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CRIME BLOTTER

Vigilantism or Activism?

Is Internet vigilantism ever justified? Evan Guttman, a friend of a woman who left a \$400 T-Mobile Sidekick in a taxi earlier this month, thinks so. After buying a new Sidekick, Guttman and his friend discovered that a 16-year-old had created photos and logged on to America Online with the lost device. Using the Sidekick information to contact the Queens native, he was unable to get the cellphone returned. Trying a more public approach, Guttman created a website posting photos, personal information and conversations to publicly shame her. "I'd rather just embarrass the thief as much as possible," Guttman explained on his website. Guttman had the taxi receipt with the time and medallion number of the taxi and was soon emailed by a sympathetic NYPD reader who explained the proper procedure—reporting it lost to the NYC Taxi & Limousine Commission and NYPD. However, in the Internet world, interesting stories often take on a life of their own, and the Guttman's website quickly grew to epic proportions. The girl was harassed at her house by the website's readers; some of them shouted "thief!" as they drove by while others took videos. After three weeks of taking the law into his own hands, the police returned the Sidekick to Guttman and arrested the girl charging her with possession of stolen property in the fifth degree.

In related news, undercover cops disclosed the arrest of 13 flashing perverts in a May sting operation last week in New York. The crackdown on techno lewdness came in response to Internet activists such as Thao Nguyen, who posted (the now infamous) photos on her blog last August of raw-food restaurateur Dan Hoyt with his hands in his pants on the subway.

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