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NOT SO SNEAKY 04.15.12



Winston
Ross

Fugitives Who Love Facebook: The Next Big Crime Wave

Accused felons on the lam are bragging about their exploits online—and police are using the evidence against them. Winston Ross on cops-and-robbers 2.0.



Travis A. Nicolaysen's Facebook page lists his occupation as "boss" at "da game." Which is his way of admitting he has no job. What does he do otherwise? Lately, he runs from the police.



"Cops all over you," wrote one of Nicolaysen's buddies on a post earlier this month. "Ya got away thanks bro," he shot back the next day. "Lol u better be careful man," came another friend's advice, 20 minutes later.

Nicolaysen did get away, according to a Port Angeles, Wash. police bulletin, but his Facebook page may help land him back in jail. That "got away thanks bro," if prosecutors can prove he's the one who posted it, could amount to evidence that he's deliberately trying to elude police and obstruct justice.

Welcome to cops-and-robbers 2.0. By the time "Barefoot Bandit" Colton Harris-Moore got nabbed for stealing boats and planes, he had become a Facebook folk hero, with more than 85,000 online fans cheering him on and offering advice about how to escape arrest. Jake England and Alvin Watts, the pair accused of a racially motivated shooting spree in Tulsa on Good Friday, have also delivered prosecutors a tidy batch of Facebook postings that will almost certainly be used to convince a jury that the two were motivated by

By comparison, Nicolaysen is small potatoes. The five-time convicted felon has been on the lam since failing to check in with his probation officer in January. That prompted a warrant for his arrest, along with charges that he seriously injured his girlfriend in a March 28 assault.

Facebook users who amass inordinate amounts of friends and post ad nauseam updates about themselves tend to show streaks of (surprise!) narcissism.

“Hey cousin,” Tanya Newell wrote on Nicolaysen’s still-active Facebook page. “Just saw ur crazy ass on kiro 7. The kids said ‘o no look its uncle travis.’ Haha wtf right. They r making u out to be some super criminal. Sad u wuldnt hurt a damn fly. And they chose to use ur mohawk pic. Anyways stay safe trav. we miss you. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do. Give em hell kid.”

Nicolaysen is indeed giving the cops hell—he’s slipped through their fingers several times—though if history’s any guide, he’ll get caught eventually. In the meantime, an increasingly cyber-wise police force will be watching his every online move.

“This guy hasn’t talked openly in over a week,” Port Angeles Police Deputy Chief Brian Smith told The Daily Beast. “That doesn’t mean he’s not talking to his friends in a way he thinks we can’t see. What people don’t realize is every form of communication—email, Facebook—they all leave something behind.”

Most people know this, on some level. And yet some people continue to either boast about their criminal exploits or bitch about whatever’s motivating them to commit a crime. Why? A self-destructive combination of ignorance, narcissism, and generation-specific disregard for their own privacy, say experts.

Researchers at Western Illinois University and the University of Kentucky, among others, have concluded in several different studies published over the past year or so that Facebook users who amass inordinate amounts of friends and post ad nauseam updates about themselves tend to show streaks of (surprise!) narcissism. Kentucky psychology professor Nathan DeWall found, for example, that some users were willing to do just about anything for attention. If status updates didn’t get a rise out of followers, they’d post pictures.

“Perhaps it’s more important to get the attention and respect they crave than the risk of being captured,” said Christopher Carpenter at Western Illinois University. “And what better outlet than Facebook?”

That seems like an obvious explanation for why criminals post on Facebook. But there’s another explanation as well: they’re dumb.

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realizes that there are ways to keep Facebook postings private, said Jeff Ingalsbe, who runs the Center for Cyber Security and Intelligence Studies at the University of Detroit Mercy. But even those who are well-versed in the company's byzantine privacy policies have a hard time staying ahead of the game.

“Even if you make your Facebook page private—and virtually nobody does that, completely—you also must make sure your friends are not posting links back to you. You’ve got to be hip enough to the tech to be able to lock yourself down. It’s not easy,” said Ingalsbe. “And we’re talking about people here that are stupid enough to post that they committed a crime on Facebook.”

That’s good news for police, who are increasingly availing themselves of social media to help solve crimes, but who also know that it’s not as easy to get a conviction with that information as it may seem. Facebook is great for investigative purposes—for keeping tabs on where someone’s heading, who they’re talking to, and what they’re saying. But only if the cops can get to the page in the first place.

“Google, these big outfits, they get subpoenas by the boatload every day,” Deputy Chief Smith said. Provided they can make an arrest, then comes the hard part: using those breadcrumbs as evidence in court. The accused Tulsa shooters threw out enough racial epithets on their Facebook pages to give the state a slam-dunk case, but only if forensics investigators can actually prove that they were the ones who typed that hateful speech into their computers.

