

Fake media still has its place

LET'S FACE IT: PRINT MEDIA IS DEAD. YOU SEE the stuff you're reading this on? Thin and white? Paper—have you heard of it? There's a good chance you might not have, what with the Internet, which I hear is all the rage these days. Twenty-four-hour news sites, blogs, and RSS feeds have supplanted newspapers, magazines, and the evening news as the go-to source for information.

But perhaps I was a bit rash with that opening statement, especially since my job relies on paper pulp and soy-based inks. Old media still serves a very important role in delivering in-depth coverage that doesn't quickly get pushed into the annals of a server in India.

Still, the Internet, and blogging in particular, has a romance surrounding it that no other medium can match. Getting news from blogs is like being 16 years old and sharing your first kiss with a distant cousin: you're not sure if it's right or wrong, but goddamn it, you want it now.

What's more, the anonymity and timeliness that the Internet provides can make those who deliver the content take more risks, make off-the-cuff statements, editorialize, and generally run amok of what has come to be known as "good journalism."

Take, for instance, the Secret Diary of Steve Jobs—a blog run by someone using the pseudonym Fake Steve Jobs, fake CEO of Apple Inc. FSJ's blog, while incredibly humorous, was also lauded by the technology community—including the real Steve Jobs and Bill Gates—as being smart and having its finger on the pulse of what's happening in Silicon Valley. So much so that it was long believed Fake Steve could very well be the real Steve.

That is, up until this weekend when Brad Stone, a writer at the *New York Times*, did some digging and revealed Fake Steve to be *Forbes* editor Daniel Lyons. While no direct confession came from FSJ's blog, Lyons did fess up to creating Fake Steve, but promised to keep the blog up and running, going as far as to have *Forbes* sponsor it.

But where does this leave the blog as a brilliant and sharp-witted, but most importantly, romanticized source that strattles the line between fact and fiction? I guess that depends how you choose to look at media.

Lyons was providing a service to nerds everywhere: an unabashed look into the the mind of one of the world's most popular, and secretive, CEOs. Though it was almost a given that one day FSJ's cover would be blown, it was more fun to look at the character Lyons was playing, rather than the actor behind the keyboard. More importantly, Fake Steve was a little bit of every techno-geek. He spoke to an industry from the highest—albeit fictional—tier in a way that was refreshing, honest, and with little rhetoric.

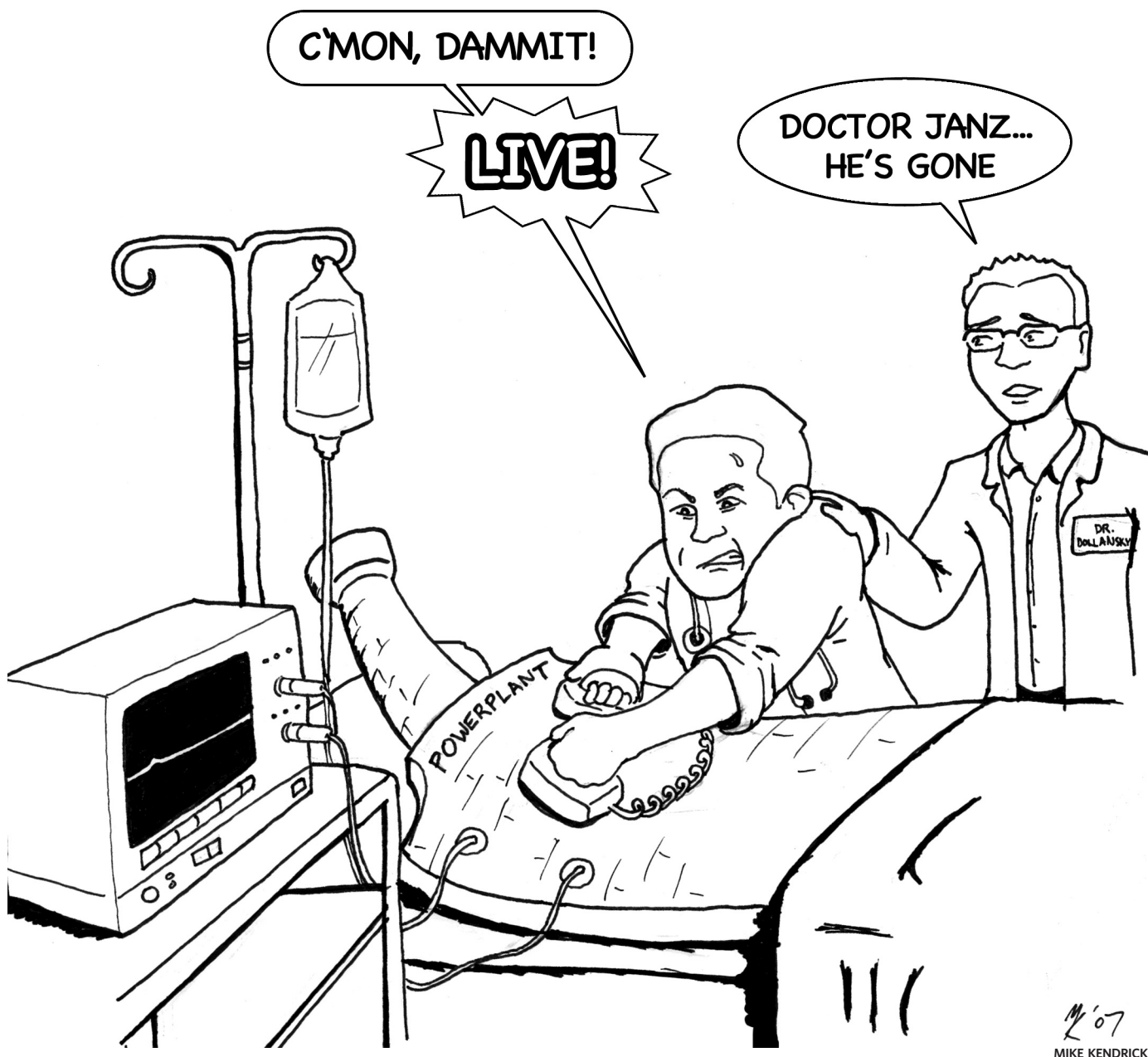
The Internet has erased the line between news and entertainment. What most old media outlets would never get away with is now commonplace online. Stories are published with information from sources as shady as the spam that sneaks through your email filter. Writers and experts are now names of average Joes with no credentials—not even a Wikipedia page—and their opinions are often some of the most honest and trustworthy around.

