

Bizarre New Art Project Stalks Shaquille O'Neal for Custom "Dunk Rig"



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What if, instead of marketing to a general demographic, you marketed to a specific individual? What if, instead of waiting for a patron to commission new work, an artist simply designed it based on someone's psychological profile? If an online ad asked for you by name, could you resist?

[Are you Shaquille O'Neal - Want to see your dream artwork?](http://www.bocagallery.biz/shaq)

www.bocagallery.biz/shaq

Shaq saves 20%!

These are some of the questions asked by Julian Garcia and Matt Goerzen's project "[Shaq Attack!](#)" The artists, members of Montreal's Boca Gallery digital art collective, use Google AdSense to lead the NBA superstar, art collector, and curator to an artwork they have "tailored to his unique sensibility."

The campaign keywords and the design of Shaq's piece (a "[dunk rig](#)" to be manufactured out of the rarest hardwoods, once Shaq orders it) are based on what they call "Artisanale Data Mining."

In other words, they stalked him.

But he's a celebrity, so the artists say they didn't have to do anything questionable to build their profile of Shaq. Everything they needed was already in public, from where they say Shaq lives (Mount Dora, Florida) to his favorite video game (*Call of Duty*), from how much he likes buying stuff (he likes it a lot) to whether he is obsessed with Charles Barkley (he is).

Why Shaq?

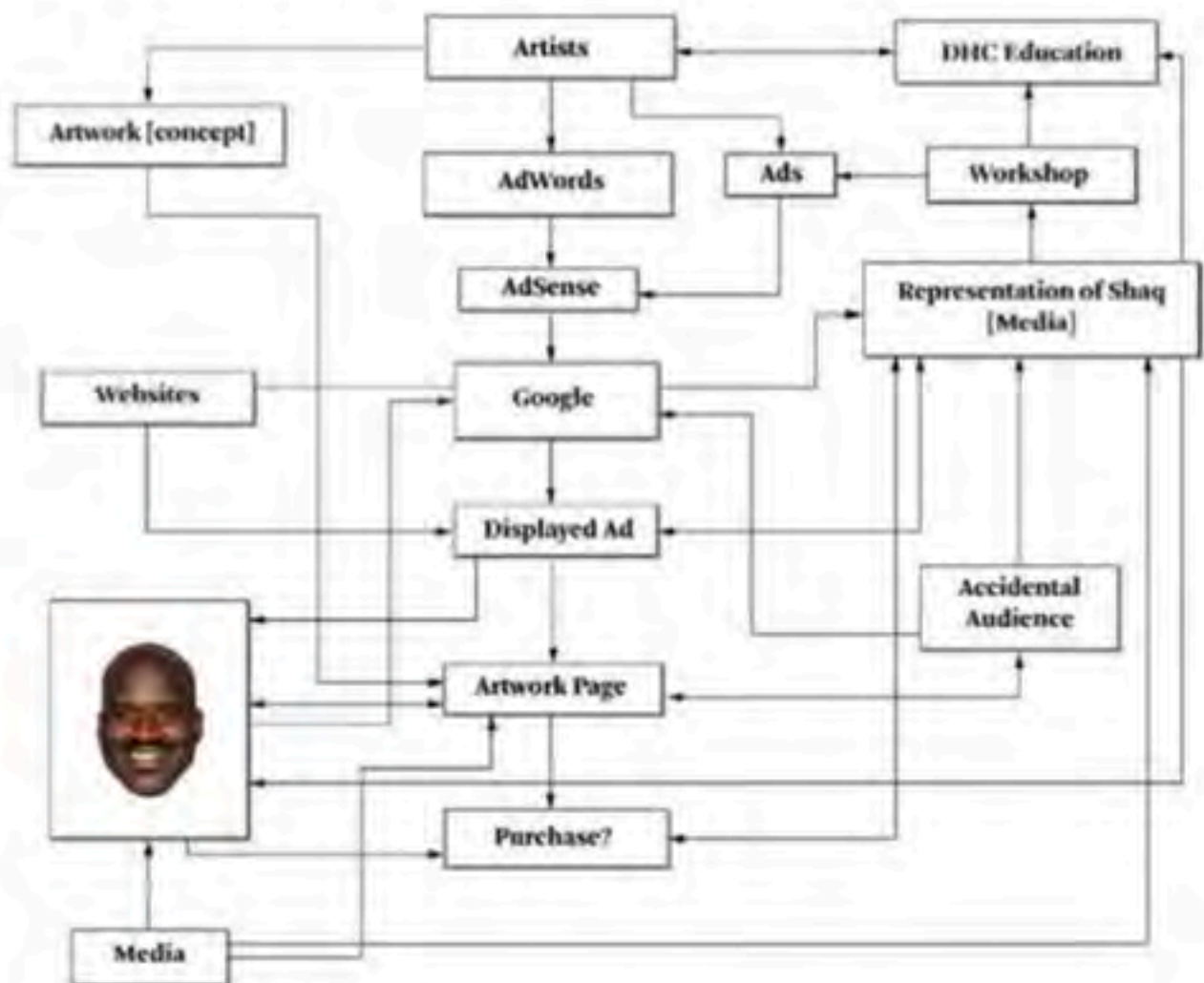
- Everybody knows Shaq
- He is an active Internet user
- Likes games like Call of Duty and Battlefield, which suggests he browses websites related to the game (prime ad space).
- He is responsive on Twitter, suggesting responsiveness
- There is a great deal of marketing-relevant information about him
- He is an avowed narcissist
- He has demonstrated repeated consumerist tendencies
- He is in the fringes of relevance (and might desire to change this)
- He is an art collector and has curated art exhibitions
- He has reflected upon his aesthetic sensibility

A slide from Garcia's and Goerzen's presentation at DHC art.

Based on their "profiling," they identified keywords of interest in AdSense and chose those—like "shaq is the best"—that had the lowest search volume. Ouch.

Of course, they don't want many people to click on their ads. In fact, they don't want *anyone* to click on their ads except for Shaquille O'Neal.

THE SCHEME



A slide from Garcia's and Goerzen's presentation at DHC art.

If you think the point of producing art is to sell it, then the Garcia-Goerzen approach is an environmental improvement: it only creates pre-sold objects.

But, beyond a cynical model for 21st-century art practice, "Shaq Attack!" gets past some of the usual questions—like if two artists can assemble a "handmade" profile of a celebrity whose data is public and then use that data to sell something to him, what can organizations like Facebook, Google, and the NSA do? How accurately can data-mining tools, like "[aggregated psychological profiles](#)," predict what you will do with your pressure cooker or your credit card? And what do you care as long as they are right?

"Shaq Attack!" starts out assuming this kind of predictive marketing is already happening (it is) and that companies are making money (they are) by claiming they're simply the best at predicting your behavior. So why shouldn't artists get in on the action?

Meanwhile, Garcia and Goerzen are accepting other bids while they wait for The Big Shaqtus to reply to their ad. "That would be like stuffing Shaq."

Lead image credits: [Bob Bekian/Shutterstock](#)