“Especially in the mobile world, it becomes more difficult,” Ingalsbe said. “The Samsung Galaxy, the iPhone, you set up Facebook on these devices and you’re automatically logged in, all the time. It adds another dimension of confusion. You can say, ‘That wasn’t me, somebody must have picked up my phone and messed with it.’ ”

It’s also difficult to find the data in the first place, at least in a way that can be hauled into court.

“Facebook, Twitter, they put their stuff on servers all over the place,” Ingalsbe said. “Those servers are dynamically moving, based on the volume of traffic. Cloud computing makes it more difficult for a forensic investigation. It’s much more useful as an investigative tool.”

It’s also more useful as social networkers trend younger. They tend not to worry about hiding personal information from the world, Ingalsbe said.

“They’re much more willing to share information, and to assume the risks are low. They’ve grown up with this; they don’t think it’s a big deal.”

As time marches on, said Tyler Willis, vice president at the social-media

social network—using thugs. And to some extent, it will all be out in the open.

“We’re getting access to people on a scale we’ve never had before,” said Willis. “With social media, we get to see parts of society we’ve never seen before. We don’t have a lot of chances to interact with folks committing street crimes and running away from the cops.”

There’s one more way Facebook could help put a stop to crime: it provides a way for the levelheaded to reach out to the fugitives.

“I’ve been down this road bro,” wrote Tristian Twitchell on Nicolaysen’s page. “It’s no good. Maybe it’s time to turn a new leaf and get your shit going right. Do what you gotta do though Bud.”

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Mark Greenberg/Virgin Galactic, AP

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM 10.31.14

WRITTEN BY

Dave
Majumdar

Clive Irving

SpaceShipTwo Flew on Untested Rocket

Richard Branson's plane meant to carry tourists into space never tested a new engine using new fuel before it flew—and exploded—over California on Friday.



Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo crashed in the California desert Friday after testing a new rocket motor for the first time in flight. The company said an "in-flight anomaly" occurred. Law enforcement said one pilot was killed and the other was seriously injured.

"During the test, the vehicle suffered a serious anomaly resulting in the loss of the vehicle," Virgin Galactic said in a statement it released to NBC News. "Our first concern is the status of the pilots, which is unknown at this time. We will work closely with relevant authorities to determine the cause of this accident and provide updates as soon as we are able to do so."

SpaceShipTwo had been slung under the jet-powered carrier aircraft WhiteKnightTwo before taking off. WhiteKnightTwo carried SpaceShipTwo to 50,000 feet before releasing it for free flight.

The Federal Aviation Administration provided additional details on what happened next.

"Just after 10 a.m. PDT today, ground controllers at the Mojave Spaceport lost contact with SpaceShipTwo, an experimental space flight vehicle," FAA spokeswoman Laura Brown told The Daily Beast in an email. "The incident occurred over the Mojave Desert shortly after the space flight vehicle separated

were on board SpaceShipTwo at the time of the incident.”

The WhiteKnightTwo remained airborne after the incident and landed safely.

The National Transportation Safety Board also will investigate the crash, a spokesman told The Daily Beast.

SpaceShipTwo was testing a new plastic-based rocket fuel for the first time Friday. An eyewitness told The Daily Beast that the spacecraft exploded shortly after the rocket motor was ignited. The spaceship had not flown a powered flight in about nine months because engineers were switching out its original engine that used rubber-based rocket fuel for the new engine, which used plastic-based fuel.

Scaled Composites, which built the spacecraft, had experienced some problems with the new rocket, which until Friday had only been tested on the ground. While the new motor holds much promise of greatly increased performance, there were some serious risks associated with the new rocket—as Friday’s incident proved.

With the new rocket installed, SpaceShipTwo was expected to fly more than five times higher than it had ever flown before—right to the edge of space at 62 miles above the Earth. In some ways, SpaceShipTwo, which was to reach a maximum speed of about 2,500 miles per hour during its ascent into space, was pushing the limits of its virtually untested design.

It was not the first time Virgin pushed limits to get into space. A new biography about SpaceShipTwo’s patron, Richard Branson, by investigative journalist Tom Bower makes that clear. Rocket engineers Geoff Daly and Caroline Campbell were critical of one of the components of the original rubber-based fuel: nitrous oxide. Campbell warned: “Nitrous oxide can explode on its own.” Another toxic component of the fuel was hydroxyl-terminated polybutadiene, a form of rubber. Campbell said that when the engine ran there was “so much soot coming out the back, burning rubber, that it could be carcinogenic.”

