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got juice?

By Zach Johnson

There's a new **BITCH** on campus, and this one isn't trying to **steal your boyfriend** or "accidentally" **spill her martini** on your silk dress. People have never seen her, yet she's all anybody can talk about. At the **tip of everyone's tongue**, she's always the first to know who the "frat boys who cheat on their girlfriends" are or "who probably has the most **STDs**." Who is she? Her name is **JUICY CAMPUS**, and she's making her presence known on more than 500 campuses, including **Iowa State University**.

Founded in October 2007 by CEO Matt Ivester, a Duke University alumnus, juicycampus.com is a place where students across the country can anonymously post salacious gossip on the Internet, without fear of it being traced back to them. Much like a real-life Gossip Girl novel, students now have to deal with what happens when a rumor gets published for almost anyone to read.

"I knew I wanted to start an Internet site," Ivester says. "I thought that the college market might be a really good place for me. I was only a couple years out of school, and while I may not have had as much business experience, I certainly knew the college market better than [my competitors] would."

"I tried to focus my ideas around the college students, and I realized that even two years out of school, I loved hearing stories from my college days...stuff with your friends, about the dumb stuff we do on the weekends or the best frat parties or the about the college professors we had. It occurred to me that every day, on every college campus, every group of friends has these same great stories, so why not create a place online where people can share this ridiculous, hilarious things—and Juicy Campus was born."


With more than 10,000 requests from people to have their campus added, Ivester realized he had

something big on his hands. Since its introduction to the ISU campus in October, most people whose names have been posted are reluctant to even acknowledge the site, afraid that increased publicity will only further tarnish their names.

"I will not be doing an interview for your article," one female ISU student writes in an e-mail. "I think it is extremely [sic] rude that you would contact me and ask me to do an interview. Writing an article about juicy campus will only encourage people to look at it and write rediulous [sic] lies about people. That trashy website has the potential [sic] to ruin not only individual reputations but the reputation of our entire Greek community. The website needs to be taken down before it causes any more trouble on the Iowa State campus. If you write this article it will only cause more drama. Would you please reconsider writing this article?"

Whether students like it or not, Ivester says he has no plans to start censoring the Web site any time soon. It has always been Juicy Campus' belief that students are posting what they deem interesting and appropriate, and censorship is not the answer.

"Gossip has been around forever," Ivester says. "This really isn't something new. As people are spending more and more time online, gossip is moving online. We wanted people to feel free to



share really juicy stories and be honest about what's going on. We didn't want them to have to feel the negative repercussions from their peers or administrators.

"I don't think that censorship is the right answer. I think that one of the things that has inspired me about Juicy Campus is that when I read posts that say, 'So-and-so is a jerk that cheats on his girlfriend,' it's very common to read 20 replies all saying, 'That's not true. He's a really sweet guy who treats his girlfriend great.' There are affirmative posts about people combating these really negative posts, and I love that. I think that is a much better solution than removing the posts and censoring them."

Ivester noticed a shift in the direction of the site early on, and he posted a blog titled, "Hate Isn't Juicy," encouraging students to think about whether adding a name adds to the entertainment of a story, or whether it's just cruel.

No matter how malicious a post might be, however, people continue to log on to the Web site in record numbers. Juicy Campus is like the nasty little sister to television's high school ice princesses Brenda Walsh and Blair Waldorf of 90201 and GossipGirl fame, respectfully, straddling the line between humor and cruelty. But no matter how ruthless they are, just like Juicy Campus can be, people can't seem to get enough—even if Juicy Campus' bitch slap hits closer to home.

Lucy Spiller, a senior at the University of Colorado at Boulder, has had Juicy Campus for a little more than a year at her school, and she's felt the effects of the Web site firsthand.

"My name was on the Web site twice," Spiller says. "The first time it was in a negative light, and it made me upset, but I knew that there was nothing that I could do about it. When it was in a positive light it made me feel happy, but the happiness was overshadowed by the thought that one of my friends may have written the comments to make me feel good about myself."

Ivester's initial plans for the site did not include the scandal for which Juicy Campus has become infamous. In fact, it's one of the

elements of Juicy Campus he likes the least.

"First and foremost, Juicy Campus is an entertainment Web site," Ivester says. "We've never said that we're trying to act in the academic rigor of the campus. We probably

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add as much value as Jackass, the TV show, right? But students find it entertaining, or as a place to let off steam and to just kind of relax and read the juicy gossip. I also think there are a lot of good uses on the site. Besides hearing the entertaining stories of campus life, there's been a lot of posts about things like, 'What do you think of this professor?' or 'Which classes should I take?' or 'Which Greek organization does the least hazing?' or any number of positive ways that people are using it to get information about things on campus."

