

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant: Industrial Organic, PBC
Serial No.: 88/573,196
Filed: August 9, 2019
Mark: VELES

TM Law Office 112
Ex. Atty. Darryl M. Spruill

Applicant's Response to Office Action

Industrial Organic, PBC (“Applicant”), by its undersigned counsel, hereby responds to the Office Action dated November 19, 2019, regarding Application Serial No. 88/573,196 to register the mark VELES in connection with multi-surface cleaner. The Examining Attorney identified no conflicting marks that would bar registration, but refused registration on the ground that the primary significance of VELES to the consuming public is as merely a surname. In response, Applicant submits the following arguments, and respectfully requests that the refusal be withdrawn and the application be published accordingly.

I. Information Requirement

In response to the Examining Attorney’s information request, Applicant indicates that no individual associated with Applicant has the surname “Veles.”

II. The Primary Significance of VELES Is Not Merely a Surname

The mark VELES would not be perceived by consumers as primarily merely a surname. If the primary significance of a word is as a surname, “*and it is only that*, then it is primarily merely a surname.” *In re Eximius Coffee, LLC*, 120 USPQ2d 1276, 1278 (TTAB 2016) (emphasis in the original); *see also* TMEP § 1211.01 (“whether the primary, and only, significance of the term is a surname significance”). Here, VELES has another meaning that is

much more prominent than its rare use as a surname. A surname is certainly not the primary, let alone only, meaning of VELES.¹

A. None of the Relevant Factors Supports a Surname Refusal.

As the Examining Attorney indicates, factors considered in evaluating whether a mark is primarily merely a surname include (1) whether the surname is rare; (2) whether anyone connected with applicant uses the term as a surname; (3) whether the term has any recognized meaning other than as a surname; and (4) whether the term has the structure and pronunciation of a surname.² *Id.* at 1278 & n.2 (citing *In re Benthin Mgmt. GmbH*, 37 USPQ2d 1332, 1333-34 (TTAB 1995)); TMEP §1211.01. These factors, and any others that may be relevant, are evaluated in their totality, to determine the mark’s “impact...on the purchasing public.” *In re Eximius Coffee* at 1278. In this instance, each of those factors and all of them in conjunction clearly indicate that the impact of VELES on the purchasing public is not merely as a surname.

i. VELES Is a Rare Surname in the United States

The Examining Attorney cites 451 entries for the last name “Veles” in a directory of telephone numbers in the United States. It is impossible to tell from that evidence how many of those entries may be duplicates. *Id.* at 1279. Indeed, it is evident that some of the entries are duplicates. For example, entries 423 and 424 are both for a “Simon Veles” with the same address and phone number. Thus, the Examining Attorney’s evidence demonstrates that there are at most 450 phone numbers registered to individuals with the last name “Veles” in the United

¹ To the extent there is any doubt, however, it should be resolved in favor of Applicant. *In re Eximius Coffee* at 1278; TMEP § 1211.01.

² As the Examining Attorney noted, the fifth factor, stylization, is irrelevant here, where the mark is applied for in standard characters.

States. That is fewer than 1.5 people out of every 1 million, which means that the large majority of Americans will never know someone with the last name “Veles.”

In *In re Carlo Ferrara SA*, Serial No. 79/162,222 (August 25, 2017) [not precedential], the Board reversed a 2(e)(4) refusal of a term with no other established meaning, appearing 375 times in a surname database, where there was no showing of widely recognized public personalities with that surname. *See also In re Joint-Stock Company "Baik"*, 84 USPQ2d 1921 (TTAB 2007) [precedential] (reversing refusal, finding that 456 instances of the surname rendered it “extremely rare”); *In re Fair Isaac Germany GmbH*, Serial No. 87/424,333 (May 28, 2019) [not precedential] (reversing refusal of a term with no other meaning, finding that 523 instances of the surname rendered it rare); *In re Suphachatwong Innovation Co., Ltd.*, Serial No. 86/516,441 (November 3, 2016) [not precedential] (same, finding 333 instances rendered surname “very rare”); *In re Grand & Piano Parts Distribution B.V.*, Serial No. 85/946,217 (March 31, 2015) [not precedential] (same, finding 455 instances of surname rendered it “extremely rare”). Like the marks at issue in these cases, VELES is a very rare surname that consumers are unlikely to recognize as such.

ii. VELES is Not the Surname of Anyone Associated with Applicant.

As noted above, no founder, officer, director, executive, or employee of Applicant has the surname “Veles.”³ Accordingly, the purchasing public will not encounter any information about Applicant that will lead them to believe VELES is a surname.

