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Stalking a missing cellphone

By **Nicholas Confessore** The New York Times

Published: June 21, 2006

NEW YORK Dirty Harry had his .44. Sherlock Holmes had his brain.

Evan Guttman had his computer, the Web and a few thousand people he had never met. That was enough.

Three weeks ago, Guttman went on a quest to retrieve a friend's lost cellphone, a quest that ended with the arrest of a 16-year-old on charges of possessing the missing camera phone, a Sidekick model that sells for as much as \$350.

But before the teenager was arrested, she was humiliated by Guttman in front of untold thousands of people on the Web, an updated version of the elaborate public shamings common in centuries past.

The tale began when Guttman's best friend, Ivanna, left her cellphone in a taxicab, like thousands of others before her. After Ivanna got a new Sidekick, she logged on to her account - and was confronted by pictures of an unfamiliar young woman and her family, along with the young woman's America Online screen name.

The 16-year-old, Sasha Gomez of New York, had been using the Sidekick to take pictures and send instant messages. She apparently did not know that the company that provided the phone's service, T-Mobile, automatically backs up such information on its remote servers. So when Ivanna got back on, there was Sasha.

Using instant messages, Guttman tracked down Sasha and asked her to return it. "Basically, she told me to get lost," Guttman recalled. "That was it."

So he set up a no-frills Web page with a brief account of what happened, and posted the pictures of the girl and her family. Within hours of putting up the Web page, Guttman was fielding hundreds of e-mail messages from those nursing their own bitter memories of a lost cellphone, a BlackBerry or a digital camera that went unreturned.

There were links to the page on Digg and Gizmodo, two popular technology-oriented blogs, which helped drive more and more traffic.

Eventually, hundreds of other Web sites posted links to his page. The

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