

# STUDENT LIFE

## Ask ASCII: What is a 'Google Bomb?'

By Logan Stack  
staff writer

Dear ASCII,

Why is it that when I type "miserable failure" into the Google box and then hit "I'm Feeling Lucky" that I get the White House site and a biography of George W. Bush?

Mystified

Dear Mystified,

This is what's called a "Google Bomb." And for people who believe George W. Bush is a warmonger, this name happens to be oddly appropriate. You get W's biography because of the way Google keeps track of what web pages are related to what search terms. Because so many web pages lie about their content to get more hits from search engines, Google ignores what a web page claims to be about and uses a different method for finding out what the site is actually about. And Google's way has little to do with what's actually on the site.

Google works like this: It goes around the web, following links and looking at who linked to a site and what they said about it. A given site is ranked in the Google search engine based on who linked to it and how many people linked to it. So if you're searching for "Penn State," most links that say "Penn State" link to "http://www.psu.edu/www.psu.edu," so that's what Google returns as its first result (which you get when you click "I'm feeling lucky.") This has some unforeseen side effects.

At some point, someone realized that if he searches for "more evil than Satan himself," Google would list microsoft.com as the first hit. As it turned out, a lot of people had made links to Microsoft using keywords like "evil" and "Satan," and that led to Microsoft being the #1 hit for "more evil than Satan himself." Eventually though, news articles pointing this fact out got linked to more frequently, so the search no longer works using evil and Satan, instead "I'm Feeling Lucky" returns the news stories reporting on that fact.

The first time someone tried to intentionally change Google's ranking of a page was done as a joke. Adam Mathes got a bunch of people to link to

his friend's site using the words "Talented Hack," and it worked. Unfortunately for Mathes, so many people linked to his web page with the story explaining how it was done that now his site is the #1 return on Google for "Talented Hack." (now THAT, Alanis Morissette, is ironic.)

So if so many people think Bush is a "miserable failure," how did he get re-elected? Well, if you search for "great president," you get the same biography, so obviously lots of people like him too. There are plenty of interesting Google bombs that still work. "Unelectable" returns the same Bush biography. "Weapons of mass destruction" returns a fake "cannot be found" error with a bunch of jokes about being unable to find the WMD's and urging the reader to change their "UN Inspector settings." "French military victories" returns a page designed to look like Google's "returned no results" page, and suggesting that you search for "French military defeats." There are also quite a few in other languages. "Weird Haircut" in Dutch will return the biography of the Netherlands's Prime Minister.

Google bombs have a tendency to deactivate themselves. Often, stories talking about the bomb supplant the bomb in Google's rankings. And frequently bloggers put the link in their on line journals, and when that entry in the Blog gets pushed off the main page by newer entries, Google doesn't count the link for as much. A link on the main page is worth far more than a link on a page buried deep in a web site, so as time passes the bomb becomes weaker until it basically fizzles - no longer arriving as the first search result.

So, what does it take to make a Google bomb? A bunch of friends with web sites. If enough people make links on their sites to the target site using the same terms, it will change the target site's Google ranking. The more obscure the words, the fewer the links needed, as they've got less competition from web sites which are actually using those words. Have fun bombing. Better on line than in Iraq.

*Do you have a computer question? Ask ASCII! Send an e-mail to "mailto:lws118@psu.edu" lws118@psu.edu with "Ask ASCII:" in the subject line to get your question answered.*

## Test your knowledge

### Trivia for avid 'South Park' fans

DallasNews.com/(KRT)

1. Kenny famously dies in almost every episode of "South Park." What officially killed Kenny in 2001 (before his resurrection in the show's eighth season)?

- A. Stan, Kyle and Cartman set Kenny on fire
- B. Terminal illness
- C. Heart failure
- D. Electrocutation

2. How many swear words are spoken in "South Park: Bigger Longer & Uncut"?

- A. 146
- B. 221
- C. 1,230
- D. 399

3. "South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone based which two South Park characters on themselves?

- A. Kenny and Cartman
- B. Stan and Kyle
- C. Stan and Cartman
- D. Kenny and Kyle

4. According to Comedy Central's "South Park" Web site, what cataclysmic feud launched the "South Park" craze?

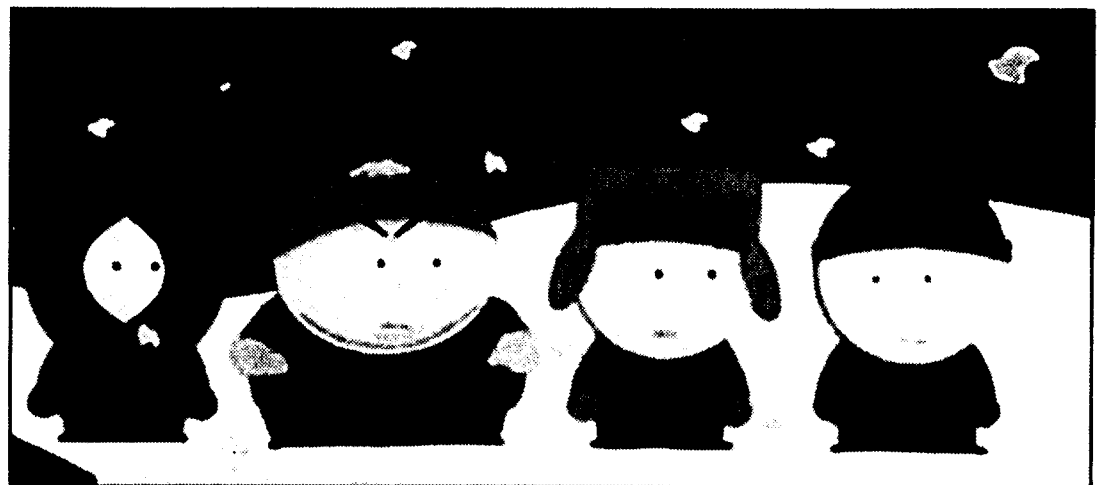
- A. Jesus vs. Frosty the Snowman
- B. Good vs. Evil
- C. The Arquette acting family vs. the Baldwins brothers.
- D. Satan vs. Saddam Hussein.