³ The Examining Attorney asserts that “the proposed mark is the applicant’s surname.” Applicant assumes that this statement was included in the Office Action in error, as Applicant is a public benefit corporation called Industrial Organic, PBC, and no individuals associated with Applicant have the surname “Veles.”

iii. VELES Has a Recognized Meaning that Is Not a Surname.

In evaluating a potential surname refusal, “the examining attorney must determine the primary meaning of the term to the public.” TMEP § 1211.01(a). The primary meaning of “Veles” is the Slavic god of earth, waters, and the underworld. **Ex. A.** Indeed, this Slavic god is the meaning Applicant intended to invoke when it selected the mark VELES for its multi-surface cleaner, which utilizes waste materials (including water) as ingredients, thereby reducing environmental waste (protecting the earth) and contributing to a cycle of resource death and rebirth (symbolized by the underworld).⁴ Nearly all of the hits on the first page of Google search results for the term “Veles” are references to the Slavic god (or crafts depicting the Slavic god). None of the hits refers to any individuals with the surname “Veles.” **Ex. C.** Clearly, the primary significance of “Veles” is a reference to Slavic mythology, not a surname.

iv. VELES Does Not Have the Structure and Pronunciation of a Surname.

An Examining Attorney “may submit evidence that the public would perceive a term to have surname significance due to its structure or pronunciation.” TMEP § 1211.01(a)(vi). The Examining Attorney has not done so for VELES. Instead, the Examining Attorney has merely asserted that “the proposed mark has the look and sound of a surname” without further explanation or support. “[A]rguments about surname structure and pronunciation ‘would require more objective evidence . . . of how members of the public would perceive the structure and

⁴ “Veles” also happens to be the name of a city in North Macedonia, which recently gained some notoriety as the source of a significant amount of so-called “fake news” distributed in the United States. **Ex. B.** Applicant’s goods do not originate in Veles, North Macedonia. While Veles, North Macedonia has enjoyed a bit of recent press coverage, it remains a remote and obscure place, which the average American consumer is unlikely to associate with goods of any kind, including household cleaning products.

sound of [the applied-for mark] and whether they would be likely to perceive it as similar to the structure and sound of other surnames, common words or coined terms.” TMEP

§ 1211.01(a)(vi), *quoting In re Adlon Brand GmbH & Co. KG*, 120 USPQ2d 1717, 1724 (TTAB 2016). Moreover, the applied-for mark does not include a possessive apostrophe-s, a title, preceding initials, or any other element that might suggest grammatically or contextually that the mark was a surname. *Cf. In re Beds & Bars Limited*, 122 USPQ2d 1546, 1551 (TTAB 2017) (finding that BELUSHI’S was primarily merely a surname, in part due to its presentation in possessive form). Accordingly, nothing about the mark VELES inherently suggests that it is a surname.

As demonstrated above, none of the relevant factors weighs in favor of finding that VELES is primarily merely a surname, and Applicant respectfully requests that the 2(e)(4) refusal be withdrawn.

B. Other VELES-Formative Marks Have Not Received Surname Refusals.

Further demonstrating that VELES is not primarily merely a surname, several other marks that consist primarily or exclusively of VELES have been examined without receiving surname refusals, and have registered or been approved for registration without a claim of acquired distinctiveness. These include:

Mark	Reg. or Serial No.	Goods/Services	Basis
VELES	5,429,863	Remote control hobby model vehicles and parts and accessories therefor	1(a)
VELES	87/382,728 (abandoned due to failure to file Statement of Use following Notice of Allowance)	Beer	1(b)

Mark	Reg. or Serial No.	Goods/Services	Basis
ALA VELES	86/355,850 (abandoned due to failure to file Statement of Use following Notice of Allowance)	Audio and video recordings featuring music and artistic performances	1(b)

The term VELES is no more likely to be perceived as a surname when used in connection with multi-surface cleaner than it is when used in connection with hobby model vehicle parts, beer, or audio and video recordings.

III. Conclusion

It is submitted that the Application is in condition for publication, and such action is respectfully requested.

Date: January 28, 2020

/Jenevieve J. Maerker/
 Jenevieve J. Maerker
 Foley Hoag LLP
 155 Seaport Boulevard
 Boston, MA 02210
 Tel. (617) 832-3031
 Fax (617) 832-7000
 e-mail: jmaerker@foleyhoag.com

Exhibit A



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Veles (god)

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For the city in North Macedonia, see Veles, North Macedonia.



