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Huffington Post Doubles Down, Has MIT Professor Spread Blatant Falsehoods About Creation Of Email

from the *really-now?* dept

Email
by Mike Masnick
Wed, Sep 3rd 2014
10:34am

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We already covered the bizarre situation in which one of the biggest names in PR has "teamed up" with the Huffington Post to write an entirely bogus "series" of stories on the "history of email" that is nothing more than a PR campaign for a liar. V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai claims to have invented email. He did not. We went into great detail on this on Tuesday, so you can check out the history there.

Despite my requests to both Huffington Post and Larry Weber (the PR guy who kicked off the "series"), neither has responded and explained if any money is changing hands here. That means either it is, and Huffington Post is violating FTC rules concerning "paid" posts, or Huffington Post just made it clear that it is willing to post pure bullshit without the slightest bit of fact checking. I'm still not sure which is worse.

Instead, it appears that they've gone forward and posted the latest in the series. Incredibly, they've convinced an MIT professor, Deborah Nightingale, to destroy her own credibility by writing a piece that is supposedly "debunking" the "myths" that everyone puts forth in proving that Ayyadurai is simply wrong in claiming to have invented email. Except the "myths" are not myths, and her debunking does not debunk anything. It just repeats the same false claims (using nearly identical language) as Ayyadurai and his friends in their original posts.

Nightingale cherry picks a few things, presents them in a misleading way, repeats the entirely bogus story about Dave Crocker claiming interoffice email was impossible (which is not at all what he actually said), and then just repeats (almost word for word) Ayyadurai's previously disproven claims. It's clear that the only way they think they can win this debate is to *redefine what email is* in such a narrow way to pretend that Ayyadurai's specific implementation was the "invention" of email. It's not. It's ridiculous. Here's their definition, according to Nightingale, though more or less repeated word for word by the other posts in the series.

"first full-scale electronic replication of the interoffice mail system consisting of the now-familiar components of email: Inbox, Outbox, Folders, Attachments, Memo, Address Book, Forwarding, Composing, etc.,"

Again, as noted in our post yesterday, nearly all of that was done previously by others (often many years earlier). But Ayyadurai, Weber and Nightingale are pretending that none of that was truly email because it didn't have *every single component* that Ayyadurai's app had. That's **ridiculous**. Email is an ever-evolving set of standards. You could just as easily make an equally ridiculous claim that "email" didn't really exist until it also had *color highlighting*. After all, the offline interoffice mail system had the ability to highlight with colored pens, and email didn't include *color highlighting* until years later. But, of course, that's ridiculous, because color highlighting doesn't make email.

Email was very much in place long before Ayyadurai's app. It included all the basic concepts of email, including an inbox, folders, to:, from:, subject, cc:, bcc:, etc. Ayyadurai may have written a wonderful new form of electronic messaging, but he didn't "invent" email.

The thing that's amazing here is that Ayyadurai is using one of the oldest trolling tricks in the book, in pretending that everything that he is actually doing is actually being done nefariously *against him*. Almost everything that he claims people are doing to him are things that he is actually doing himself:

He claims that the attacks are because Raytheon/BBN's entire "identity" is built off of its fake claim to have invented email.

First off, that's not true. Raytheon is a giant multi-billion defense contractor. It doesn't care about

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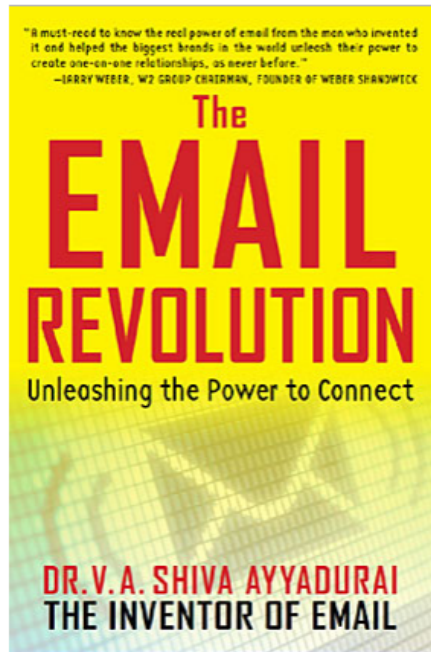
He claims that the attacks are because Raytheon/BBN's entire "identity" is built off of its fake claim to have invented email.

