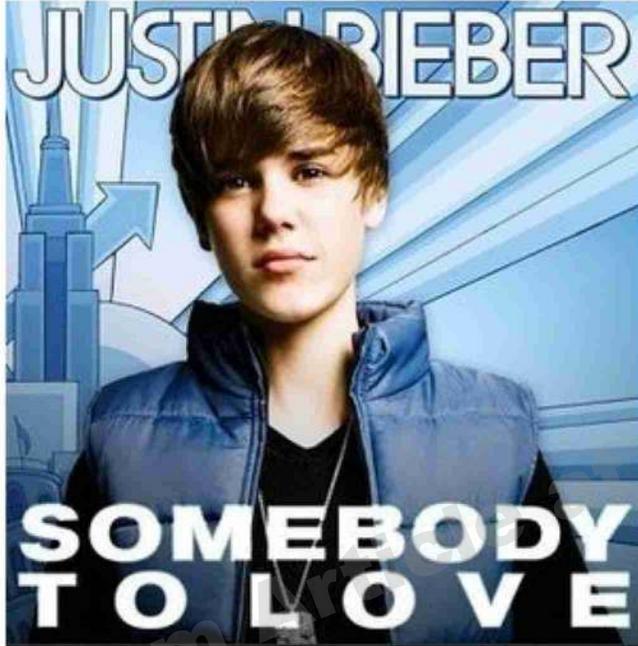


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The Justin Bieber Twitter Scam

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Twitterers love their Biebs

Teen pop idol Justin Bieber has some of the most hard-core Twitter followers on the planet.

Numbering over 13 million, they routinely push Bieber-oriented slogans and sayings to the top of the Twitter trend charts; they follow each other; and they follow whomever he follows—I myself gained about 600 followers after Bieber followed me.

They also long for the day Bieber will follow them. From an actual (and typical) Twitter profile: “I’m 15 y/o, a simple girl who simply love @justinbieber and a BIELIBER..my dream is to be followed by Justin Bieber someday”).

If he does follow them, they memorialize the date on their profiles (“JB followed me 11/02/09!!”). And they routinely Tweet him pleas to follow them.

A new scam is looking to take advantage of this adolescent longing. Chances are, if you’ve lately mentioned Justin Bieber in a Tweet—either negatively or positively—you would get a response from a Twitter account saying, “Wouldn’t it be cool if Justin Bieber followed you? It can be done!” followed by a link.

If you click on the the link, it brings you to a page proclaiming, “Don’t miss out. Here is the secret to get Justin Bieber to follow you.”

Then, in the typical spelling-challenged spam-glish of an email scheme, it goes on: “It is never easy to get a celebrity to follow you on Twitter. Imagine how it feels for someone like Justin Bieber with literally thousands of people begging for you to follow every minute of every day. There is a secret method reporters use when they want to get close to a popular artist which will definatley [sic] work when you’re trying to get someone as huge as Justin Bieber to follow you.”

This particular reporter managed it by writing a blog about Bieber that he and his team weren’t too happy with (See: Justin Bieber’s Days Are Numbered). Shortly after it appeared, the teen idol became one of my followers. Kid has a sense of humor!

Otherwise, this page being sent to fans, found at <http://justiner.info/> and <http://sobieber.info/> to name two URLs, claims all you need to do to unlock the “secret” to getting Bieber to follow you is to enter a password into a box. But first, you have to take something called the “IQ Challenge.” Once you do that, and give up your cell phone number, you will be sent the password that will reveal all.

The only problem is that, as the very fine print makes clear, after you take the challenge and enter your phone number to receive your password, you will be automatically signed up for a mobile content subscription and be charged between \$10-\$20 a month.

The Tweets to Justin fans and foes alike are sent from Twitter accounts that on the surface appear innocuous—one was named @Deannv4 and, when that account was suspended, popped up elsewhere as @Neldaov5—but if you look at their Tweet streams, all they do is send out hundreds of Bieber lures.

One 14-year-old Bieber fan tried to get the password, but got confused and gave up. “I tried it and it didn’t work!” she Tweeted back to @Neldaov5. When I asked her what happened, she wrote, “It didn’t go through and that site is asking for all kinds of passwords! It looked kind of fishy!”

The fans’ responses to Nelda varied from from the skeptical (“Go away spammer!”) to the credulous (“Thanks. I would love [him] to follow me.”)

“We’ve seen all kinds of things, but we hadn’t seen this before,” said Todd Mumford, one of Bieber’s attorneys. Asked if Bieber’s team would ever participate in a marketing campaign that would guarantee a Bieber Twitter follow in exchange for a monthly cell subscription, Mumford scoffed. “That would be cheap and slimy,” he says. “He doesn’t need that for his fans.”

After I alerted Verizon Wireless, which is listed on the IQ Challenge’s web site as the content subscription’s provider, Verizon says it shut down the site’s “short code” that allows third party premium SMS providers to work with telecoms. Adds spokesperson Debra Lewis: “It appears the content provider was operating in a way that doesn’t meet our standards and guidelines for this kind of campaign.” Lewis says Verizon is working on figuring out who the third party provider(s) in the Bieber scam are.

This isn’t the first time third party SMS providers have engaged in deceptive practices. Since 2004, Verizon Wireless has brought more than 20 lawsuits against telemarketers, wireless spammers, and pretexters, including one in March.

As of today, both Twitter accounts sending out the Bieber spam scam were shut down. But could it pop up again? About an hour ago, I Tweeted, “I want Justin Bieber to follow me.” So far, nothing.

Oh, and Justin Bieber followed me 09/21/11!!!

Update: Well, a bit of egg on my face. Oddly, this scam has surfaced before, in July. Yet when I reported this one to Bieber's manager, Scooter Braun, and he passed it along to Bieber's attorneys at My Man Greenspan Fineman Fox Light, it wasn't mentioned that this had already happened a couple of months ago. According to reports then, the scam was quickly shut down. Scams die hard.

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