



John Stillwell / AFP file

Princess Diana Net controversy

Up to 250 Web sites accused of exploiting her name

By Lisa Napoli

Aug. 30 — Princess Diana's death was a milestone event in Net history, as millions of people flocked to the Web to share their grief by posting to online bulletin boards and building Web page shrines. But just as sites prepare for another onslaught of traffic for the anniversary of her death, attorneys for the Princess Diana Memorial Fund are going after 250 Web sites that they say are exploiting the Princess' name for commercial purposes — including one that redirects users to a porn site.

‘During her short but shining lifetime, the Princess never objected to our fan site.’

— PRINCESSDIANA.COM

One is of particular interest to the Fund, which was established by the Princess’ sister and raises money to give grants to charitable causes she supported. Depending on whom you ask, Princessdiana.com is either a potential shrine to the deceased Princess that’s being strongarmed from its rightful owner by greedy corporate types — or a placeholder page for a porn site operator.

This kind of domain name dispute is one of countless of its kind, but it has special relevance on the anniversary of the Princess’ death. After all, many point to August 31, 1997, and the days immediately after that as a pivotal point in the development of the World Wide Web. Millions of people shared their grief by posting to online bulletin boards and even building Web shrines to the Princess, and hundreds of those are still maintained.

WHAT WERE NAUGHTYA’S INTENTIONS?

What someone named Naughty Page of Portland, Ore., intended to do with that site when she registered it in May of 1997 isn’t clear. Page has not returned emails, and the phone number listed in the official domain name registry has been disconnected.

But on the site, Page or whomever is maintaining it paints a picture of corporate greed, recounting how lawyers for CMG, an Indianapolis firm that protects the estates of famous names, are seeking to shut down more than a hundred domains containing any reference to Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales — including Princessdiana.com

“During her short but shining lifetime, the Princess never objected to our fan site,” reads the site. “Now, a few brief years after her tragic death, we find ourselves threatened by corporate ‘hijackers.’ If they are allowed to prevail in their actions, many of us devoted followers of the memory of Princess Diana will be prevented from showing our love and affection for the departed Princess in our own unique and diverse ways.”

Jonathan L. Faber, the attorney for CMG, said in a phone interview on Tuesday that from what he has seen, Page never had any intention of building a Web shrine to the Princess. Faber, who is working on behalf of the non-profit Princess Diana Memorial Fund, said that until he sent a legal letter to the site owner earlier this summer, the site redirected users to a pornography site.



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Faber said his research has found that Page owns 40 other domains with pornographic names — names that are too graphic to be published here.

“It concerns me when I see a Web page that makes us seem like corporate bullies,” Faber said. “If this Naughty Page is trying to take a moral high road, I think they lose. We’re working to preserve the Princess’ memory. If Page is a dedicated, devoted fan, they why would you not want that domain name to be in the control of the memorial fund, a charity?”

OTHER EXPLOITATIVE SITES

Napoli on the Net

- E-mail the infantry, cell phones at sea
- Young widow offers online support
- No more AOL CDs, please
- The evil, e-mailed poetry of a virus
- So thank God for e-mail
- Seniors look to Net for community

Faber said he has a list of 250 domain names that are of concern to the Fund, and has prioritized the list based on how each site is using the Princess’ name. He said he has contacted the owners of Princessdiana.org, which redirects to an international Web site building company, and Princessdiana.net, which is a one page

site in honor of the Princess. But he said Princessdiana.com is among his “highest priority” targets, as are others owned by people “exploiting” the Princess for commercial purposes.

One of those, DianaSpencer.com, sends surfers to a “For Sale” page and then, seconds later, redirects them to a pornographic site. Faber said this is a common ploy on the Web, particularly with the names of female celebrities.

The Memorial Fund already owns about 30 domains that direct surfers to a site about the organization. They include Princessofwales.com and Theworkcontinues.org.

PREPARING FOR ANOTHER ONSLAUGHT

The Web has grown exponentially since that fateful day in August three years ago, but the sentiments expressed just after Diana’s death are still evident.

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- [Up to 250 sites accused of exploiting Diana's name](#)
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Jesse Kornbluth, editorial director of America Online, said the service is getting ready for an influx of visitors to the Diana memorial section of the service, which has been active since the Princess died. On August 31, 1997, about 9 million users visited AOL, and in the days after the death, 4.5 million people visited the site's Diana memorial.

“All events have a half life,” he said.

“What’s interesting about Diana’s is how long her half-life has extended. In moments of really intense grief, in a culture where people have trouble expressing that grief with one another, an online service is the ideal center for people to express really deep and powerful emotions. This was national catharsis, that’s the point. We’ve seen this again and again since then.”

Walter Hopgood, a systems analyst in Sunnyvale, Calif., built his own Web shrine to Diana in a fit of sleeplessness in the early morning after she died. Though he hadn’t been a life-long Royals watcher, he said he was outraged by the actions of paparazzi and wanted to rally support for a ban against the tabloid newspapers who hired them to track the Princess.

“Within hours, I saw the page count soar, as more and more people found out about it. The output of support was wonderful. People wanted to know what they could do to help, what they could do to make a difference so this didn’t happen again,” he wrote. “To this day, I still receive e-mail for the Web page, where people continue to link up and want to talk about Diana’s death.”