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SpooF web page enjoys surge of traffic across global markets

'Weapons of Mass Destruction' satirical error page sees huge gains in traffic in Australia, the UK, France, Germany and the US

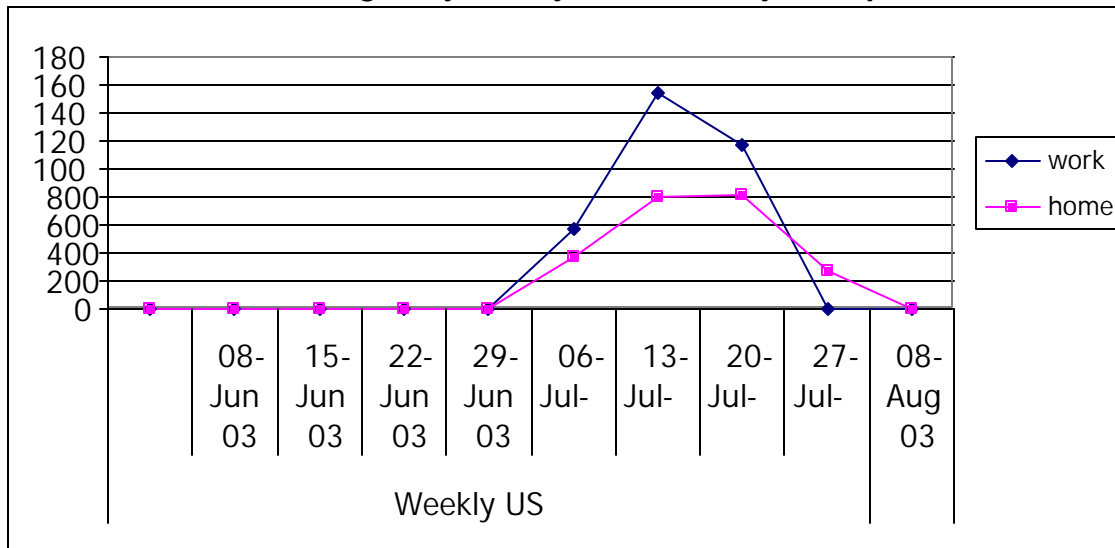
A spoof web page satirizing the War in Iraq led to an audience boost for the Blueyonder portal across a number of international markets and proved the power of both the search engine Google and viral marketing, according to the latest research from Nielsen//NetRatings.

The page, set up at coxar.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk by a Blueyonder ISP subscriber, uses a simple idea, a standard error page- the kind that appears when a file can't be found on the Internet - tweaked to say "These Weapons of Mass Destruction cannot be displayed". The page includes links to help the reader 'Detect weapons', which takes them to Amazon's UK site, and also opens a pop-up window for an online casino. Visitors can also link to another page where 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' merchandise can be bought.

The research highlighted a sizeable jump in Blueyonder's UK audience, with 31% going to the 'WMD' page in July. In Australia, where Blueyonder did not have an existing web presence, the effect is more pronounced – a massive jump in audience and 90% of that audience being for the spoof error page. The 'WMD' page also found readers in France, Germany and the US. The chart below shows the impact the site made in the US week by week in July.

These kind of comic pages are common on the Internet, but the Blueyonder page found its audience boosted by a stroke of good luck – it started to come top of Google's searches when the phrase "weapons of mass destruction" was searched for. Nielsen//NetRatings figures show the effect this had on Blueyonder's overall audience.

Chart 2: Nielsen//NetRatings July Weekly Data for Blueyonder portal, US





Google and Blueyonder were not the only winners, though. The links on the site led to Amazon.co.uk, and the click-through rate was high. In the UK 31% of visitors to the WMD site went to Amazon, and in Australia the figure was 37%, which almost doubled amazon.co.uk's audience in Australia.

Audience For Blueyonder Portal June-July 2003

Nielsen//NetRatings Country Panels Home + Work data	June Audience	June Rank	July Audience	July rank	Month on Month increase
Australia	43,000	801	576,000	36	1240%
France	-	-	336,000	179	
Germany	-	-	241,000	852	
UK	1,505,000	31	2,100,000	24	40%

“This is a fascinating net phenomenon,” commented European Market Analyst Tom Ewing, “It really shows the power of viral marketing – most of the hits came from Google after an e-mail was circulated telling users to type the phrase into the search engine and hit the ‘I’m Feeling Lucky’ button, which takes you to the top result automatically. It also shows the power of Google, of course, if it can generate this much traffic.”

“The Amazon aspect is what’s really interesting,” says Ewing, “Because it implies that if you want to promote a site or product you can get massive click-through rates by coming up with satirical or joke pages like these.”

The only other question is – how did the site top Google’s search charts in the first place? “Google’s engine works by identifying sites people are linking to,” explains Ewing, “And what happened here was that webloggers worldwide started linking to the site as an entertaining parody, which pushed its Google ranking higher and allowed it to become a phenomenon. If you want to get a high Google ranking, being noticed by weblogs is one way to do it. But as we can see from the US data, these kind of links spread very rapidly across the Internet and peak within a week or two – and they’re always a very short-term web event.”

Please source all information to Nielsen//NetRatings

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About Nielsen//NetRatings: Nielsen//NetRatings is the global standard for Internet audience measurement and analysis. Covering 70% of the world’s Internet usage, the Nielsen//NetRatings services offer syndicated Internet and digital media research reports and customised data to help companies gain valuable insight into their business. For more information, please visit www.nielsen-netratings.com.

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