In 2007, the unattached rocket engine using that fuel was being tested on the ground in the Mojave desert when it exploded and killed three of 40 engineers observing the test. Investigators found that safety regulations at the site had been violated and that the men killed had been too close to the rocket motor.

After tests this January, it was decided to the fuel powering the rocket engine should have its rubber removed. The reason was not toxicity but that the fuel did not provide consistent and stable power, and the test pilots had to shut down the engine prematurely. Before SpaceShipTwo could fly with the new fuel aboard it had to be extensively tested on the ground. As those tests were taking place, Branson told Bloomberg TV: “It took us a lot longer to build rockets that we felt completely comfortable with.”

SpaceShipTwo was expected to usher in a new era of commercial space travel: More than 700 people had already paid more than \$250,000 each for a chance to leave the planet and experience the weightlessness of space flight. Branson himself had been planning to fly onboard the spacecraft by next year.



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NEW ENERGY ECONOMY 10.28.14

Charging Up

Car companies are finding that putting solar panels on top of their



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Electric cars are slowly gaining strength. Manufacturers are busily introducing new models of all-electric and hybrid cars. And each month, about 10,000 new vehicles powered entirely or in part by electricity hit the roads. Even so, these sales account for less than one percent of the monthly sales total. Which means the idea of powering large numbers of cars using renewable sources of electricity, like wind and solar power, instead of gasoline, remains a distant goal.

But renewable electricity is playing an increasingly important role in car production.

If you've never visited a car factory, it's difficult to appreciate the size and scale of these modern monuments to industry. Auto factories tend to sprawl horizontally over huge lots, and have flat roofs. They're long-lived assets, which means their owners intend to keep them operating for a long time. They are often set in quasi-rural areas, with vast parking lots and vacant land surrounding them. And they use a fair amount of power for all that welding, to move the assembly line, to keep the lights on, and to cool and heat various departments and assembly stations. All of which makes them excellent candidates for solar power—even if they are generally not located in the most sunny states.

Which explains why there's something of a solar boom taking place at American car factories.

General Motors assembles the popular Chevrolet Cruze at its big plant in Lordstown, Ohio, which is about 60 miles southeast of Cleveland—about as far from the sunbelt as you can get. In addition to the shift workers inside the plant, teams are now working on the roof, installing an 8,500-panel 2.2 megawatt solar plant. When completed, as Hybridcars.com noted, "It will be GM's largest solar installation in the Western Hemisphere." While it provides only a small fraction of the power used—about 1.5 percent—it does represent an important investment and symbol. "With more solar installations than any other automotive company and the second-highest percentage of solar among all commercial users, GM shows that manufacturing and the use of renewable energy can go hand-in-hand." said Rhone Resch, president and CEO of the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA).

Indeed, large companies are increasingly lighting up solar panels on their facilities. And car companies are helping to lead the way. Each year, SEIA identifies the top 25 companies adopting solar power in its annual *Solar Means Business* report. Big box retailers like Ikea and Walmart generally lead the rankings. But in the most recent report, three auto companies were among the top 25: Volkswagen was 15th with 10.0 megawatts installed, General Motors

Volkswagen has been the most aggressive. On 33 acres adjacent to its factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee, it has planted more than 33,000 solar modules that have a combined capacity of 9.5 megawatts, which is enough to power several residential subdivisions—or enough to provide about 12.5 percent of the juice needed to run the factory that produces the Volkswagen Passat.

But General Motors isn't far behind. It has already deployed solar elsewhere in Ohio, at the Toledo Transmission plant, at its power train plant in Baltimore, (where solar panels provide about nine percent of the electricity used), and at a factory in Orion, Michigan. Other automakers are getting into the act. At its Michigan Assembly Plant, Ford has a 500 kilowatt solar plant, along with a powerful array of batteries that can store power generated by the sun to be used after dark. Toyota, which has had solar panels on the roof of its sales office in California since 2002 also uses a small amount of solar power at a factory in Mississippi.

What accounts for this trend? Many consumer-facing companies use renewable energy primarily as a branding proposition—as a way to signal to customers that they are up on the latest trends and interested in moving toward a lower-carbon future. But auto companies have another goal in mind. One, the important developments in energy in recent years combined with incentives and falling costs have made renewable energy competitive with traditional power on a cost basis. And because they work in tough industries where every penny counts, car manufacturers are always looking for ways to squeeze a few more pennies out of the production process—whether that is reducing waste, managing inventory more effectively, or figuring out ways to save a few dollars on electricity. Increasingly, adding solar power to the top of factories can help boost the bottom line.





