Targeting Networks of High-Frequency Sex Buyers

Research shows that most high-frequency sex buyers—men who average about 75 purchases a year—are married, college educated, and make about $120,000 annually. They represent only five percent of the total sex-buying population, but account for over three million paid sex transactions a year. They are tech savvy and well versed in masking their actions, making them very difficult to catch and prosecute. **But that's changing.**

All over the United States, high-frequency sex buyers are logging on to websites to interact and share information on the illegal sex trade. These “john boards” allow sex buyers to participate in clandestine networks where they openly rate those they exploit, tell other buyers how they can gain access to secret brothels, and give tips on avoiding police detection.

![Image of law enforcement logos]

The ReviewBoard.net, as it appears today. Law enforcement seized the Washington-based prostitution promotion site in January, 2016.

In Seattle, King County, the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office and FBI infiltrated, seized, and eventually shuttered the “john board” reviewboard.net. The seizure led to buyer arrests, the rescue of trafficking victims, and thousands of sex buyers left without a forum for communication.

The men arrested all belonged to an organized network of sex buyers known as the League, and several were charged with promotion of prostitution for their online activities. Promotion of prostitution is a felony in Washington, carrying with it stiffer penalties. Enforcement increases the perception of risk for other reviewboard.net users, creating a ripple effect in the Pacific Northwest sex-buying community.

**SHUTTING DOWN “reviewboard.net” AND “THE LEAGUE”**

- **18,000 – 23,000** Sex buyers cut off from their communication forum
- **19** Buyers arrested
- **12** Trafficking victims rescued

DEMAND ABOLITION
Many states have a promoting prostitution charge reserved for people who entice, or force others to engage in prostitution. But these charges are only applicable under certain circumstances, such as human trafficking or brothel owning cases. As a result, people who are continually aiding prostitution by engaging in review boards get off with minimum sentencing in the form of a small and ineffective fine. Given that a high-frequency sex buyer spends tens of thousands of dollars on paid sex annually, a fine of a few hundred-dollar is not a true deterrent. But, not all states have such limited promotion laws; Washington, Alabama, Arkansas, and others are important exceptions. These states have promotion of prostitution laws that are more broadly defined, including penalizing those who ‘advance prostitution’. This allows prosecutors to bring defendants that aid prostitution by engaging in john boards up on felony charges. The wording of these laws create more opportunities to penalize sex buyers for their online activities, provide a more serious deterrent to would-be buyers, and increases funding for victim's services through additional fines. Washington's promotion of prostitution law can be used as an example for other states interested in targeting networks of high-frequency buyers and combatting the illegal sex industry in the United States.

WASHINGTON'S LAW STATES:

**Definitions**

1. **“Advances prostitution.”** A person “advances prostitution” if, acting other than as a prostitute or as a customer thereof, he or she causes or aids a person to commit or engage in prostitution, procures or solicits customers for prostitution, provides persons or premises for prostitution purposes, operates or assists in the operation of a house of prostitution or a prostitution enterprise, or engages in any other conduct designed to institute, aid, or facilitate an act or enterprise of prostitution.

2. **“Profits from prostitution.”** A person “profits from prostitution” if, acting other than as a prostitute receiving compensation for personally rendered prostitution services, he or she accepts or receives money or other property pursuant to an agreement or understanding with any person whereby he or she participates or is to participate in the proceeds of prostitution activity.”

**Promoting Prostitution in the First Degree**

1. A person is guilty of promoting prostitution in the first degree if he or she knowingly advances prostitution by compelling a person by threat or force to engage in prostitution or profits from prostitution which results from such threat or force.

2. Promoting prostitution in the first degree is a class B felony.

**Promoting Prostitution in the Second Degree**

1. A person is guilty of promoting prostitution in the second degree if he or she knowingly:
   (a) Profits from prostitution; or
   (b) Advances prostitution.

Together we can shut down high-frequency buyer networks

To learn about efforts to break up online sex-buying networks, contact Tony Loftis office: 617.995.1913
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