

It's Not Only CeBIT That Hannover is Now Famous For...

Written by Bob Snyder
22 February 2012

OK, by us, Hannover in Germany is famous for CeBIT. But the success of a police stratagem in Hannover may capture attention from police forces worldwide.



In Hannover, the local polizei have a pilot scheme (Fahndung via Facebook or Manhunt via Facebook) that uses photofit technique delivered by social media to harness the public to locate criminal suspects.

Photofit is now generally known as Electronic Facial Identification Technique (E-FIT), as today it is a computer-based method that produces facial composites of suspects based on eyewitness descriptions. (Janina Kaminska in the UK Home Office first proposed the name ["E-Fit"](#) in 1984.)

Since its introduction, the Facebook-using public in Hannover have "ratted out" enough wanted criminals to claim 8 arrests. No wonder, because almost 100,000 Hannoverians claim on Facebook they "LIKE" the local police. That's out of a population of 520,000. (And, of course the local city hall is called the [Neues Rathaus...](#))

The program is not without controversy because E-FIT itself is not without its detractors. It's only a tool for police to round up suspects-- not a true indictment of any suspect. That's a distinction that the general public often fails to make.

Criticism is worse in this case as Data Protection is a serious issue in Germany (serious because Teutonic culture is serious but further heightened by concern over abuse during WWII). So criminal investigation via photofit raises worry that bad witnesses inspire bad photofits and when released on Facebook the public could jump to guilty assumptions about some people who may be innocent and wrongly accused.

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So Germany's data protection commissioner found a loophole that let them shut down the police experiment: they ruled an official manhunt should never be stored on a server located outside of the German state where it was first issued.

Rather than drop this successful trial (successful in crime-fighting but just as successful as public relations), the Hannover police stopping publishing officially on Facebook's US servers--only they continued to link their cases on Facebook so they could lead their Facebook fans to their own servers (in Hannover, of course...so presumably their police IT techs visit CeBIT to shop for their network technology).

As Facebook becomes the Batman crime-fighter of the social web, will Twitter become Robin?

Go [A Manhunt on Facebook Leads to 8 Arrests in Germany](#)