

Digital view: Life on the Danish Internet, September 14-20,  
2009

# Big Danish leak week: Information won't be stopped

Why and how the official Danish tourism agency, the Danish Defence and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation failed to stop publishing “unwanted” material.



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“Digital view: Life on the Danish Internet, September 14-20, 2009: Big Danish leak week: Information won’t be stopped. Why and how the official Danish tourism agency, the Danish Defence and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation failed to stop publishing “unwanted” material” is written by Jon Lund.

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Jon Lund  
Byholmvej 10 // 2720 Vanløse // Copenhagen // Denmark  
[jon@jon-lund.com](mailto:jon@jon-lund.com) // +45 2819 9052  
CVR: 32 17 61 19 // Bank: 2128-7563384616



## INTRODUCTION

Digital view: Life on the Danish Internet provides a weekly overview of the evolution of on the Danish internet, based on available sources of information.

## BIG LEAK WEAK: INFORMATION WON'T BE STOPPED

Why and how the official Danish tourism agency, the Danish Defence and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation failed to stop publishing “unwanted” material

Central control of the dissemination of information is faced with numerous challenges these days. The loss of control is tied to a general development of modern-day societies in which societies have become increasingly more complex and fluctuating, less stable and well-ordered.

With the advent of the internet, this general trend is powered up. The control of information became and are becoming ever more difficult. In fact control is often impossible: information just slips away through your fingers, whenever you try to get a hold of it or hold it back. The forces of transparency are at work.

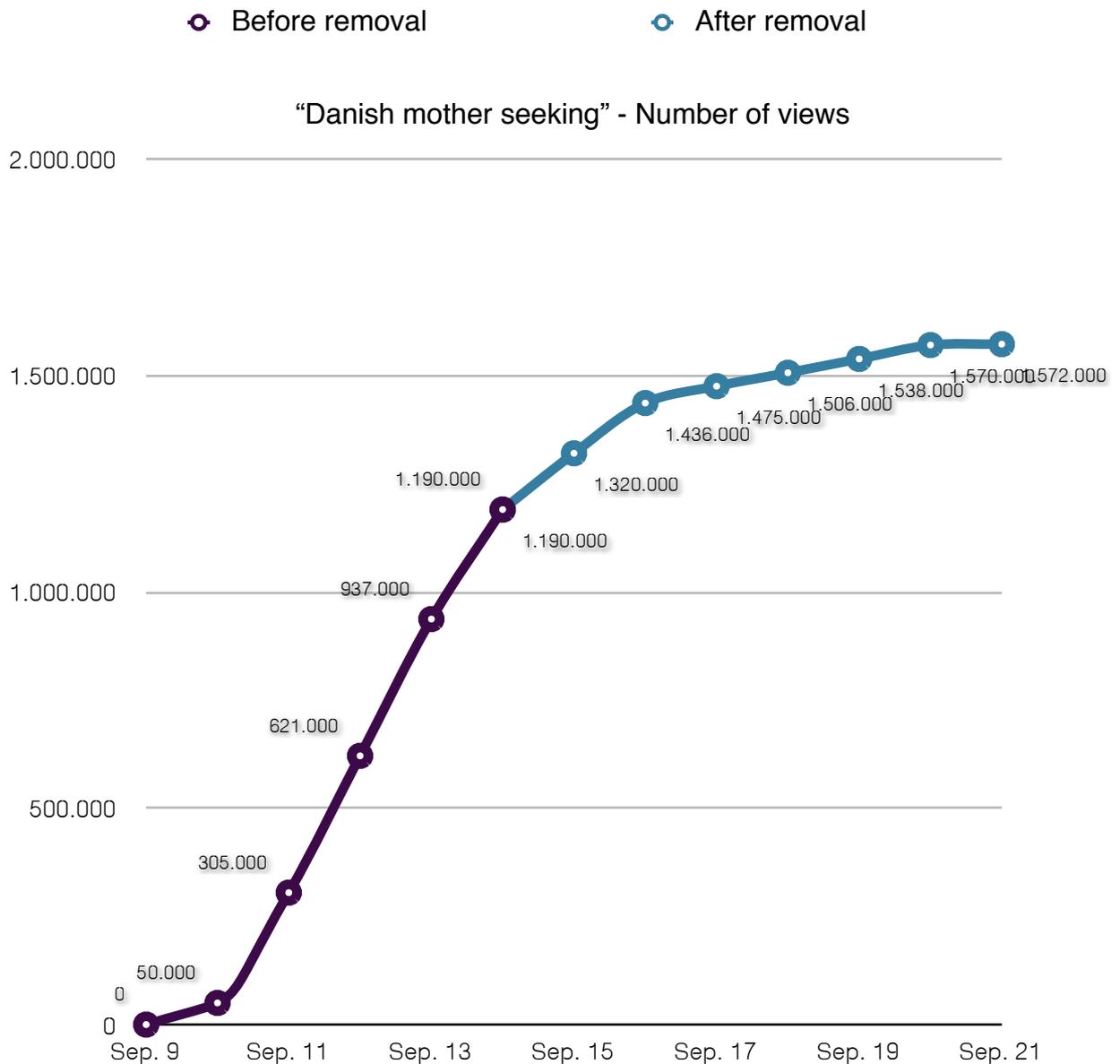
This has been the reality for lots of people the past years. Within one single week in the fall of 2009 three large Danish organizations: VisitDenmark, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation and the Danish Defense, realized this the hard way.

