

Case #3. Companies Buying “Likes” for Their Facebook Fan Pages

Facebook.com is the largest worldwide social network used for communication and also for company promotion.

A problem has emerged because of companies like **boostlike.com** that are selling “likes” or “followers” on Facebook.com. Nobody knows who the owner of **boostlike.com** is, but people know that employees are from Asia.

On **boostlike.com**, owners of “fan pages” or “business pages” can buy some number of “like”s on their page. For example, for 500 likes you have to pay 42 \$US and your likes will be on your page during 10 days. These “virtual likes” are made by low-wage Asian employees. The rationale for buying likes is that people go to a fan or business page and are influenced by the number of fans. Higher numbers are meant to imply a quality firm and service in a customer’s eyes.

Not aware that likes can be bought, customers or followers believe that numbers of fans on a page are relevant and real. Customers don’t consider the possibility of an illegal means to increase likes on a page. Although Facebook’s has rules against building artificial likes, the rules are difficult to enforce.

In 2012 **Rory Cellan-Jones**, a British journalist focused on technology and economic issues, made a project called **VirtualBagel** to assess the value of likes on a Facebook fan page. VirtualBagel is a non-existent company. He used boostlike.com, paid 10 \$US and during 24 hours, VirtualBagel had 1600 Likes. During 4 days his fictional page had 3000 likes. The majority of likes were from Asian countries. Notably, there were no reactions, comments, sharing – no conversation—regarding these likes.

After this project, some media will start to analyze a number of profiles on Facebook. It is quite easily to search profiles with likes, because these profiles have same structure: high number with fans, no comments, no reactions, only photos, and users are usually from Asia with common names.

QUESTIONS: Maximum length: total of 150 words.

1. Is it ethical for companies to buy fans for their fan pages?

2. What should Facebook's role be in "validating" "likes?"

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