

Asian nonprofits unknowingly linked to porn

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complacent. That category begins with two listings for Pinkzilla Gal, followed by a link to New Zealand pet food company Oceania Meat Processors, another for the Sloane Meat Market and Deli of Johannesburg, South Africa, and then moves to Asianstreetmeat Pictures, which shows graphic movies of “exploited” Bangkok bar girls.

By contrast, Tim Hallman of the Asian Arts Museum was appalled.



Clicking on Mr. Chew's Asian Beaver link that is next to one FLIAsian listing of Asian Art Museum brings a browser to this logo, which sits atop endless galleries of sexually graphic photos.

“It’s discouraging that someone would use our name alongside such material,” he said. “I can see there are many other fine organizations listed here that we sponsor or are supporters of ours. Fortunately, we’re a city agency and have access to the city attorney. We’ll try to find out if there is anything we can do.”

STARTED WITH AN E-MAIL

Central City Extra got wind of this new Webtrusion — a brand new word there, folks — when someone calling herself Jenna Brooks sent us an e-mail. She’d just linked the FLIAsian site with Study Center’s, she wrote, and she’d like us to reciprocate.

Brooks didn’t answer our two e-mails asking questions. When we tried calling the phone number under her name, a recorded message said, “You are cool,” then rattled off a string of Bay Area phone numbers that offered an 800 number where we could chat on a “hot and wild adult-only party line” for \$1.98 for the first minute, 98 cents for each additional minute.

Web businesses can easily hide their identity. Russell Mondy, the Study Center’s Webmaster, pointed out that for a few dollars,

our Miss Brooks could have even masked her Netherlands, Antilles, address, which includes what appears to be a phony Arizona ZIP code.

We discovered that the FLIAsian site was registered by an outfit with a fittingly martial name, Conquest Business Ventures, and registered through GoDaddy.com. Its software crawls the Web for sites that include key words like “Asian,” then posts what it finds on a hosting site such as FLIAsian.

The process, also called traffic building, has proliferated as those who sell advertising via the Web find it increasingly difficult to reach Internet users through spam or pop-ups. In just under an hour, The Extra located and identified a dozen directory Web sites created by Conquest Business Ventures, all in the last few months.

There’s a two-fold economic incentive for creating directory Web sites such as FLIAsian, which has 78 categories, from Asian Art to Young Asians, each with up to 100 Web links; a fourth or more are porn.

Pornographers have built a royalty system into the pricing structure. Webmasters who lead customers to porn sites are paid a percentage of whatever the customer spends at the site, and, occasionally, a token amount, perhaps a penny or two, for simply providing the pornographer with “traffic” on his site.

Directory Web site creators also can make money by selling advertising space. Conquest Business Ventures offers two plans: Companies or organizations can be listed at the top of the category of their choice for \$25 a month, or they can choose a “pay-per-click” plan — a dime per visitor or \$100 for 1,000 visitors.

To legitimate organizations such as the Asian Art Museum and the Study Center, such a contract makes no sense. But, to a pornographer selling photos of kids having sex, channeling Web users who aren’t habitual porn site visitors to the porn site might be well worth the investment.

Does that mean that all top-of-the-category listings paid for the privilege? Not necessarily. Under the Asian Studies category, first up is the University of Melbourne’s Asian Studies Department. Under Asian Art, the first listing is

a magazine called Persimmon: Asian Literature, Arts, and Culture. FLIAsian’s home page’s first link is the San Francisco-based National Asian American Telecommunications Association.

Asked to comment about that placement, Hieu Ho, NAATA’s Web content editor, left us a voicemail message: “I followed up and tried to find out why we were listed at the top,” he said. “To our knowledge, we don’t have a relationship with them. For some reason or other, they have a preference to put us at the top and that’s to our benefit, I suppose.”

How much money FLIAsian brings in is anybody’s guess. The people behind the site stay artfully hidden.

Conquest Business Ventures sallies forth from Landhuis Joonchi, a business located in a building on Richard J. Beaujon Street in Willemstaad, Curacao.

A directory site Webmaster named Joe, not his real name, told us, “The thing about these directory Web sites is they’re already old. The search engine companies — Google, Yahoo — have already caught on to most of them, and are dropping their listing way down in the bottom of the stack. Most people never go past the first 10 listings for a subject, so in terms of traffic, these sites are coming up empty.”