### Danish mother seeking

“Danish mother seeking” is the case about VisitDenmark, the official Danish tourism agency, who tried to withdraw a video it itself had already posted online. The video, named “Danish mother seeking” was uploaded to Youtube by “Karen 26”, featuring an (allegedly) single mom, Karen, with her one year old child born out of wedlock as a result of a one-nights-stand, speaking to the camera asking the father, whom she can’t remember neither name or nationality of, to step forward. The hidden purpose of the video was to advertise Denmark as a tourist destination.



After a heated public debate in which VisitDenmark was accused of trying to sell Denmark to sex tourists, VisitDenmark removed the video from youtube on monday, september 14. Within minutes, copies of the video had been put in its place on youtube by other youtube-users. Several of the copies were removed the following days, only to be replaced by yet other copies.



By tracing the now-deleted videos it's possible to draw up a picture of the videos "after-removal life" on youtube. The tracing shows how "Danish mother seeking" video had been shown a total of 1.190.000 million times at the day of it's removal. Instead of dropping dead, the number of views continued to climb upwards, nicely following the slope of the curve which was set out by the original video. One week after the videos official removal, it had received nearly 400.000 extra views, accounting for a post-removal growth rate of 32 percent.

The learnings are, that the withdrawal of the video by VisitDenmark had little if any effect on the availability and distribution of the video. The video is still there in a number of copies.

The withdrawal did two things: It worked as a public excuse and helped in the short term VisitDenmark getting out of the spotlight, which apparently was getting to hot for them. Not very elegant, but an symbolically it worked. They disassociated themselves from the content of the video.

Secondly, the removal effectively shot down VisitDenmarks own possibilities for participating in the discussions on the video and took away whatever means they might have had for influencing the development of the story. The videos out there now became a target for removal from the side of VisitDenmark, not an object around which discussions could evolve. Likewise the website of "Karen" build up to support the video was closed down.

In conclusion: VisitDenmark tried to play the game of the internet, but were caught on the wrong foot unable to maintain any but a symbolic control of the distribution of the "Danish mother seeking" video, effectively outplayed by the forces of transparency.

#### How reliable is the tracing?

The tracing gives an overview of the minimum number of exposures of the video "Danish mother seeking". The figures stated are minimum-numbers, based on positive findings on youtube.com. The real number of views will most likely be larger.

There are two major reasons to believe the real number of exposures of the video is larger than the tracing lets us to believe.

First: Besides youtube the copies can be stored at other video-sites or ripped of youtube for email-distribution and offline viewing. These copies or views hereof are not counted.

Secondly, the tracing only takes the original video and the three probably most viewed copies into account. This is due to the methodology of the tracing, which takes advantage of the fact that even though a video and the corresponding page on which the video is shown is removed, statistics of the videos performance is still accessible through direct queries to the youtube database.

The queries requires a knowledge of the individual videos unique identifier. Since the videos are now deleted the removed videos can only be identified, by looking for mentioning of the now deleted videos containing the identifiers other places on the internet.

By querying into amongst other global twitter-databases, it has been possible to identify two deleted copies and one copy still on youtube with significant number of views. Videos with less than 10.000 views each has been ignored in the tracing process.

## H\*A\*S\*H

Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) had spend what equals a little more than \$ 1.5 million on a new satiric TV-puppet-series H\*A\*S\*H featuring hash-smoking Danish troops in Afghanistan for their christmas lineup, but decided last week to dropped the series.

Critics, including the series' director, suspects censorship and political motives behind DR's decision. Thursday september 18 the two pilot-episodes, on which the decision to drop the show was based, leaked to youtube for everyone to make their own judgement.



