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12 Jun 2012 4:35pm, EDT

Cartoonist turns lawsuit threat into \$100K charity fundraiser



Twitter

By Rosa Golijan

Updated 7:43 p.m. ET

"I'd rather just focus on writing comics," a young man told me when I asked him why he responded to a lawsuit threat by starting a rather successful charity fundraiser for the American Cancer Society and the National Wildlife Federation. Sounds strange and somewhat illogical, right?

Well, keep reading, because — over \$100,000 in donations later — it's probably the most reasonable decision you'll encounter on the Internet today.

Even though many people don't recognize his name, 29-year-old Matthew "The Oatmeal" Inman is a popular cartoonist. You've probably seen plenty of his work — such as "10 Words You Need To Stop Misspelling," "What It's Like To Own An Apple Product," or "Cat vs Internet" — in your Facebook feed, on Twitter, or on your favorite blog at some point. It's almost impossible to avoid Inman online.

The popularity of Inman's work does have downsides though: Occasionally

A yellow advertisement for Sprint. At the top left is the Sprint logo. In the center, an iPhone is shown with its home screen. To the left of the iPhone, the text reads: "THE ONLY NETWORK WITH TRULY UNLIMITED DATA". Below the iPhone, it says: "The only national carrier with no throttling, no metering, no overages for your iPhone." At the bottom, there is a black button that says "Switch to Sprint" and the text "Restrictions apply." below it.

some websites will repost it without asking or crediting him. More often than not, these websites will even profit from this practice.

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About a year ago, Inman got fed up with a [website](#) — called FunnyJunk — which had become particularly prone to re-hosting and monetizing his work. He [wrote a blog post](#) declaring that FunnyJunk had "practically stolen [his] entire website." [The website's owner responded](#) by claiming that Inman was threatening to sue him and removing any content which referenced "The Oatmeal."

Even though plenty of his content remained on FunnyJunk, without any reference to his pseudonym, Inman just didn't have energy to file DMCA takedown notices to deal with it. "Let's just leave it alone, I thought," he told me. "That's how it was for a year."

But oddly enough, the folks behind FunnyJunk decided they wanted to revisit the whole situation, almost exactly a year later. Inman discovered this when someone knocked on his door to serve him with papers about a week ago. "It was 8 p.m. — I was having a sushi-making night," Inman explained. The owner of FunnyJunk was threatening to file a federal lawsuit unless Inman paid \$20,000 in damages.

"Is it going to get worse?" Inman wondered. He consulted a lawyer and sat on the letter for about a week before finally posting it online, along [with his rebuttal and an explanation of what he'll do](#). (His lawyer also mailed a formal reply to FunnyJunk's representative as well, of course.)

"I don't want to get tied up in courtroom nonsense. I don't want to pay more money to my lawyer," Inman declared in that blog post. He outlined why he believed that it was silly that FunnyJunk is demanding money "for hosting [his] unlicensed comics [...] for the past three years."




"I've got a better idea," he wrote. "I'm going to try and raise \$20,000 in donations. I'm going to take a photo of the raised money. I'm going to mail you that photo, along with this drawing of your mom seducing a Kodiak bear. I'm going to take the money and donate one half to the National Wildlife Federation and the other half to the American Cancer Society."

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No, I've got a better idea.

- I'm going to try and raise \$20,000 in donations.
 
- I'm going to take a photo of the raised money
 
- I'm going to mail you that photo, along with this drawing of your mom seducing a Kodiak bear.
 
- I'm going to take the money and donate one half to the National Wildlife Federation and the other half to the American Cancer Society.

The Oatmeal

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Inman dubbed his response "[Operation BearLove Good Cancer Bad](#)" and gave it a 15-day deadline. He announced it on Monday, at about 1 p.m. PT. About one hour later, he'd met the \$20,000 fundraising goal. About 24 hours later, he'd raised over \$117,000 with donations coming from over 8,000 people.

When I reached out to FunnyJunk's lawyer, Charles Carreon, to discuss the situation, he explained that he'd removed his contact information from his website due to the large number of people who'd contacted him after Inman's blog post went online.

"I really did not expect that he would marshal an army of people who would besiege my website and send me a string of obscene emails," he says.

\$117,526

Raised of \$20,000 Goal

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"I'm completely unfamiliar really with this style of responding to a legal threat — I've never really seen it before," Carreon explains. "I don't like seeing anyone referring to my mother as a sexual deviant," he added, referencing the drawing Inman posted.

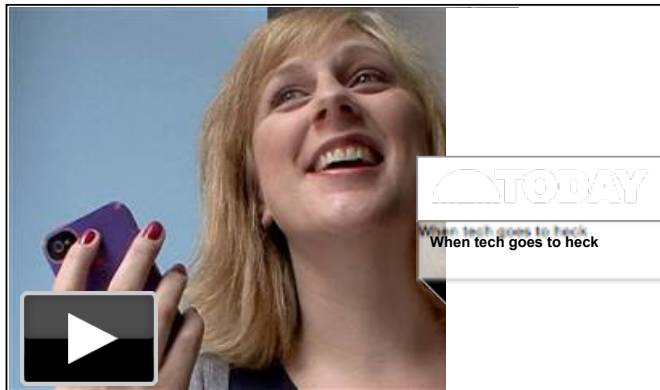
Carreon tells me that Inman's blog post was interpreted as a complaint — similar to a DMCA takedown notice — and that the content the cartoonist listed in it was removed from the FunnyJunk website promptly. He also explains that he believes Inman's fundraiser to be a violation of the terms of service of IndieGoGo, the website being used to collect donations, and has sent a request to disable the fundraising campaign. (The fundraising website has only responded with an automated message so far.)

"I don't think that what I did was unreasonable," Carreon says while discussing the initial demands sent to Inman. He tells me that while this situation is unique, he is typically open to negotiation. He ended the conversation with a promise to keep me updated on how things are resolved and on whether he takes any legal action against the folks who have been harassing him since Inman's "BearLove Good Cancer Bad" fundraising campaign started.

"It's an education in the power of mob psychology and the Internet," Carreon told me.

In the meantime, Inman is trying to figure out how to explain that he needs to withdraw over \$100,000 so that he can photograph it next to a drawing of someone's mother attempting to sweet-talk a bear.

"I think I might need an armored truck," he mused.



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Rosa Golijan

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is a contributing writer at msnbc.com and an all-around nice person. You can stalk her on Twitter--she's [@rosa](#) there--or 'like' her on [Facebook](#).

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