Chip Somodevilla/Getty

RUNNING SCARED 10.28.14

Michael Tomasky



Hooray for Liberal Fear-Mongering!

The Democrats are running hard on protecting Social Security this election. And while the strategy is tiresome and unoriginal, it's not without its merits.

Well, there's a week to go before the election, and the Democrats have zeroed in on their closing argument. Yesterday morning, my in-box was stuffed to the gunwales with alarming messages alerting me to...to what?



To the fact that the Republicans don't have one decent economic idea in their collective head? To the fact that they don't want the American people to have decent health care? To the fact that, if Americans elect these people, there's zilcho chance of passing a gun law in the next decade? No, no, and no.

Instead, the Democrats are reverting to Old Reliable: Social Security. When all else fails, love, sayeth the poet. Say the Democrats: When all else fails, whack them on Social Security.

It's probably in Alaska that Social Security has been the biggest issue. Republican Dan Sullivan, who leads Democratic incumbent Mark Begich in most polls, says he's against privatizing Social Security, but he has talked of raising the retirement age and means-testing benefits. Begich has courageously talked of eliminating the payroll tax cap of around \$115,000. Polls typically show that Americans by fairly large majorities support Begich's fix, but that doesn't mean Alaska off-year election voters support it.

Monday morning, Alison Lundergan Grimes came out swinging with an attack that Mitch McConnell opened himself up to last week. In a speech to a Rotary Club, McConnell said "I spent a year trying to get any Democrat in the Senate"

even Joe Lieberman.

Grimes has Elizabeth Warren coming to Louisville to campaign with her today, so one can presume that the populist Warren will bang the Social Security argument drum too, and that it will be a theme of Grimes's closing week in a race that the experts might have written off a little prematurely.

In Iowa, Democrat Bruce Braley is now up with an ad that shows extremist Republican Joni Ernst saying, "Yes, I have talked about privatizing Social Security."

**It's not as if this
year's
Republican
Party doesn't
present targets
of opportunity.
But the
Democrats
always go to the
old standbys.**

In New Hampshire, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee is on the air with an ad featuring a 65-ish (i.e. still vigorous-seeming) woman, with a syrup-thick New England accent, talking about Scott Brown's votes "to cut Social Security and Medicare while protecting tax breaks for millionaires."

And in Louisiana, the DSCC is paying for an ad in which the narrator (male voiceover this time, barely noticeable Southern lilt) warns the viewer that "millionaire" Bill Cassidy, the Republican challenging Mary Landrieu, wants you to work until you're 70. Maybe that's okay for fancy-pants doctors like Cassidy, the narrator says

(all right, he doesn't say fancy-pants doctor), "but we're on our feet all day, working the rigs, farming the land. Jobs you can't do at 70."

Is this all going to work? Well, there's a reason the Democrats are doing it. Actually there are two reasons. The first is that they're panicked. But the second is that yes, they're doing it because it often enough does work. Old people vote in midterms, so it stands a much better chance of having an impact than a last-second student-loan scare. And it's not a stretch of the facts. McConnell did what he did in 2005, and he was foolish enough to boast about it in public less than two weeks before an election.

It's just a little hard for me to believe that a new line of attack that doesn't have anything to do with the current news cycle can shift the dynamics of a campaign with just one week to go. At the very least, this line of attack should have been started last week to give it a chance to gain traction. At this point, probably the only thing that can really flip the dynamic of a particular race is a major gaffe. And who knows, maybe one of these Republicans, confronted with evidence of their privatization enthusiasm, will commit one.

Look, I hope the Social Security strategy works. It may in a couple of cases, and that's all they need, a couple of unexpected wins, to keep the Senate majority. But at the same time, it's a little maddening. It's not as if this year's

always go to the old standbys. In 2002, it was the prescription-drug benefit election. That was the issue that was supposed to turn the tide that year. Granted, it was just a year after 9/11, and Bush was still riding high, but Republicans gained eight seats in the House and two in the Senate.

I have a larger theory about why Democrats keep doing this, but I see that I'm four-fifths of the way into this column, and it's going to take me a lot more than 200 words to explain the theory, so I'll save that for tomorrow.

But for now I'll say this. It has often been observed this year that Democratic voters don't turn out in off-year elections. But why is that true? In part because they're younger and they may be more likely to think about politics in terms of personalities who come along every four years (i.e. who's running for president) than in terms of competing interests that are permanent.

But maybe in part it's because the Democrats aren't very good at giving them a reason to vote—getting them to see those permanent interests. In my adult lifetime, Republicans have run three good off-year elections: 1994, with the “Contract for America” business, which was new and galvanizing for their side; the aforementioned 2002, when Bush put personal political capital on the line and succeeded in preventing the usual incumbent-party losses; and 2010, when they fed off the tea-party rage.

