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Aug31

[Mike](#)

### [Point: Was our coverage too 'Hotz,' too cold or just right?](#)

In a comment on a different [post](#), a reader criticized our coverage of RIT student George Hotz, who's credited with "cracking open" the iPhone. The reader (let's call her/him "Annie") thinks we could've done much more. But I say our coverage was just right.

Annie raises a valid concern, though—one that has been the center of extensive debate within University News, where both sides are well represented. However, Annie's conclusion that RIT "[doesn't have the guts to even form any kind of response or acknowledgment that anything has happened](#)" is based on some misperceptions.

Before telling you what's been done to let people know about this story, let me first say that behind the scenes here at University News, the story has consumed considerable man (and woman) hours ever since the story broke last week. My colleague John Follaco will delve more into that aspect of the story in a separate [post](#). For now, suffice it to say this story was *not* ignored.

Here's how we told—and will tell—the story:

- Early last Friday, a link to an [article](#) in *The Record*, the New Jersey newspaper that broke the story, was posted in the "[RIT In the News](#)" section of the [University News Web site](#). This prominent section of our Web site serves as a kind of "news ticker"—and stories posted there have the stamp of credibility from independent news outlets (there's no "PR spin").
- Later, following a "breaking-news huddle" among University News staff in which specific tasks were assigned and the story was further researched, RIT issued a [news release](#) that was posted on the University News Web site and distributed to media outlets. The release included a statement from the RIT president and it invited reporters to personally hear from George Hotz on Sunday on campus.
- As Annie correctly noted, the story was referenced here on [The Tiger Beat Blog](#).
- The story is slated to be reported in the next issue of [News & Events](#).

It can be debated whether that described above is enough (and, as mentioned, it *has* been debated here). Let me be upfront: I'm in the "let's not overplay it" camp. Here's why:

- One of our primary missions is to publicize RIT to the world through outside media. At last count, the iPhone story had run in more than **500** media outlets since last Friday! We couldn't have done any better through our best efforts. (But, some argue, shouldn't the RIT news Web site be a direct provider of RIT news? Indeed—and it has been as described above.)
- This next point is a contentious one: This story is what we classify as an "RIT mention" story. It's not an "RIT story," per se (that is, it's not a story about news generated by or about RIT). Rather, RIT received merely a mention near the end of most versions of the story, and the story itself was *not* given front-page treatment in many newspapers. (Rochester's own *Democrat and Chronicle* ran it on the back of its 'D' section.) Did RIT get "lucky," as Annie suggests? Darn right we did. But that doesn't change the basic fact that this was a great story that, to some extent, appeals to a *niche* rather than a mainstream audience (soldering one's iPhone isn't for the feint of heart). It's not often that I agree with the *D&C*, but in my view, in this instance it got it right.
- This next question is also contentious: Should RIT promote a story (beyond what we've already done) concerning what some people might argue constitutes potentially illegal "hacking"? I don't know the answer—but neither does anyone who claims to, because this story has yet to shake out. Meanwhile, other groups apparently have cracked the iPhone strictly through software (no soldering required!). Is *that* an even bigger story—and one that will ultimately push "GeoHot" out of the headlines?
- Lastly on the issue of our coverage, we needed to measure our steps for a few other very important reasons that I'm unable to get into here. (Although this is a blog, I can't tell you everything. Sorry.)

In closing, I've two final points for Annie:

- Regarding another story (about an [RIT student involved in the Microsoft Imagine Cup finals](#)), you accuse us of "shameless self promotion"—yet you seem to be encouraging more of the same by suggesting we capitalize on a story in which, in your words, RIT was "lucky" to be mentioned. Sorry, but that just doesn't compute.
- Also concerning your remarks about that same story (Imagine Cup): Maybe it's just me, but I find absolutely no value in denigrating the success of other students ("Whatever's safe and looks good") in order to prop up another story, and it tends to weaken your otherwise well-stated opinions, Annie. Ultimately, I may be proven wrong about our coverage of the Hotz story—but it won't come at the expense of another RIT student for whom we're also very proud. As our president has stated, the talents of *all* our students never cease to amaze us!

Too 'Hotz'? Too cold? I say, *just right*.

1. [Anonymous \(now\)](#)  
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Thank you, Mike, for taking the time and energy to respond so thoroughly. All of your points are well-taken, including your criticisms of my own. My greatest mistake was not finding the Hotz news release that you linked to. Not having seen that, I was frustrated at the time to find no formal mention/acknowledgment of something that was all over world news. Now we can all have a good laugh at my expense. I appreciate the way you chose to handle the situation. Thank you again for the post and for correcting my misperceptions.

2. [Counterpoint: W](#)  
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[...] Mike was correct in his post, other than issuing a news release that contained a statement from President Destler, there was little we needed to do with external media. This story largely (with the exception of a few calls I fielded from the local and national media) took care of itself. My concern, however, has more to do with how we've covered the story internally through our University News Web site. The link to the Bergen Record story Mike mentions is on our Web site—although I disagree with Mike's assessment that it's in a prominent place. When I open my browser here at work, I have to scroll down before coming across the RIT IN THE NEWS section. It's in the right hand column, with no art attached to it (I don't know about everyone else, but my eye is always drawn to the art associated with our featured stories. To me, THAT is prominent real estate). Plus, that section only hosts five clips. Therefore, the story was bumped down to the archives section within a couple days. The only other mention on our Web site has been Mike's initial post—which visitors would have to dig down a couple layers in order to find. [...]

3. [Justin Thorp](#)  
Aug31

Mike, I really dig this level of transparency. I hope you do more posts like this that are a peak inside the workings of University News.

4. [Mike Saffran](#)  
Sep02

Annie, be assured that no one is laughing at your expense. Instead, we're all enjoying a good, hearty blog discussion—one that you spurred, and for that we're grateful to you. Justin, thanks, as always, for reading and commenting. And there's more on the way, so stay tuned! Happy Labor Day!

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#### About us

The Tiger Beat takes you behind the scenes with the members of [RIT University News](#)—the news and public relations division of [Rochester Institute of Technology](#). Get the "story behind the story" and an insider's look at who we are and what we do to publicize RIT news.

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