

## Stardom 2.0

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One warm evening last July, I was walking past my local newsstand on the way home. I glanced at the main stories – most often, it’s the Evening Standard that can grab me with some wild headline. This particular time, they out did themselves. Their headline was about me.

Well, not about me personally, but about a one-minute film clip I’d shot, posted online for a few friends, and then promptly forgotten. “Bin Man ‘Ziggy Dust’”, shouted the newspaper, “Spins and Twirls his Way to Internet Stardom.”

How on earth had my grainy sixty-seconds ended up all over the net, and the headlines? I stood there in the middle of the pavement, trying to piece together how this could possibly have happened.

It had all started just two weeks earlier, while having tea with my Gen Whatever siblings.

We’d noticed a street sweeper – how could we miss him? – turning his humble profession into a full-on Fred Astaire musical. My sibs gathered, smiling, as I filmed this little miracle, and replayed it on my camera. They insisted I post it on YouTube right away. Now here I was, glued to the pavement days later, the last person to learn that my film had become world famous. Why hadn’t anyone told me?!

## OUR THOUGHTS



For one thing, because every time I launch a viral campaign, it’s part of a brand strategy, not by chance. But this time, it was my accidental launch that was taking off like a rocket. If my little film was going to benefit its anonymous star, I had to move even faster. Executing a spin worthy of Ziggy the street sweeper, I headed towards my office at a run. From somewhere beyond the grave, I could hear Andy clicking his stopwatch: “Fifteen, fourteen, thirteen...”

Breathless, I burst in and went directly to the source of all the trouble: the internet. Sure enough, the Evening Standard’s website led with the Ziggy story, linking directly to my video. What would the dancing street sweeper say about having been filmed – and turned into a star – without his permission?

To find out, I’d need to find him first. As I quickly discovered, that wasn’t going to be easy. Ziggy had no phone listing and, except for a certain sixty seconds of video and a comment in a local community chat room, no obvious presence on the web.

To catch a pre-digital man, use a pre-digital strategy: I walked his street cleaning route the next day, asking the local merchants if they could hand a note to the dancing street sweeper. Everyone knew exactly who I was talking about.

While I waited impatiently for Ziggy to resurface, his YouTube popularity continued to skyrocket. What began with a few of my friends had gone global, with internet, newspaper and television

coverage all driving each other. Online hits leapt from thousands to a quarter million and showed no sign of peaking.

Now, a year later, I see how important it was that I responded when that wave was still beginning its swell. It was the greengrocer who put Ziggy and I in touch, early enough for us to claim the content and develop a strategy for harnessing it. As hits began to approach half a million, we sold the rights to an advertising agency, who wanted the footage to sustain another media brand.

In addition to payment, Ziggy and I added one condition: the ad agency had to donate £1000 to the charity of our choice. We did this, in part, because of Ziggy's experience with both the positive and negative sides of internet stardom. In addition to autograph requests and guest DJ appearances, he had to contend with vandalism along his cleaning route, and an attack by thugs from the National Front. So our choice was easy: our fifteen minutes of fame would also support Amnesty International.

### **What to do when you're in the glare of stardom 2.0?**

Every case is unique, but as with all brand management, it's best to prepare as well as respond. Here are my top five suggestions:

#### *1. Establish your rights*

Even though some new media channels claim to exist entirely in the public domain, claim your content. Future dividends depend upon it. I was advised to use a fake screen name when posting the video on YouTube. My instinct to use my real name instead turned out to be essential later, in claiming and managing rights to the material.

#### *2. Manage long term value*

As author William Gibson famously observed, the internet was an accident. The military think-tank that invented it never dreamed it would become the open, global network we use today. This law of unintended consequences applies equally to internet content. Manage and index your archived content knowing that its future value may depend on uses you can't foresee. The Discovery Channel has only recently discovered how valuable those uses are.

#### *3. Deploy an early warning system*

Which portions of today's content will be tomorrow's revenue streams? The first step towards tracking future value is simple and free. Use [Google.com/alerts](http://Google.com/alerts) or one of several other free services to notify you every time your name, brand, or teatime videos are mentioned on the internet.

#### *4: Sustain momentum*

The power of Web 2.0 is that a grainy video could catapult Ziggy Dust from zero to hero in two weeks. The power of branding is that a launch, whether planned or accidental, can be managed to become more sustainable.

#### *5: Know when to relinquish control*

Viruses mutate. So do viral campaigns. As a marketer who prefers to tightly manage brands and budgets, I had to overcome my natural resistance to hundreds of strangers editing my video, adding music, and reposting it worldwide. Effective brand management of Web 2.0 means understanding which channels you can control and which are valuable enough to accept the risks of consumer interaction, excitement and fame.



[youtube.com/rachfairley](http://youtube.com/rachfairley)

*You can also Google 'Billy Clean' or 'Ziggy Dust' to read related articles.*