The Democrats, in contrast, haven't really run one good one in my lifetime. You might say 2006, when they captured the House and Senate, but it was right after Katrina, Bush was in the toilet, and all they had to do was say “Iraq” (in fairness, what they did well that year was to recruit good candidates).

So clearly, Republicans know something about midterms that Democrats don't. If the Democrats can't figure it out, they'll keep winning presidential elections, maybe, but keep losing majorities in off-years, and the stalemate will continue. And, by the way, eventually, the retirement age actually will go up, because someday this “grand bargain” pressure will prove irresistible, and Republicans like Dan Sullivan and Joni Ernst will have leverage.

So, for now at least, go fear-mongerers.



Luke Sharrett/Getty Images

SKETCHY 10.31.14



Grimes Campaign “Exploring Legal Options” Against McConnell

A misleading mailer sent out by the state GOP may lead to legal issues in the Kentucky Senate race



The Daily Beast has learned from a source on the campaign of Kentucky

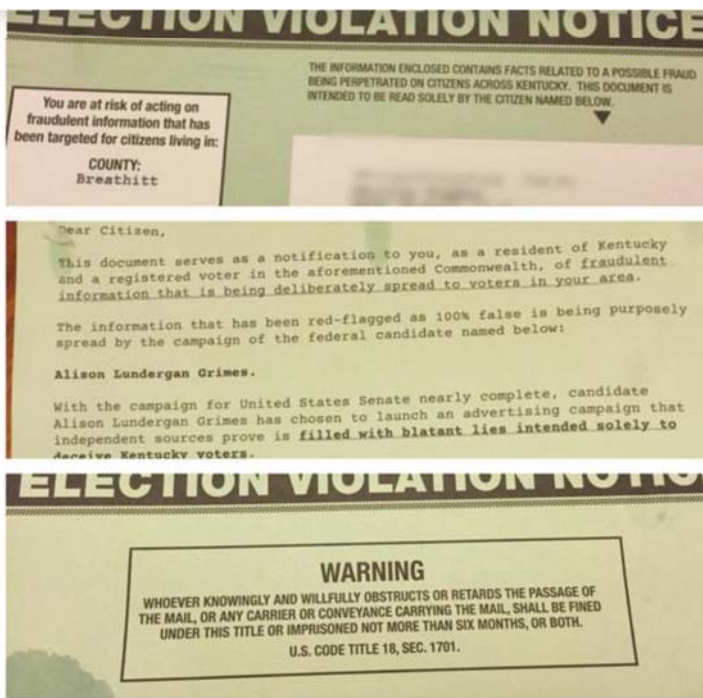
available legal options” to confront an anti-Grimes mailer sent out by the Republican Party of Kentucky and approved by the campaign of incumbent Republican Mitch McConnell labeled “Election Violation Notice.”

The official mailer, first reported by Salon.com and already derided by *The Washington Post*, is labeled on its envelope as containing information relating to “facts related to a possible fraud being perpetrated on citizens across Kentucky.” It also includes the specific county that the voter lives in with the warning that “you are at risk of acting on fraudulent information that has been targeted for voters living in [county name].” The envelope also contains a warning about the federal penalties for obstructing the mail. Inside though, the message is anything but official.

The letter inside says that “information that has been red flagged as 100% false is being provided to you by Alison Lundergan Grimes.” It goes on to say that Grimes has launched an advertising campaign “filled with blatant lies intended solely to deceive Kentucky voters” as well as to attack the Democratic challenger for receiving campaign donations from anti-coal and anti-gun Hollywood celebrities. The letter cites the *Washington Post’s* Fact Checker blog calling Grimes’s ad “beyond the pale.”

Whatever the factual inaccuracies that the Grimes campaign is putting out, disguising the attack as “an Election Violation Notice” provoked outrage in a Grimes source, who described the mailer as “a despicable assault by Mitch McConnell on Kentucky voters.” Campaigns often exchange outrageous attacks but to do so in the guise of a government mailer is quite unusual. The McConnell campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Update: The Grimes campaign announced early Friday evening that it would be seeking an injunction “to prevent McConnell from engaging in these unprecedented and shameful campaign tactics.” The campaign also said that they would be asking state and federal authorities to investigate.



Jarad Fugate @JaradFugate Follow

@joesonka @phillipmbailey Received deceptive looking "notice" from @KYGOP and @Team_Mitch in the mail today. #KYSen

5:54 PM - 30 Oct 2014

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