Joe guessed that the porn sites got listed on FLIAsian because Conquest Business Ventures operates on the cheap. “It’s a matter of which software you use to collect the Web sites. If you use cheap software, you don’t know what you’re liable to wind up with on your page.”

The latest advertising technique that everyone’s looking into, he said, is something called RSS — Really Simple Syndication.

It was developed as a scripting service for specialized news groups such as those who sign on to receive newsletters or bulletins about global warming, for example. Formerly, that text was sent by e-mail. RSS designers figured out a way to put text directly on each news group member’s desktop. Such a development represents no intrusion if you’re interested in global warming. But Joe says that if Web advertisers adopt the protocols developed for news groups, embarrassments created by the likes of FLIAsian will soon look like small change. ■

City’s slick new news racks sprouting up, down Market

BY TOM CARTER

MARKET Street pedestrians can say goodbye, finally, to those standalone metal news racks that wandered all over the sidewalk and were easy fodder for vandals and demonstrators.

Supplanting them are city-supplied, dark green pedestal news racks that are anchored to the ground. The first ones, containing several individual boxes linked together, appeared at Powell and at Eighth Street as the new year dawned.

The Market Street rollout of 107 of the pedestal mount types will replace all the racks from Van Ness to Beale, which were individually owned, used and maintained by some 60 publications. Then the project will extend to

Union Square, the Financial District and Civic Center, according to Dan Brugmann, news rack manager for the Department of Public Works. Eventually, 1,000 pedestal systems will replace the city’s 11,000 racks.

Business interests have long considered the multicolored racks an eyesore and a nuisance to foot traffic. The racks are often targets for graffiti and street mobs have sent a few through windows. The standalone racks cost \$150 and last about three years.

Clear Channel Adshel Inc. manufactures and supplies the pedestal racks free to the city in exchange for advertising on them. The communications conglomerate maintains them, too. A rack varies from six to 10 boxes and costs up to \$4,000. Market at Powell has two 10-box pedestals.

The action ends a contentious chapter of bickering with the city. Publishers didn’t want to lose their individually designed racks; business interests wanted the city to move swiftly to get rid of them.

“This was hashed out over 15 years,” said Lynn Valente of the Market Street Association, who served on DPW’s news rack advisory committee. “There were a lot of compromises.”

Previously, any publisher could buy a rack and put it anywhere on a sidewalk as long as it was maintained and out of the way of foot traffic. Each had a distinctive color and design.

Then “things were exacerbated when SF Weekly was bought by New Times and they put racks on every corner,” said San Francisco Downtown Publisher Gordon Reynolds, who served on the advisory committee. “The Guardian felt obliged to do likewise. They were jockeying for position and it rained news racks.”

In 1999, Supervisor Barbara Kaufman got

an ordinance passed calling for the city to adopt pedestal racks and a system for selecting publications to occupy them at an annual rental rate of \$30 per box. Ten publishers sued.

In 2002, the suit was settled. The publishers won \$85,000 in attorney’s fees and a clause giving publications that had been on the street first crack to rent pedestal boxes at their previous sites. They apply through DPW.

In April 2003, Brugmann, the son of Guardian Publisher Bruce Brugmann, told a Graffiti Advisory Board meeting that the city’s “13,000” free-standing news racks would be replaced and there was “no limit” to the number of new boxes that could be installed. Publications could keep their old locations and new publications could have what they requested, too, as long as the fee was paid.

In 2004, DPW cited 4,100 racks for lack of maintenance or blocking sidewalks and removed 750 that didn’t comply, Brugmann said.

“It’s been a real thorn in our sides,” said Ken Cleveland, director of government and political affairs for the Building Owners and Managers Association. “For a long time we couldn’t do anything about the proliferation over the city—we wanted the sidewalks uncluttered. And then we got the ordinance.”

“But this has been an abysmally slow rollout that the business community has waited years for. We’re frustrated. We’d contribute money to make this thing go faster.”

Brugmann said, “Nobody’s going to be refused, unless there’s not enough space or they don’t pay the fee.”

DPW’s fees to replace 11,000 to 13,000 racks would be \$330,000 to \$390,000 a year. Relieved of any maintenance or surveillance duties, DPW would do the paperwork. ■

One of the new pedestal racks on Market at Powell is across from a melange of the old news racks near the San Francisco Centre.

PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

