymity, then later reveal (and prove) who you really are:

- a) you are using a mischief marketing technique called DRUID.
- b) you are bound to infuriate large corporations and government agencies so much that they'll lobby Congress to require every Internet user to be licensed, fingerprinted, and traceable through every link they visit on the Internet, until Big Brother finally almost succeeds in utterly eradicating your privacy, and the privacy of all citizens, while preserving its own (of course).
- c) you will be free at last — without jeopardizing your job, yourself or your family — to speak Truth to Power.
- d) all of the above.

2. Parasiting is the mischief marketing practice of:

- a) building an informative and entertaining website around a hot topic in order to help attract users to your own website; constructing a ParaSite.
- b) gawking at things in the capital of France.

c) using paranormal powers to indicate the source of a fact or statement; also known as paraciting.

3. BullyBaiting is the mischief marketing practice of:

a) enticing some bully — usually a large, litigious corporation or humorless politician — into attempting to suppress your freedom of speech, so you can attract the attention of the media when the bullies sic their mean lawyers on you.

b) turning the other cheek — toward the TV camera with the red light on.

c) demonstrating that America's Constitution and her First Amendment are alive and kicking, no matter how hard the control freaks try to crush them.

d) all of the above.

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

Know anybody struggling to get started on a shoestring budget? Why not help them get started? Tell them about *Mischief Marketing!*