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The Saga of Ninja Steve

HOW TO QUICKLY (AND CONSISTENTLY) DISMANTLE BRAND TRUST.

One of the first things I learned about SS Public Relations, my first source of ghostwriting clients, is that SSPR did not turn down clients. Ever. (Today, they're known as NextPR, and they have higher standards.)

That led to me writing for companies I can't discuss here without violating this magazine's "family friendly" content rules. However, I can talk about Turing Space Industries, originally known as QSα (pronounced "QSAlpha").

In 2013, QSα was preparing an Indiegogo campaign to launch Quasar IV, "The World's First Self-Authenticated Cipherphone Designed To Protect Your Digital Identity." The Quasar IV supposedly ran on a "military-grade encryption" system called the "Quatrix."

I don't think a Quasar I, II, or III was ever released. The name Quasar—a type of massive black hole found at the bright center of a galaxy—gave off a futuristic, space-age vibe.

But the phone, said QSα, took its "...design inspiration from one of the world's most recognized symbols of secrecy, supernatural ability and stealth: the art of Ninjutsu."

Oh yes—the company's founder claimed to study *ninjutsu*, the art of the *ninja*, the spies of medieval Japan. His name is Steve, so we'll call him Ninja Steve.

To launch Quasar IV, Ninja Steve needed some cash. So, he launched an Indiegogo crowd-funding campaign (I might have helped...). In the intro video to the campaign, Ninja Steve is seated with his face next to the handle of a ninja sword, with ninja-ish music playing in the background. The Indiegogo page had another video of a human ninja (not Steve—unless it was a brilliant ninja disguise) doing ninja-y things with a ninja sword. Near the end, this ninja does a cartwheel and then starts throwing ninja stars (excuse me, *shuriken*) towards the camera.

If you contributed to the campaign, boy oh boy, were you in luck! €174 got you a Ninja Jacket and 195 QuaCoins to spend in the QuaStore, which offered mobile apps for QuaOS (have you caught onto the naming scheme yet?). For just €17,815, you could get ten phones "... carved with our Ninjutsu Saizo, Togakure or Soke clan logos."

I know what you're thinking. This "unhackable" phone (QSα's words) sounds a bit...suspicious. Well, you're not alone. The Indiegogo campaign was supposed to raise €2,850,401 but managed €87,931.

Thankfully, Ninja Steve knew what to do about it. If *ninjutsu* didn't inspire trust in the world's most secure phone, QSα would use even more powerful symbols.

After a PR smoke-bomb-cartwheel (Quasar? What Quasar?), QSα reemerged in a new guise in 2015 as Turing Robotic Industries, which would eventually become Turing Space Industries, which involved neither robotics nor space.

Like Tesla, named for inventor Nikola Tesla, Ninja Steve hitched his brand to another famous genius: Alan Turing, a founder of modern computer science. Presumably, he'd work some Turing motifs into the branding of the new phones, right?



Wrong. In 2015, Turing announced its flagship phone, the Dark Wyvern—named for the two-legged beast usually referred to as a dragon (but don't say anything that ignorant on Reddit if you value your life). The Dark Wyvern was made of "Liquidmorphium™, Turing's signature composite that is tougher than titanium," because Marvel wouldn't sell them any Vibranium.

If you weren't ready to drop $999 on a Dark Wyvern, you could buy the lesser Cardinal (not a dragon), Pharaoh (also not dragon-related), or Beowulf (dragon-adjacent poetry). Or, if you really wanted to ball out, you could reserve the Dark Wyvern Glaedr, with a body featuring "...24K gold highlights that tell the ancient tale of a fire-breathing dragon." Nothing says military-grade security like Glaedr, a dragon from The Inheritance Cycle youth adult fantasy novels.

The Dark Wyvern was mired by delay after delay after delay. People who pre-ordered it became a bit suspicious of Ninja Steve, and more so when Turing filed for bankruptcy in 2018 shortly after announcing another upcoming phone: the Appassionato (which, I assume, is also a type of Nespresso pod).

Turing was doing fine, insisted Ninja Steve, when the press asked him about the bankruptcy. That year, Turing also announced the $2,749 HubblePhone, which, naturally, would run on KeplerianOS. Ninja Steve had come full circle, back to outer space.

The fate of the HubblePhone and Ninja Steve is unclear. On Facebook, Turing promised refunds for HubblePhone pre-orders. The last sign of Ninja Steve was a three-question Q&A in an online blog that stopped publishing in 2020. There, he talked about "neuromorphic" computing.

Ninja Steve seemingly went out of his way to undermine trust in his phones—surely, a strategy grounded in ninjutsu. Yet people couldn't help giving Ninja Steve money and attention. Maybe one day he'll cartwheel out of the shadows and throw some more ninja stars at our ever-vulnerable credulity.