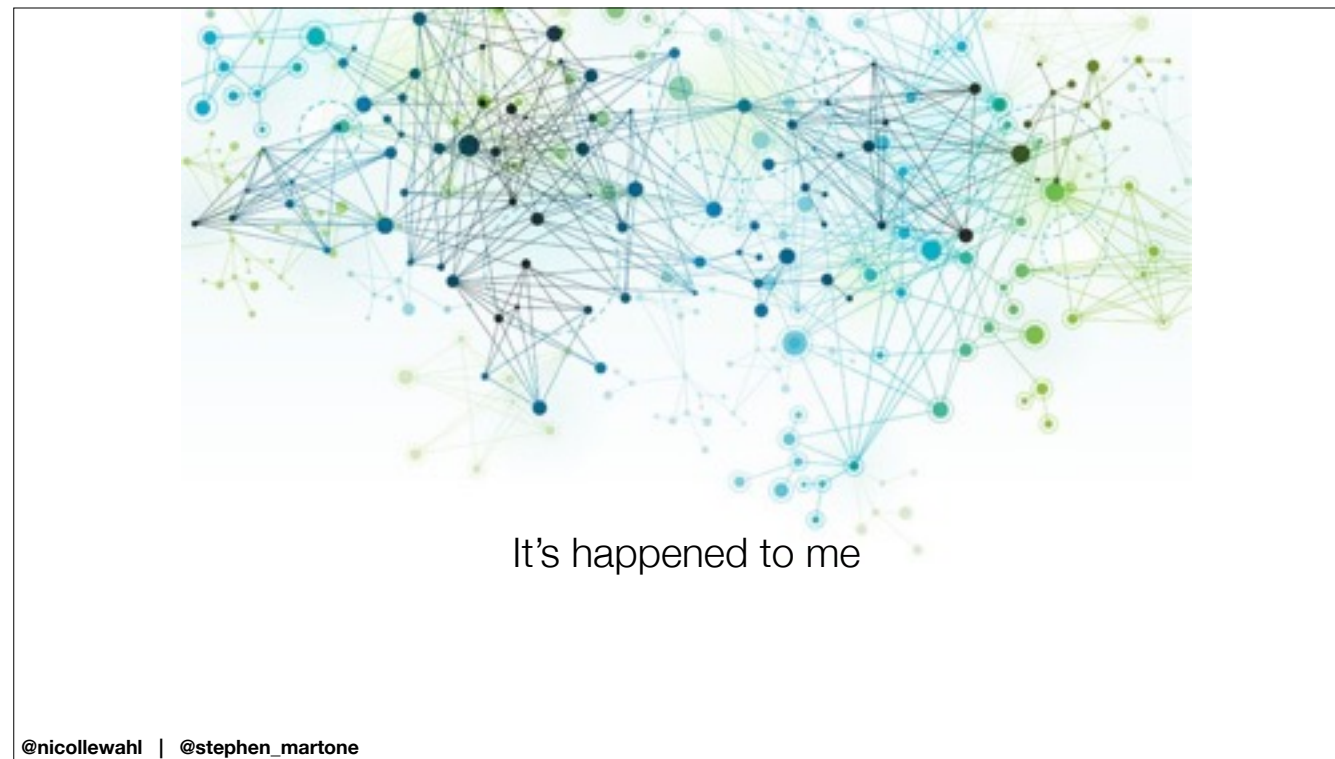


## The Imitation Game

Stephen Martone, Online Brand & Marketing Consultant  
Nicolle Wahl, University of Toronto Mississauga

- Thank you and good afternoon, everyone.
- My name is Nicolle Wahl and I am the assistant director of digital communications at U of T Mississauga.
- (stephen) Introduces himself
- (nicolle)This afternoon, we're going to be discussing the problem of unauthorized social media accounts that imitate our own online university communities and target incoming students, and ways to deal with them.
- Stephen identified one such account earlier this year, and it led us both down this rabbit hole
- I'll ask Stephen to start the story...



### -Stephen's comments

I open with a question then go into a personal story of how I was impersonated. Fear and how scared I was.

- Nicole and I are here to give you tips and solutions to stop acts like this. But we are not here to discuss impersonation on an individual level, but one that effects thousands.
- etc.

Data Extraction

It's all connected



Western University (UWO) Class of 2019 — Social Group

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-Stephen's comments

- Data extraction and how I used different search tactics to find him from the two pieces of evidence I had
  - Even though his photo wasn't present, his name was there and that's all I needed.
- End with saying, Nicole will take it from here giving the next step on how to stop imposters.

