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Letterman YouTube Video Outdraws CBS Clip

Tirade Against McCain Gets 10 Times as Many Views

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Published: September 30, 2008

This story has been updated since its original post. See below for details.

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Sen. John McCain's snub of David Letterman last week may have deprived the "Late Show" host of some needed star power last week, but it's given him a hit on the web.



YouTube video of Mr. Letterman's tirade against Mr. McCain has generated more than 3.5 million views.

So far, video of Mr. Letterman's tirade against Mr. McCain, who bowed out the day of the telecast, has generated more than 3.5 million views on YouTube.

One problem: CBS is barely making a dime from the clip. That's because the vast majority of the views -- 3.2 million -- are attributed to pirated versions of the "Late Show," according to tracking firm TubeMogul.

A single nine-minute clip, "David Letterman Reacts to John McCain Suspending Campaign," uploaded by YouTube user 1970oaktree, has received 2.6 million views.

CBS's upload?

But the YouTube clip is widely suspected to have been uploaded by a CBS staffer, a likely reason the network hasn't demanded that it be taken down.

A CBS spokesman said the network is aware of the presence of pirated clips on YouTube and has no further comment.

Like all TV networks, CBS routinely demands that YouTube take down unauthorized clips of shows. So why hasn't this clip been taken down? If the clip was uploaded by staff at Letterman's production company, it makes for awkward internal politics to ask YouTube to take it down. Further, it's worked out pretty well for the network from a publicity standpoint.

CBS Interactive chief Quincy Smith said he's in constant contact with YouTube. The network has its own YouTube channel and collaborates with Google on identifying copyrighted content.

Part of this collaboration appears to be allowing users to upload copyrighted content if it suits the purposes of the network. Rather than send a reflexive takedown notice, CBS is allowing Letterman fans to do the marketing for them.

And because YouTube generally charges about \$15 per thousand exposures for the type of overlay ads running against the "Late Show" clip, they're not leaving much revenue on the table.

But the Letterman clip is another example of the stealthy use of YouTube for marketing purposes. Videos uploaded by users often get more views than those uploaded by the content-owners. CBS knows this and rather than try and wring a few ad dollars out of the video, opted to let YouTube do some marketing work for them.

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***UPDATE:** This story has been updated to reflect that either CBS or staffers from the "Late Show" uploaded the clip to YouTube and that the clip is possibly not a pirated version.*

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