Aside from what Ivester considers the positives, it still sends shockwaves through campus, particularly within the Greek community. Posts with titles like "Worst Sorority Girls on Campus" and "Frats That Hate Frats" permeate the Web site, creating a division that was once, at the very least, hidden from open conversation.

Amalie Galm, president of ISU's Collegiate Panhellenic Council, and Dusty Kroll, president of the Inter-Fraternity Council, both knew that ISU's days were numbered before Juicy Campus became a part of everyday life.

"We went to a conference at the beginning of last spring and met with other Greek councils from all over the country," Galm says. "They had really big problems with Juicy Campus, even years back, so we were kind of just glad at that point that it wasn't on our campus. But at the same time,

we knew it was coming eventually because it was hitting all the universities. In reality, it's not as extreme on our campus as it could be. We just advise community members to kind of stay away from it because it's only provoking poor public relations and the Greek community is really easy to target."

Spiller says that Juicy Campus is more popular among Greek students at Colorado, causing the same division between houses as it is on the ISU campus. Ivester is no stranger to the Greek community, however, as he was the president of his fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon, and president of Duke's Inter-Fraternity Council, allowing him to see both sides of the issue.

"Juicy Campus isn't pitting [Greek] houses against each other," Ivester says. "Juicy Campus is a reflection of the communities that are already there. To the extent that students are using Juicy Campus in a competitive or negative way against each other, I kind of discourage that type of use of the site. That's really a larger issue within the Greek community that leaders need to address. I'll tell you that the right way to address it is not to demand that Juicy Campus be taken down or that no one use Juicy Campus. It's just saying, 'Hey! We have a real problem there that is very evident with these anonymous postings, and we need to address this problem in our community.' Hiding it is not the same as addressing it and sometimes people make that mistake."

This begs the question—how much of Juicy Campus is hearsay, and how much of it has some kernel of truth?

“A lot of things I saw on there were rumors that they made between rival chapters, or rival fraternities and sororities, that people may joke about individually,” Kroll says. “But when you’re starting to put it out in public like that, where other people might see that joke that you have, it really reflects negatively. A lot of people are realizing that it’s not smart to bash other fraternities and sororities in the open like that. Even behind closed doors it’s not appropriate and we don’t condone things like that.”

Ivester once again comes to the defense of his Web site, citing the responsibility for content as that of the posters themselves.

“I really love the idea that it’s an authentic college Web site,” Ivester says. “It is what it is, and people need to realize that what they’re reading is unsubstantiated, anonymous gossip. We have done some things to limit the potential for reputational [sic] or other damage.

“One of the things that a lot of people don’t realize is that we’ve gone out of our way to block search engines from crawling

our Web site. If someone were to Google your name, and your name had been posted all over Juicy Campus, you’re not going to get any results from Google from our site. That’s been something that’s really encouraged students when they hear it. That means that when they’re reading a post on Juicy Campus, nobody else can be reading it. I don’t think a reasonable person believes everything they read on a site like ours.”

Both Galm and Kroll say they aren’t worried about the Web site affecting next year’s recruitment numbers, because they hope people will make their own decisions about joining a fraternity or a sorority.

“Working with Greek Affairs, you hear rumors,” Kroll says. “We’re such a tight-knit community that rumors would have already been passed around, and we would have already dealt with it. It’s obvious that a lot of it is just made up bullshit.”

Galm doesn’t buy Ivester’s notion that the site was originally intended to find out about the best-kept secrets on campus.

“If you’re going to have a Web site about the best professors or the easiest classes to take, why would you call it Juicy Campus? It’s trying to get the juice,” Galm says. “It’s

trying, in my opinion, the way it’s set up, it’s all about trying to get someone to spill the juice.”

Ivester likes to downplay the negativity associated with the Web site, though he seems to revel in the attention it garners.

“We get compared to the Howard Stern show a lot,” Ivester says. “The people who love Howard Stern listen to him for an hour. The people who hate him listen to him for two hours. It’s really entertaining gossip.”

And Ivester may be right. With almost 150,000 posts since it was first launched, his staff has increased to more than 20 people, additional servers needed to be purchased to accommodate heavier traffic and Juicy Campus went under a makeover to become more user-friendly. Since adding hundreds of campuses this past fall, Juicy Campus’ hits have continued to soar.

“I see Juicy Campus as a guilty pleasure,” Spiller says. “I think it’s cruel, mean and hurtful to so many people, but I still find myself checking it all the time.” **E**

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