5. True or False: South Park is an actual town in Colorado.

- A. True
- B. False

#### CORRECT ANSWERS:

- 1. B. Terminal illness
- 2. D. 399. As of 2002, the film held the Guinness world record for most profanity in an animated feature film.
- 3. B. Stan and Kyle
- 4. A. Jesus vs. Frosty the Snowman. Jesus and Frosty battled it out in a short cartoon that started the series.
- 5. B. False. South Park is a region in Denver. Fairplay, the town the show is based on, is located in the South Park region.



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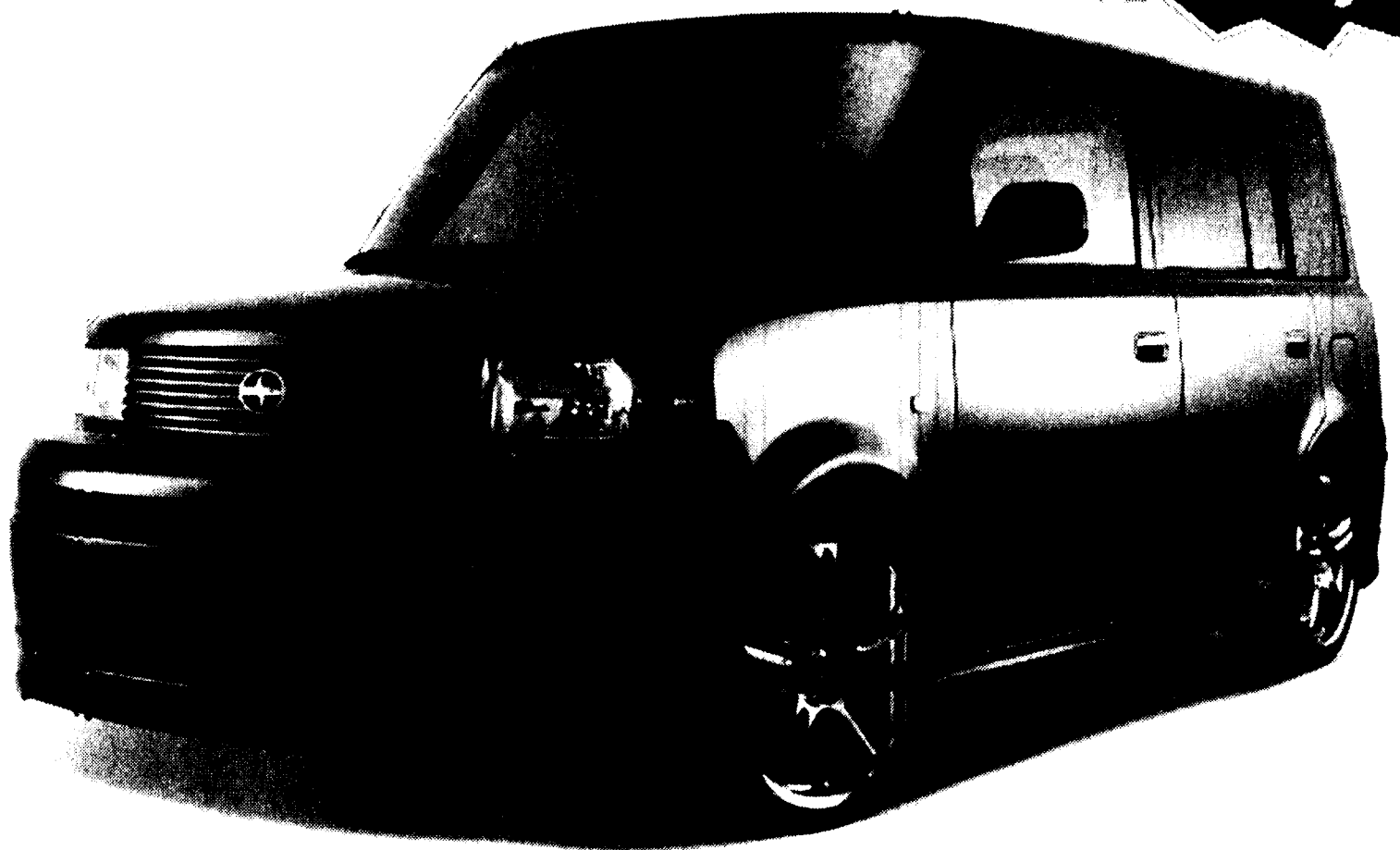
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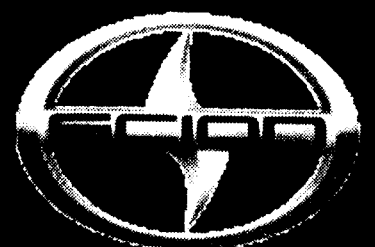


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