But the problem with this is that many of us have been conditioned to take most, if not all media, at face value. When a popular YouTube video is shown to have been staged or faked, it almost instantly loses all of its pop-culture value. When a huge news story is broken by a website and turns out to be erroneous, the trust in it is shaken and users return with trepidation. With how fast the news cycle operates online, the screw-ups are quickly pushed to the bottom of the page and, subsequently, out of many people's minds before they even realize what hit them.

The Internet and blogging is letting people get their news in a whole new way—a way that old media can't get away with. A way that's informative, entertaining, and opinionated enough to make you think more critically about events happening throughout the world. Even if it's coming to us anonymously, and whether it's right or wrong, new media has found a place for the masses to speak to the masses and be heard as loud they want to be heard.

That is, until old media comes along and debunks them as the hacks they are.

RYAN HEISE
Deputy News Editor



LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVES

Laptops not the answer

I just read your article in the 4 September *Gateway*, about mandatory laptops for engineers. Anyway, WHAT A STUPID FUCKING IDEA!!!

I can't believe that anyone would think this is a good idea. Most people don't know how to use computers worth shit in the first place, and now they want to make people buy the most expensive, underpowered, and hard-to-use computers that you can get: laptops.

Laptops are extremely underpowered when you compare them to their equally priced desktop equivalents. They have way fewer capabilities, and are way less upgradeable. Because they are made to be smaller, they have to use non-standard components which make them somewhat incompatible and problem-prone.

Now, when you say that you can get laptops for students at \$100-\$150, that's hilarious. Any decent laptop is gonna cost someone at least \$3000, and to get one that could keep up with a desktop system it would cost closer to \$5000-\$6000. A price of \$1000 for a laptop is laughable. That would maybe get you a low-end Pentium with 4 megs of RAM, and a really shitty, hard-to-read screen.

Another factor with laptops (like

any computers) is that it is out of date as soon as you buy it. With the proposed plan, by the time first-year students got to fourth year, their laptops would be so out of date, compared to the first-years', that they would be almost useless (especially if they were buying out-of-date, \$1000 bargain-bin shit to start out the program).

If they were going to have a system that supported all those using it, they would have to run software that ran on the lowest common denominator of machine (which would be the fourth-year students' machines, cause they would be the oldest). That would make the first-year students' machines overkill cause they wouldn't be able to take advantage of their hardware.

Also, if the program was designed to use only the brand name of the laptop that the project leaders specified, the students would be forced into buying brand-name crap that they didn't particularly like. Can you say, "IMB"? That's what it would be for sure ... IBM Thinkpads for the masses ... God. People who like using Mac Powerbooks would be out of luck.

If laptops would be any benefit in the classroom, I think people would buy them and bring them themselves. What the hell good is a laptop in a math class? You gonna take math notes with a word processor? Hardly.

Anyway, there seems to be a lot of reasons *not* to make laptops mandatory, and there also seems to be a lot of problems with the system

that these monkeys have thought up. I know I could think of a lot more reasons. I won't bore you with this any more, but I noticed your lack of opinion in the article, so I thought I'd give you one.

ROB GRUE
9 September, 1997

Students don't count

Dear Sir—On this day of the Federal election, it should be of some interest to the several hundred students at the University of Alberta to ponder on how little influence they have on the result of this election. The several hundred who attend from outside points and are of voting age find that unless they return to their constituency they have no opportunity of exercising their franchise.

Is it not time a demand was made for a complete revision of the franchise? Surely the electoral system is hopelessly out of date. The very sections to which the community looks for leadership in art, science, and culture are by one means or another prevented from either voting or running for office. And then we are told that universities should be more practical and attempt to fit their students for problems of the world. Surely intelligent citizenship is the highest duty of any Canadian.

Our system of single member constituencies is particularly out of date now. With so many candidates in the field, it is quite possible that only a few ... will obtain a majority of

all the votes cast.

A great English publicist said, "The people of a country should be represented not disproportionately, but according to their numbers." After the results of today's competition are seen, perhaps our statesmen will be more favorable to multi-member constituencies and the transferable ballot.

Perhaps, too, our new Governor-General may enlighten them on representation from the universities as practiced in the old land, and in our Utopian future, university students and professors may be able to exercise 100 per cent of their citizenship rights.

A ALLEN
16 October, 1935

From the Archives is a semi-regular feature where the Gateway runs historical letters that we feel are of particular importance—or are just really hilarious.

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