Multiple accounts “representing”  
Ontario universities

- Descriptive text was identical
- Common admin accounts across each group

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(bridging-transition slide)

Nicolle:

- At this point, Terry Rice and Melissa Cheater at Western contacted our office about the Western group, since it was being run by a UTM student
- They let us know about a very similar UTM group and others, including ones targeting U of T Scarborough, York, Laurier, McMaster and Ryerson
- They asked us to use our leverage, as the student's home school, to get at least the Western and our groups shut down

UTM group initially used our logo

- Trademark violation was obvious and an easy target
- Style guide clearly defines violations
- University legal team



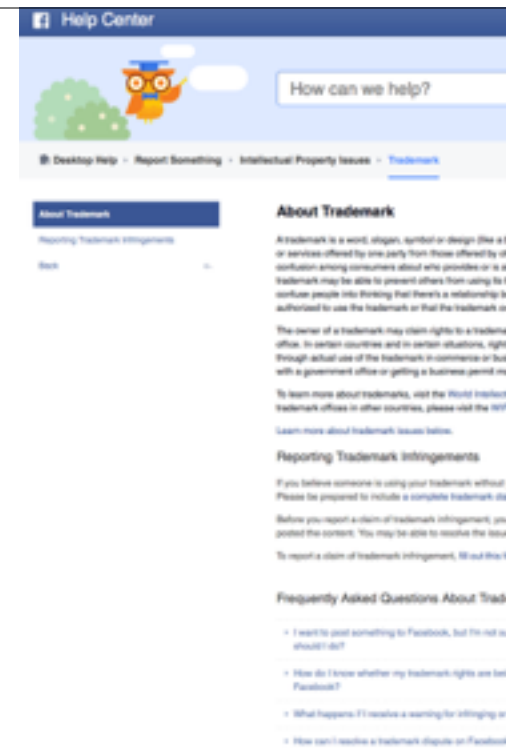
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- Initially, similar to the Western page, the UTM and UTSC groups improperly used the official logo for the campuses
- Clear case of trademark infringement
- Easiest part of this issue to deal with, since we all have our own university legalese to deal with this
- Moreover... (next slide)

Challenging trademark violations  
via Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/help/223752991080711>

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- Facebook itself gives us some protection in this area, since our logos are legal trademarks, there is recourse for challenging through their site
- But, before I contacted this guy, did I have any leverage about “imitating” or “impersonating” us on social media?
- They weren’t blatantly saying “this is an official university account” but they were using the name, photos and sometimes the logo
- Did the students really think they were affiliated? Did they care?

Official? Non-official?

- The power of our own brands gives these groups credibility
- Unlikely a prospective student would look for proof of affiliation
- Promise of peer-to-peer interaction is powerful

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- The problem is, our brands are REALLY POWERFUL, and these groups ride on those coat tails
- They don't even have to use our logo to gain credibility when they are establishing their space online
- For an unsuspecting, excited incoming student, just the combination of your institution's name and the prospect of interacting with peers before they get to campus is really tempting
- They aren't looking for the fine print
- They aren't reading the "about" section
- They are posting pics of their timetables
- They are asking registrarial questions, and trusting the answers
- They are posting selfies with personal information
- Finding ads for events like pub nights, political campaigns, textbooks and off-campus housing

University of Toronto  
Student Code of Conduct

- Written in 2002
- Facebook launched 2004
- Twitter launched 2006

*"...this Code is concerned with conduct arising in relation to a wide variety of activities and behaviours including, but not limited to, conduct related to the use of computers and other information technology...."*

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-Now, in our case, it involved a UTM student, so I read the Code of Conduct and I talked to our Dean of Student Affairs and our Dean, Academic to see if it gave me a leg to stand on

-NOT REALLY

-Relatively vague

-Outdated—written before the myriad issues raised by social media

-Knowing all that, it was time to act



## Action!

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- Contacted student directly
- Trademark violation
- Group gave false impression of association with UTM
- Other universities



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- I contacted the student by phone, identified myself and explained only my knowledge of the UTM group
- Addressed trademark violations, using the scariest legal terms I could find
- Second request was more challenging—I said that the group gave the false impression of affiliation and was potentially damaging to our brand
- “Strongly suggested” that he close the group
- Push back—he gave the “I’ll get banned” excuse, “it would take a long time...”
- Responded that I knew about the other groups, I had been in touch with other universities, and they were not happy
- His attitude changed very quickly, and the UTM, UTSC and Western groups were rapidly emptied of members

### Options 1 & 2:

- Argue to Facebook that the group is misleading prospective students (weak)
- Argue to Facebook that admins are harvesting student e-mails for the purpose of spamming them (stronger)

*"You will not use  
Facebook to do  
anything unlawful,  
misleading, malicious,  
or discriminatory."*

