

Meet the man who accidentally started an assassin hiring website

Level: Advanced

1 Warmer

- Brainstorm words that describe people who kill others for money. Write them in the box.
- Scan the article to see which expressions and words it uses.

2 Key words

- Write the correct word from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

ascertain	blurb	compelled	corroborating	dupe
feigning	fluke	intervene	jeopardy	lure
nefarious	ploy	solicit	stranded	wacky

- ask someone for something such as money or support _____
- left somewhere with no way of going anywhere else _____
- providing information or evidence that supports what someone says

- pressured to do something _____
- another word for pretending _____
- in danger; likely to be damaged or destroyed _____
- funny, silly, slightly crazy _____
- become involved in a situation in order to try to stop or change it

- something that happens unexpectedly because of an accident or good luck

- information printed on something such as a book or website that describes it and its content

- evil or dishonest _____
- a way of tricking or confusing someone in order to get an advantage or to make them do what you want _____

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13. persuade someone to do something by making it look very attractive

14. trick someone into believing something that is not true or into doing something that is stupid or illegal _____

15. find out something _____

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. I feel _____ to write to thank you.

2. Laura desperately tried to think of a _____ to delay his departure.

3. The police had to _____ when protesters blocked traffic.

4. The organization decided to _____ aid for the new campaign.

5. The financial crisis put thousands of jobs in _____.

6. Hundreds of passengers were left _____ at the airport.

7. The campaign is designed to _____ tourists back to the province

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He just wanted a catchy website name. Now, Bob Innes hands people over to the police for trying to have their enemies killed

Erum Salam

Fri 17 Dec 2021

- 1 In October 2005, Bob Innes bought the website domain name "rentahitman.com." It was the dotcom era and he was a business school student in North Carolina trying to advertise website traffic analysis services: the "hit" was a nod to clicks coming in on a client's website. "It was simply a play on words," he says.
- 2 Little did he know that by 2021, he would be involved in hundreds of legal cases, handing people to the police for trying to solicit assassin services. In December, one woman was found guilty, after trying to have her husband killed through Innes' website.
- 3 In 2005, with business far from booming, Innes moved on from his plans for a network analysis business with a catchy name. But Innes held on to the domain name in the hopes that someone might buy it one day.
- 4 It continued to exist in the background of Innes' life. Then, in 2010, he returned to its inbox out of curiosity and was stunned to find a client – just not the type he had been looking for.
- 5 Innes had received a message from a woman named Helen. She was stranded in Canada, had lost her passport, and wanted three family members in the UK murdered for cheating her out of her father's inheritance. He didn't respond.
- 6 But she persisted: sending a second email, which included names, addresses and other corroborating information. Innes felt compelled to act. So he responded, feigning to have the capability to do what was being asked of him.
- 7 "Do you still require our assistance? We can place you in contact with a Field Operative," he replied, stepping into character.
- 8 Within hours, Innes was in possession of the legal name, location, and phone number of a woman he thought was capable of serious harm.
- 9 "I truly felt that three people's lives were in jeopardy," he says.
- 10 Innes turned her in, and soon found out from detectives that 'Helen' was wanted in the UK for "more serious charges".
- 11 It was at this point Innes realized his \$9.20 website provided a little more value than he'd initially bargained for: he had just saved the lives of three people.
- 12 After Helen's arrest in 2010, Innes went back to a relatively normal life. He never planned on being a detective, or a criminal catcher, or whatever it was that he was doing when posing to be a person who could procure assassins online. He didn't have the training. He was just a man with a wacky website name who happened to intervene in a crime.
- 13 "In case you haven't noticed, I'm not really a murder-for-hire type of guy," Innes says. "I'm more of a save-a-life type who just happened to be in this position by way of a fluke."
- 14 So he kept the site running, filling it with jokes and clues to show it wasn't the real deal. "Your point and click solution," the blurb for the website says when you search for it on Google. The website assures readers they are protected by the "Hitman Information Privacy Protection Act (HIPPA)".
- 15 And then there's the warning message on the front page. It reads: "Everyone should know by now that the Dark & Deep webs [sic] are not safe places to shop for your nefarious deeds. There are lots of potentially dangerous sites, ripe with viruses, and fraud runs rampant there. Your privacy is NOT guaranteed and your information could be leaked to thousands of sites, including law enforcement, and that's no fun!"
- 16 But still, the appeals kept on coming, not just from those looking to harm others, but also those looking to harm themselves. "I'm not a crisis counsellor and it's hard to find proper solutions and resources for many who reach out," he says.
- 17 The site runs completely out of pocket, although Innes accepts donations to cover the costs associated with running it. He also plans to set up an internet safety program, to help educate on the dangers of the internet and to lobby for tougher laws for people who try to commit violent crimes online.