First off, that's not true. Raytheon is a giant multi-billion defense contractor. It doesn't care about who invented email. BBN has a long and well-documented history of a whole bunch of innovations concerning the internet and networked computing. If it didn't invent email (and no one there really claims to have "invented" email anyway -- they say, rightly, that it was a group evolution by a bunch of folks, some at BBN and some elsewhere), its legacy as the core innovators of the internet would still be in place. Instead, the only one whose entire "identity" is built off a fake claim to have invented email is... Ayyadurai. Here's his Twitter page:



His entire Twitter stream is about him claiming to have invented email. Tweet after tweet after tweet are just about those claims.

He has an entire website called "the inventor of email." He's written a book about email, which claims on the front page that he's "the inventor of email":



Oh, and notice the "blurb" on the cover of the book? It's from Larry Weber. Gee...

He claims that others "fabricated a controversy" to deny him his rightful place in history

The only fabricated controversy is by him. There is no controversy. He didn't invent email. But he

A screenshot of a Techdirt advertisement. At the top, there is a green shield icon with a white checkmark and a blue circular icon with a white 'V'. Below this is a green button that says "BUY NOW". The main headline reads "VPN Unlimited & To Do Checklist: Lifetime Subscription Bundle". Below the headline, there are links for "Report this ad" and "Hide Techdirt ads". The ad is titled "Techdirt Insider Chat" and shows a chat window with several messages. The messages include a URL, a comment about "Dark Helmet", a comment from "Jeffrey Nonken", a comment from "Vidiot" about a WaPo article, and a comment from "Mike Masnick". Below the chat window is a green button that says "Join the Insider Chat". At the bottom of the ad, there is another "Report this ad | Hide Techdirt ads" link and a section titled "Recent Stories" with a "Monday" sub-section. The "Monday" sub-section lists several stories with their timestamps and titles.



Oh, and notice the "blurb" on the cover of the book? It's from Larry Weber. Gee...

He claims that others "fabricated a controversy" to deny him his rightful place in history

The only fabricated controversy is by him. There is no controversy. He didn't invent email. But he sure trades off of the claim that big powerful interests are trying to silence him.

He claims that those of us debunking his bogus claim refused to look at the primary documents

This is untrue. We went through the documents in detail and explained why they actually debunk Ayyadurai's own claims. Their "smoking gun" is a paper by David Crocker at RAND from December 1977, in which they falsely claim he said that an interoffice email system was impossible. Yet they never point you to the paper. [go read it here](#). Go read the primary documentation and you'll see that not only did Ayyadurai and his friends/colleagues totally take Crocker out of context, they pulled two totally unrelated sentences from different parts of the report, excised from context, to pretend he said something he did not. Read the whole report and you'll *actually see* that not only were email systems quite common, lots of folks were developing all sorts of components of an electronic interoffice mail system. Crocker's paper is about one such version, but notes that many others are doing the same, and it includes screenshots of messages that clearly look like email today.

He claims that everyone is trying to rewrite history

He and his friends are the only ones doing so. The history is clear. There is no controversy other than the one that he's manufacturing.

What's bizarre is that the Huffington Post is a willing accomplice in perpetuating this myth -- and why the company won't comment on this, and the nature of its relationship with Weber and Ayyadurai. Again, either the Huffington Post is running a sponsored series without disclosing it (in violation of FTC rules) or it has been totally duped. I've heard from some folks suggesting that this is just the "blogging" side of Huffington Post, where there are no real editorial controls, but that doesn't explain HuffPost Live's multiple segments on this issue, including its bizarre interview with Ayyadurai. That is a journalistic endeavor (or purports to be) that appears to have been totally duped. The series still promises one more article, by Ayyadurai himself, and we expect more of the same rewriting of history, using the exact same phraseology. The question is whether or not Huffington Post will recognize that it's being used as part of an effort to drum up a faux controversy over something that is blatantly untrue.

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Monday

- 13:09 [Two Former Senators Call On Obama To Save The Full CIA 'Torture Report' From Being Buried \(5\)](#)
- 11:52 [The FCC Suggests Some Wishy Washy, Highly Unlikely Solutions To The Poorly-Secured Internet Of Things \(13\)](#)
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- 06:29 [Judge Tosses Charges Against Backpage Execs, Tells Kamala Harris To Take It Up With Congress \(14\)](#)
- 03:25 [More Prosecutors Refuse To Accept Guilty Pleas Based On Faulty S2 Field Drug Tests \(11\)](#)

Sunday

- 12:00 [Funniest/Most Insightful Comments Of The Week At Techdirt \(5\)](#)

Saturday

- 12:00 [This Week In Techdirt History: SOPA, China, Dajaz1 & The Hypocrisy Of Copyright \(2\)](#)

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