

MACLEANS.CA

February 4, 2007 - 16:19

Police video could make Pickton internet celeb but people might not care

STEPHANIE LEVITZ

VANCOUVER (CP) - Robert Pickton bills himself as a just a simple pigman, but some Internet entrepreneurs are betting he's worth a lot more than that.

Bids on robertpickton.com are up to over US\$12,000. A letter he allegedly wrote early from prison last year can be bought for US\$150.

And if Justice James Williams so rules, video of Pickton's hours of interrogation by police could belong to anyone for free.

He's expected to decide this week on whether videotapes of Pickton's interrogation by police - first in a tiny room in Surrey, B.C., and next by an undercover police officer in his cell - should be provided to the media for publication.

Williams is presiding over Pickton's trial on six counts of first-degree murder in the deaths of Mona Wilson, Sereena Abostway, Andrea Joesbury, Georgina Papin, Marnie Frey and Brenda Wolfe.

Handing over the videotapes to the media involves weighing the need to keep the justice system accessible, lawyers and media experts say, against the possible Pandora's box that could fly open when the tapes hit the press.

"It comes down to a value judgment around is it a value in a democratic society that the public has an opportunity to see its institutions at work?," asked Terry Field, the chair of the journalism program at Mount Royal College in Calgary.

"Given the nature of the media world we live and the technology that alters that, it complicates matters."

Appetite for video content has arguably never been higher in today's Internet-driven news world and should the Pickton tapes go public, they'll be able to reach an audience far greater than viewers sitting at home waiting for the television news.

There's also the grim possibility the tapes could be downloaded and altered, moving their publication beyond furthering the justice system and into the bizarre world of murderabilia - tangible items connected to crimes.

But just because they'll be out there doesn't mean anyone will want to watch, said David Schmid, a professor at the University of Buffalo and author of *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*.

"I think the market for these types of things have reached a saturation point," he said.

"The Pickton trial is in competition with every multiple homicide trial that's gone before it."

Schmid said the Pickton trial lacks the allure of other high-profile cases because the accused isn't that interesting.

"You've got a sort of defiantly unmediagenic suspect, you've got someone who is not going to be giving many quotable quotes in the courtroom, there is not going to be a lot of shocking revelations coming from him," Schmid said.

"He is not going to do many things that are going to make him appealing to him the public."

He said public fascination with multiple murders generally comes from the disconnect between the horrors of the crime and the personalities of the alleged killers.

"But there are atrocious crimes that never get any coverage," he said.

"To a certain extent you cannot predict popular taste."

The men selling off www.robertpickton.com said they're hoping to make money on the crime, but not the name.

They said they originally intended for the site to be an information repository for people following the case, but they quickly realized that others could do a better job and the name was worth a great deal of money.

"It's the news story of the decade," said Jay, a programmer involved in building the simple site as it now stands.

"It's worth gold," he said, adding they were hoping to sell the address to a media company that would use it host all their coverage of the trial.

Field said he hopes that if the video is released, journalists won't hit the repeat button on the most salacious details from the tapes but rather use them in a contextual way to show the justice system at work.

"If you take out the certain elements of this tape and cut them in a certain way," he said, "people are going to draw conclusions only from what they've seen not from the totality of the experience of seeing the testimony."

How the video could be used isn't a judicial decision, but an editorial one, said media lawyer Fred Kozak said.

"If the jury can see them, the public should see them," he said.

Though many have been wary of the extensive coverage of the Pickton trial and its gory details, the coverage has helped turn one man's life around.

A Vernon, B.C., man turned himself in to police for a robbery he said he committed 18 months ago after watching the first few days of the trial.

He said he didn't want to have a crime he committed hanging over his head.

Copyright by Rogers Media Inc.
May not be reprinted or republished without [permission](#).

Close

This story can be found at:

<http://www.macleans.ca/topstories/news/shownews.jsp?content=n020423A>