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- 18 Does he ever worry about keeping the website? “The site is not a ploy to lure or dupe people who want to have others killed. These people search the internet to contact a hitman,” he says – explaining that the website is not advertised anywhere. Innes also typically gives people a “cooling off” period of 24 hours after they try to procure him – for him to ascertain whether they are certain. “I’ll ask two simple questions,” he says: “Do you still require our services? And would you like me to place you in contact with a field operative for a free consultation?” If they don’t answer, he says they get a free pass. But if they do “then it’s game on,” he says.
- 19 Ultimately, he also feels he has no choice. “As long as these emails keep coming in, I will continue to act,” he says. “So far, nearly 150 lives have been saved as a direct result of the site and my actions.”

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3 Understanding the article

a. Are these sentences True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Bob Innes bought the domain name more than fifteen years ago purely as a joke.
2. The domain name costs him just under one hundred US dollars.
3. Five years after he bought it, he got an email from a woman requesting very specific and unusual business services.
4. He immediately wrote back to her asking for more details.
5. After she provided information about herself and her intended victims, Innes contacted the police.
6. Unfortunately, the police never managed to trace the woman.
7. At this point, Innes realised that his website had the potential to save lives.
8. He tried to make it clear, by writing unserious information on his website, that he was not a killer, but people still contacted him for hitman services.
9. Innes has finally started to make money from the website and domain name.
10. Law enforcement agencies use Innes' site to get would-be-killers to give away their identity.
11. While people are still contacting him, Innes sees it as his moral duty to keep their identities secret.
12. Innes plans to run courses to help people protect themselves online.

4 Key language

a. With a partner, and without looking at the article, write in the missing letters to complete the verb phrases from the article. The first letter of each word is given to help you. Then go back over the article to check your answers.

1. a n _ _ _ to = a sign that someone is aware of or wants to recognize the influence or importance of something
2. I _ _ _ _ _ did he know = he was unaware of something
3. stepping into c _ _ _ _ _ = taking on a particular role and pretending to be someone else
4. be in p _ _ _ _ _ of = to have something
5. t _ _ _ _ someone in = tell the police about someone

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6. more than someone had b _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ for = something different from what you expected, especially something worse
7. r _ _ _ _ with = full of
8. r _ _ _ rampant = existing, happening, or spreading in an uncontrolled way
9. out of p _ _ _ _ _ _ = losing money
10. get a f _ _ _ _ pass = when poor behaviour is tolerated

b. Use each phrase to write a new and unrelated sentence of your own.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What do you do with your old email addresses when you change provider?
- Do you have any old email addresses, websites or social media accounts that you no longer use but are probably still active?
- Do you have / have you ever had a website? If yes talk about security, updates and information related to this website. If not, why not? How might a website be useful to you in your life?
- What information would you not put online, or send via email or messaging app?
- How else could you get this information to someone who needed it?
- How do you protect yourself online?

6 In your own words

a. Work with a partner or in small groups.

Discuss and build on your answers to the last discussion question in Activity 5 and write a comprehensive list of internet safety do's and don'ts.