

How did a quiet 16th birthday celebration turn into a full-scale riot? Read this to find out what happened when a Dutch teenager made a Facebook error.

Preparation

Match the sentence halves to make things that can go wrong at a party. Write a–f next to the numbers 1–6.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1..... Someone breaks | a. gatecrash the party |
| 2..... Loads of people you don't know | b. in your parents' bed |
| 3..... Someone spills | c. embarrassing photos from the party on Facebook |
| 4..... The neighbours complain | d. their drink on the carpet |
| 5..... Your mates post | e. an expensive glass |
| 6..... Someone falls asleep | f. about the noise |



It began as a plan for a very normal 16th birthday party. Merthe Weusthuis wanted a quiet celebration with a small group of friends in her family home in the small Dutch town of Haren. Like many teenagers, she decided to send out invitations via a social network site. But Merthe made one big mistake: she used open-access settings on Facebook, so it wasn't just her friends who could see details of the event, lots of strangers could too.

The number of invitation acceptances quickly snowballed into an avalanche. Not marking the event as 'private' meant the electronic invitation was eventually seen by 240,000 people, of whom 30,000 confirmed online that they planned to attend. To make matters worse, an unauthorised campaign was launched to promote the party by means of a dedicated website and Twitter account, which received hundreds of thousands of hits. The party became known as 'Project X Haren' after the 2012 American film *Project X* in which three high school students throw a birthday party that spins out of control. Video trailers for Merthe's party were produced, with scenes from *Project X* edited in, and they were posted on YouTube. T-shirts featuring Merthe's face were also made, all without her knowledge or consent.

Even after Merthe's parents had cancelled the party, the publicity didn't stop. Local media reported on the forthcoming event and teenagers turned up to have their pictures taken outside the Weusthuis family home. On the evening the party was to have taken place, about 5,000 teenagers began gathering in Haren, many outside the Weusthuis house. When it became clear that there was nothing to gatecrash, violence broke out and 500 riot police equipped with helmets, shields and batons were brought in to control the crowd. Shops in the centre of Haren were vandalised and looted, journalists were attacked, cars were set on fire or overturned and street signs and lamp posts were damaged.

However, Facebook was also involved in the clean-up effort in the days after the riot. A group called 'Project Clean-X Haren' was set up to gather and organise volunteers. Another group named 'Suspect-X Haren' was created to help police identify and arrest the rioters by sharing photos and videos of the event.

A number of other 'Facebook parties' have spiralled out of control, including the 16th birthday party of British teenager Bradley McNulty in April 2012. Bradley had not posted details of the event on the internet, and had been careful to ask his friends not to, but somehow the news leaked out and appeared on Blackberry Messenger as well as Facebook. More than 400 gatecrashers invaded his family home in Poole, Dorset, causing extensive damage.

1. Check your understanding: multiple choice

Choose the best option to complete these sentences.

1. Merthe Weusthuis made the mistake of ____.
 - a. using Facebook to organise her birthday celebration
 - b. letting her friends invite their friends to her party
 - c. inviting people she did not really like to her party
 - d. not checking who could see her online invitation

2. The number of confirmed guests ____.
 - a. did not reflect the reality
 - b. got out of control almost immediately
 - c. was manageable until the Twitter campaign
 - d. suddenly shot up when people started watching the YouTube video trailers

3. 'Project X Haren' was named after ____.
 - a. another party in the same area
 - b. the group who promoted the party online
 - c. a party video on YouTube
 - d. a film

4. Local journalists ____.
- a. gave the event publicity
 - b. tried to discourage people from attending
 - c. gathered outside the house
 - d. started the violence
5. Violence broke out when ____.
- a. teenagers arrived in large numbers
 - b. people realised there was no party
 - c. rival gangs turned up
 - d. gatecrashers saw the riot police
6. After the riot, Facebook was used to ____.
- a. plan another party in Haren
 - b. send messages of support to Merthe and her family
 - c. help rioters get in contact with each other
 - d. help the town recover from the violence
7. Bradley McAnulty ____.
- a. made the same mistake as Merthe Weusthuis
 - b. sent invites via Blackberry Messenger
 - c. had taken steps to prevent problems
 - d. posted details of the event online
8. In Bradley McAnulty's case, ____.
- a. only a small number of people arrived
 - b. the gatecrashers were well behaved
 - c. the gatecrashers caused a lot of damage to his home
 - d. the gatecrashers caused a lot of damage to his town

2. Check your vocabulary: gap fill

Complete the gaps with a phrase from the box.

take place

broke out

set on fire

turned up

send out

leaked out

named after

brought in

1. Merthe used her Facebook page to _____ invitations.
2. The event was _____ a party in a film.
3. Teenagers _____ at the house to have their photos taken.
4. 5,000 teenagers gathered in Haren on the night the party was supposed to _____.
5. When it became clear there was no party, violence _____.
6. Riot police were _____ to control the crowds.
7. Shops were vandalised and cars were _____.
8. Even though Bradley McAnulty had been careful, news of his party _____ and appeared on Blackberry Messenger.

Discussion

Is Facebook a good way to organise a party? Why or why not?

Are you careful with your privacy settings on social network sites?

Vocabulary Box

Write any new words you have learnt in this lesson.