DR responded by condemning the leak, stating that the leak is viewed as theft and breach of copyrights, and that charges will be pressed if or when the identity of the whistleblowers is revealed.

However the two videos lives on on youtube seemingly without attempts from DR to remove them. They have 50 and 16 thousand views respectively, and are both rated an average of two stars. Perhaps they just really were not funny?

In conclusion the H\*A\*S\*H-case illustrates first how maintaining the control of what information should be spread is exceedingly difficult. But the H\*A\*S\*H-case also illustrates how the spread of information although unattended isn't necessarily a bad thing: the ratings and discussions around the videos have delivered what can be used as a proof of a sound editorial decision not to air the show.

## Hunter – at war with the elite

On a more serious note, the Danish Defense last week tried to stop the publication of a Special Forces soldier tell-all-book on grounds that it allegedly compromised national security, though the warnings were made without specific references to particular parts of the book.

Critics saw the military move as yet another attempt to control public opinion surrounding the Danish military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, and while charges were pressed for the

courts to issue an injunction against the book's publication as well as press coverage of it Politiken, a leading Danish daily newspaper shortcut the process and published the entire content as a supplement to it's Wednesday september 16 edition. At the same time the book was uploaded to both wikileaks.org and piratebay.com.

In court a retired head of Danish Special forces witnessed that he - as opposed to the militarys official position - did not find the book to contain details that could endanger Danish or foreign troops and argued against what he thought off as a much to closed Danish Defenses. Meantime the head of the Danish institute for human rights argued in the press that procedures described in the book seemed to violate the Geneva conventions.



Monday September 21, the court ruled not to issue an injunction against the book, noting that it did in fact find security details provided in the book should not have been made available to the public, adding that the injunction would have been authorized had the book not already been published or made available on the internet. Also, she said, it might be time to revise the legal concept of injunction, which - due to the presence of the internet - to her had started to lose it's meaning.

As was the case with “Danish mother seeking” the attempted closure from the part of the Danish defense had, apart from the genuine desire not to have the book spread, a strong symbolic side to it. Whether an injunction was issued against the book or not, whether it was distributed through alternative channels or not, the defense - it could be argued - wanted to put a message to other soldiers who might be thinking of writing their own books or in other ways start to talk: don't do it. Also the defense might also have needed to assure it's foreign partners that they could count on the Danish defense to do it's best to keep things quiet.

In conclusion, the Danish defense did not succeed in stopping “Hunter” from being neither published, distributed or read. On the contrary: because of their involvement, the book was

widely distributed and heavily discussed. They actually spurred the process of multi-channel distribution.

## Forces of transparency in play

Though different, the three cases share similarities, reflecting a general set of forces of transparency.

First, they're all stories of organizations who themselves believed they could control - that is restrict sharing of - information in one of the most internet-savvy societies in the world. And they're stories of organizations who failed to do so.

Second, the information the organizations wanted to withhold from the public is characterized by being already digital ("Danish mother seeking" and "H\*A\*S\*H") or being very easy to digitalize ("Hunter"). Digital information have easy access to the internet, and is much harder to control than non-digital information.

Third, the information is not only digital, it is also narrative. Numbers in spreadsheet or long scientific reports can be distributed just as easily, but does not have the same appeal as does videos and books. Also video and books has established distribution-channels available to them. Videos in particular benefits from the widespread use and knowledge of sites like youtube.com.

Fourth, the information is - before the attempts to control it - already shared among a larger group of people.

Fifth, the information is in all cases seen as important enough for someone to engage in the uncontrollable dissemination process.

The three cases therefore carries a message: if you're responsible for information, which can be put in digital form (and really, what information cannot?), don't rely on your own ability to keep it back.

Instead you should plan how best to distribute it. And how to deal with the interest it might arouse.



## ABOUT JON LUND

Jon Lund is advising, speaking and analyzing the impact of new media and new technology on business and society. Jon Lund views openness and transparency as factors contributing to the growth of business, the welfare of societies and the well-being of individuals. Open up, give away data, figures, facts and opinions, invite customers, business-partners and society in general to engage with you, in the long term will leave you better off.

From 2004 to 2009 Jon Lund was general manager of IAB Denmark (Foreningen af Danske Interaktive Medier, FDIM) and headed as such the official measurement of activity and ad spend on the internet.

Jon Lund is member of the board of IAB Europe and has held honorary positions as member of the Danish Ministry of Cultures advertising forum, member of the board of directors of the forum of the Danish Media, member of ICC Denmark's marketing committee. He holds a masters degree in Political Science and has worked with internet since starting his own agency in 1995.