

# THE BAIT OF AN UPDATE

When you blitz your social network with a purposely vague news flash on your life, you're begging for attention

By KIM BOSCH

"What's on your mind?"

It's the question Facebook asks millions of people every day. And it's a question that many choose to answer with obscurity.

*Steve is wondering if it's all worth it ... Rebecca shouldn't have done that.*

This kind of indeterminate status updating hardly answers the Facebook question. If anything, it elicits more questions in return.

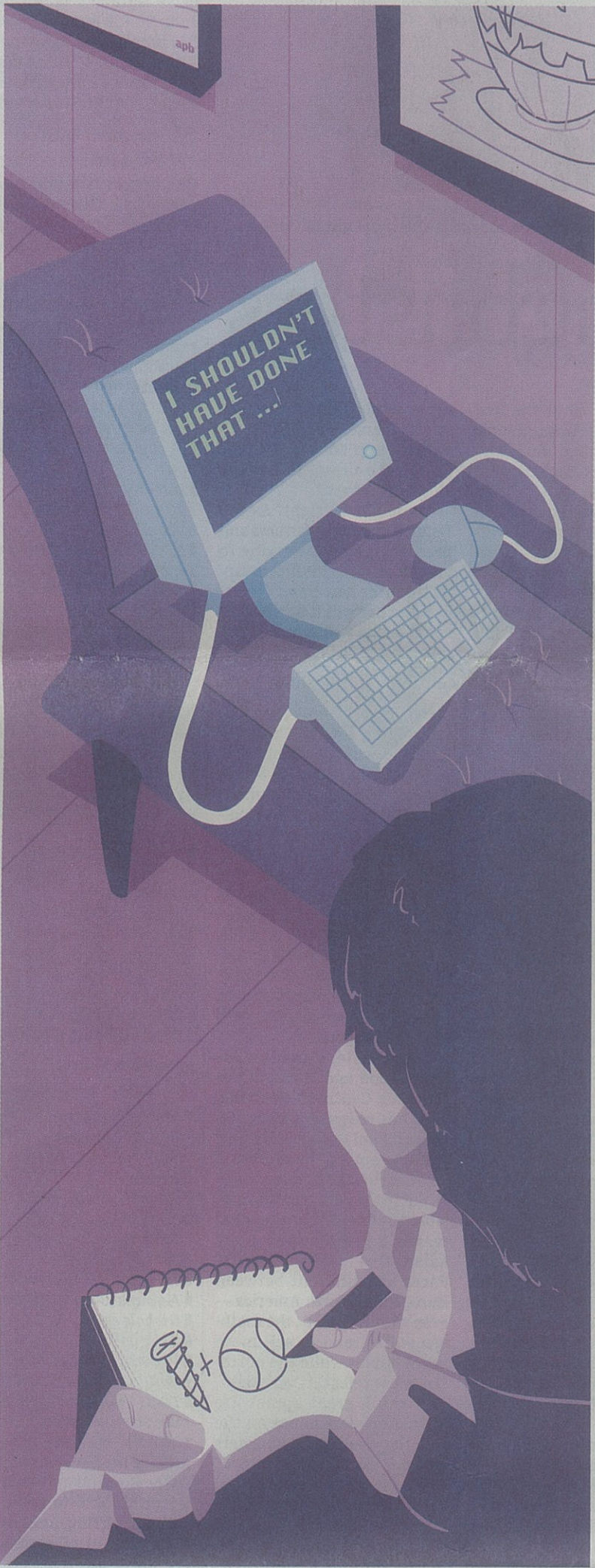
Enter vaguebooking: the act of posting an unclear status that prompts, even dares, friends to ask you more. The term was originally coined on UrbanDictionary.com — an online collection of slang terminology created by the people, for the people — and gained attention when it was featured as the site's word of the day earlier this month.

Vaguebooking's core concept lies within the status writer's ability to bait its readers while still remaining elusive. It is always confessional, provocative and indeterminably sly. *Bob was wrong to do that. Jane should have handled that better.* These phrases are consistently open-ended but hint at something more just below their surface. For example, *Stephanie is late ... and worried* could simply mean that Stephanie is late for school or work. If accompanied by inside knowledge about Stephanie's sex life, though, it could imply something much more pressing.

Specificity is forbidden in vaguebooking, and one certain rule is never mentioning anyone by name. However, the use of Vaguebooking to message other (often unwilling) parties is common practice, whether the person is directly mentioned or not. Therefore the posting *Liz shouldn't have slept over last night* holds special meaning to someone out there, while the rest of us get to indulge in asking questions about where Liz slept (or who she slept with) last night. Occasionally Vaguebookers will also mention a person in terms of their role, often as a cowardly way of confronting them. *Trudy wishes her boss hadn't done that. Steve isn't sure about his wife.*

In its simplest form, vaguebooking can be used to celebrate, *Jen just got some great news*; to grieve, *Jen will miss her*; or to bitch, *Jen hates this*. Sure, Jen could have just told us her big news, or who it is she will miss or what it is that she hates but then, that's the whole point to Vaguebooking: Why just tell people when you can get them to guess?

Upon reading these statuses, we can't help but ask, "What's the great news, Jen?" or "What are you late for,



Stephanie?" They compel our curiosity and appeal to our desire for drama.

Facebook has created the ideal platform for our ego — that little (or in some people, big) part of our psyche that is immersed in self-importance. In the social networking realm, our audience, those handpicked people — whether it's your ex, your high school crush or your mom — are always ready to read whatever it is you have to say. With vaguebooking, it's easy to create suspense. *Martin isn't sure if he should tell you.* And just like that, within the span of a short unclear phrase, a regular event becomes mysterious and fully exposed people become enigmas.

However, all ego-stroking aside, there must be a larger reason behind all this ambiguity. With virtual soapboxes at our disposal every second, why then are we purposefully failing to communicate?

In its extended definition, vaguebooking can also be used as "a cry for help." Statements like *Ann just doesn't know anymore* or *Brian is wondering if it's all worth it* could easily be interpreted as depressive projecting at its very saddest. So why post it online then? Perhaps technology has created a protective veil, allowing us to engage in emotions we otherwise wouldn't have without our third-person (Steve, Jen, Stephanie, instead of me, myself and I) anonymity. Could it be that vaguebooking allows us to reach out in a safe way? For example, through the use of song lyrics:

**Ciaran ... lonely, lonely, that is me.**

**Kim** Why are you lonely?

**Ciaran** It's a lyric from Feist. I'm fine!

In this case lyrics further protect the writer from vulnerability because even though the lyric obviously means something to them, they can quickly change their tune if anyone out-and-out asks them about it.

Then again, maybe vaguebooking is much simpler than all of this. Perhaps, in this online world where everyone has an immediate voice, a problem has arisen: No one is listening. As a result, people have started to yearn for the dialogue lacking in our one-way communication culture. Maybe people aren't vaguebooking for attention, but are simply doing it to elicit a response. Maybe Facebook, Twitter and all the other social sites have in fact painted us into a lonely corner and this is the social butterfly's way of inducing good old-fashioned conversation in a new world format.

Or maybe we're just a bunch of egomaniacs.

Weekend Post