*--Facebook Statement of Rights and  
Responsibilities (Jan. 2015)*

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-So, from our experience, we see at least three options:

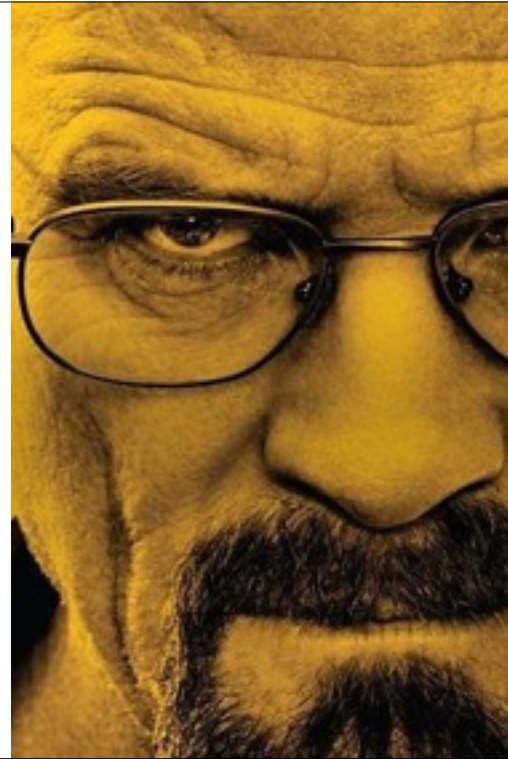
1. Make the "imitation" argument to Facebook—WEAK; nothing in terms of service to support you
2. Make the argument to Facebook that these group admins are likely using them to harvest contact information so that they can spam these students. STRONGER; Facebook may see this as unlawful or misleading behaviour

### Option 3

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- Contact the group admin and make your arguments
- Be persistent
- Be authoritative
- Be threatening (carefully!)

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- Finally, you can try the direct route of contacting the group admin—if you can find a real person amidst all the ghost accounts
- But, unless they are a student at your school, you may not have much leverage
- If you have that advantage, use it
- Expect that this will take a lot of nagging
- Be as threatening as you can reasonably be—you are protecting both your brand and your students

## Whac-a-Mole?

- Constant monitoring will help catch the worst offenders
- Prepare to share

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- Challenge is that for every group you shut down, I'm sure that even more pop up
- If these admins are harvesting contact info, there's a lucrative market here—they want access to this demographic pretty badly
- The reality is that we can't get them all
- We have to prepare to share that social space, but we can take aim at the ones we find

The cycle begins again  
every academic year.



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-And we have to be prepared to build this process into our roles year over year, because there is no end in sight



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- For example, I am currently dealing with another series of groups
- Again, identical information, using a nice pic of our campus
- This is run by “Olivia McDonald”, who apparently runs nine similar groups
- She has not responded to my messages—BIG SHOCK—and I am now pursuing it with Facebook

### Further legal options via CASL?

- Group “must request clear consent for secondary use” of the students’ contact information
- Must provide opt-out

*\*The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada protects the personal information of Canadians. The new law allows the Commissioner to enforce the legislation with respect to two types of conduct:*

- *the collection of personal information through access to computer systems contrary to an act of parliament;*
- *electronic address harvesting where bulk email lists are compiled through mechanisms; including the use of computer programs that automatically mine the Internet for addresses.”*

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-One last thought regarding the potential to use CASL-Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation

—if these admins are harvesting contact information to send spam, it may be possible to use this new law

-I spoke to someone at the Office of the Privacy Commissioner about these sites, and she said that while they hadn’t yet ruled if these groups were a violation of the law, the group “must request clear consent for secondary use” of the students’ contact info, and give them the clear choice to opt-out

-So perhaps CASL could give us some leverage in the future.

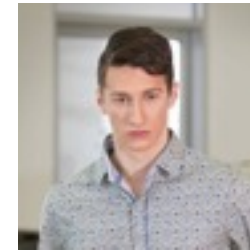
## Resources

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- <http://www.fightspam.gc.ca/eic/site/030.nsf/eng/home>
- <https://www.facebook.com/help/174210519303259>
- <https://www.facebook.com/terms>
- <https://support.twitter.com/groups/56-policies-violations/topics/236-twitter-rules-policies/articles/18366-impersonation-policy>
- <https://help.instagram.com/446663175382270/>



**@nicollewahl**



**@stephen\_martone**

-I hope that we have given you some ideas as to how to track down and deal with these imitation groups, and with any luck, in future we'll have a code of conduct or legislation that gives us a bigger stick to wield when dealing with these misleading groups.

Thank you.