

# Did House candidate Chuck Lee buy Facebook likes?



Anna Staver, Statesman Journal 6:02 a.m. PDT July 25, 2014



(Photo: Anna Staver)

Something strange happened on Facebook this week.

The [Facebook fan page for Chuck Lee](https://www.facebook.com/chuckleoregon/timeline) (<https://www.facebook.com/chuckleoregon/timeline>), the Independent candidate for House District 25, jumped from about 170 likes to more than 9,600.

That's a steep jump.

What struck me as particularly odd were the metrics on Lee's new followers. The website stated that the "most engaged" group of Lee's new fans came from Istanbul, Turkey, and were between the ages of 18 and 24.

I compared those statistics to those of Lee's opponent, Republican radio host Bill Post, and things got weirder.

Post's campaign Facebook page has about 1,400 likes, and his active fans were people in Salem who were between 45 and 54 years old.

Then, I checked Gov. John Kitzhaber's Facebook page. He has nearly 30,000 likes, and his new followers were Portlanders between 35 and 44 years old.

The governor's page also garnered about 600 new likes in the past week — less than 10 percent of what Lee captured during the same time period.

So, what happened?

"I can confirm we've been doing some paid marketing," said Jake Weigler, a consultant hired by the Lee campaign. "We believe there is an online audience to be reached through paid marketing. I think you are seeing the results of one of those efforts."

For those of you who don't know, dozens of Internet companies offer to boost your likes or followers on social media accounts for a fee.

For example, [BuyMoreLikes.com](http://buymorelikes.com/) (<http://buymorelikes.com/>) offers 1,000 Facebook 'likes' in six days for \$15, and 50,000 Facebook likes within 35 days for \$525.

Facebook also offers its own marketing and advertising.

Users can pay to promote their pages or posts, but the company makes no specific guarantees about how many new followers its ad services will generate.

Businesses selling Facebook likes earned about \$200 million in 2013, according to data produced by Italian security researchers and blogger Andrea Stroppa and Carla De Micheli.

It's also a questionable practice.

Some of these third party firms — many of which are located overseas — open email accounts in bulk and use them to create fake profiles on social media websites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Facebook estimates that about 14.1 million of its 1.2 billion users aren't real people. The company closes fake accounts as it finds them, but new "bot" accounts are opened all the time.

It also penalizes people caught buying likes.

Facebook's [terms of service](https://www.facebook.com/help/348805468517220) (<https://www.facebook.com/help/348805468517220>) states the company could "place limits" on suspect pages that include disabling that page's like button.

A California-based company called [Boostlikes](https://boostlikes.com/facebook-likes) (<https://boostlikes.com/facebook-likes>) promises Facebook likes from real people for a premium price.

Boostlikes charges \$70 for 1,000 likes. That price jumps to \$190 if you want those people to live in the United States; 50,000 likes would cost \$1,200.

When I asked Weigler whether the Lee campaign bought its new Facebook followers through a service like this, he declined to answer.

"I can't get into how we've been doing that," Weigler said. "I'm not going to offer up our playbook or campaign strategy."

Weigler did say he doesn't believe the Lee campaign has done anything that would violate Facebook's terms of service.

He also skirted my question on the surprising following Lee seems to have among young adults in Istanbul.

"Most relevant for him are voters in the district," Weigler said. "We are, of course, appreciative that people outside of Oregon are taking an interest."

astaver@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6610 or on Twitter @AnnaStaver

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