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Veles (Cyrillic Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian and Ukrainian: Велес; Polish: *Wiles*; Bosnian, Croatian, Czech, Montenegrin, Slovak, Slovenian: *Veles*; Ruthenian and Old Church Slavonic: Велесъ; Belarusian: Вялес, *romanized:* *Vialies*), also known as **Volos** (Russian: Волос, Влас, Власий listed as a Christian saint, Armenian: Սուրբ Վլաս; gem: Blasius; fr: Blaise; sp: San Blas; port: São Brás; it: San Biagio; croat: sv: Blaz; eng: Blase, Wallace; Greek: Άγιος Βλάσιος), is a major *Slavic god* of earth, waters, and the *underworld*. His attributes are wet, wooly, hairy (bearded), dark and he is associated with cattle, the harvest, wealth, music, *magic*, and *trickery*. Believed to be related to the Indo-European deity of *Mitra*. According to reconstruction by some researchers he is the opponent of the supreme *thunder god* *Perun*.^{[2]:211–214} As such he probably has been imagined as a *dragon*, which in the belief of the pagan Slavs is a *chimeric* being, a serpent with a bear's head and drooping hairy ears.^{[2]:141[3]:87,88} His tree is the willow much like Perun's tree is the oak.^[citation needed] No direct accounts survive, but reconstructions speculate that he may directly continue aspects of the *Proto-Indo-European pantheon*.^[citation needed]

Contents [hide]

- ↑ *Sources*
- ↑ *Etymology*
- ↑ *Enemy of Perun and storm myth*
- ↑ *God of magic and musicians*
- ↑ *Post-Christian Veles*
- ↑ *Honors*
- ↑ *See also*
- ↑ *Notes*
- ↑ *References*

Sources [edit]

Veles is one of few Slavic gods for which evidence of offerings can be found in all *Slavic nations*. The *Primary Chronicle*, a historical record of the early *Kievan Rus*, is the earliest and most important record, mentioning a god named Volos several times. Here, Volos is mentioned as god of cattle and peasants, who will punish oath-breakers with diseases, the opposite of Perun who is described as a ruling god of war who punishes by death in battle. In the later half of the 10th century, Veles or Volos was one of seven gods whose statues *Vladimir I of Kiev* had erected in his city. It is very interesting that Veles' statue apparently did not stand next to others, on the hill where the prince's castle was, but lower in the city, in the marketplace. Not only does this indicate that Veles was connected with commerce, but it also shows that worship of Perun and Veles had to be kept separate: while it was proper for Perun's shrines to be built high, on the top of the hill, Veles' place was down, in the lowlands.

A similar pattern can be observed among the *South Slavs*. Here the name of Veles appears only in *toponyms*, the best-known of which is the city of *Veles* in *North Macedonia*, over which looms a hill of St. *Elias* the Thunderer. Also, in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, a part of *Sarajevo* is called *Velesjići*^[4] and a mountain *Velez*^[5]^[*circular reference*] near Mostar, Herzegovina. Other examples are Veles in Western Serbia, Velesnica on the Danube and Velestovo in *Montenegro* and also the township of *Velestino* (Βελεστίνιο, today Φέρες), apparently bearing testimony to a Slavic layer in the settlement of Thessaly. Another debatable if not improbable example^{[2]:178} is the town of *Volosko* in *Croatia*, situated on the seashore under the peak of Mount *Učka*, nicknamed *Perun*.

Among *Western Slavs*, the name can be principally found in 15th and 16th century *Czech* records, where it means either *dragon* or *devil*.

Etymology [edit]

Presumably it is not possible to conclusively determine a definite etymology for the name of the god Veles, though there are several *Proto-Indo-European* roots that are all closely related to the nature of Veles and his domains.

One possibility is that the name derives from the Proto-Indo-European root **wel-*, meaning wool.^[6] This seems plausible, since in Slavic cosmology Veles in serpentine form is lying in a nest of black wool in the roots of the Tree of the World^{[2]:136,154} and Veles is the shepherd of the dead. *Volos* is also the Russian and Ukrainian word for "hair" and Veles is hairy in his beastly form (bear, wolf).

The Proto-Indo-European root **welg-* also means humid, wet. Nothing is more connected with Veles than humidity and wetness. His domain is down, 'y vody pod korč pot konopy' (in the water, below the tree stump and the log). That is where Veles is in his place. English word wool has its root in *Wolos* too.

There is also the Indo-European word **woltus* meaning meadow which is derived from the same root. And *Veles* is the shepherd of the dead who was imagined to browse the deceased on green lush meadows in the underworld.^{[2]:171[7]}

The name is also related to Slavic terminology for oxen, for which the South Slavs, Russians, and Poles use "bor/vol/wól".^[citation needed] Volos can also be a derivation from the same root by Eastern Slavic phonetic laws, now considered the most probable explanation for this phonetic form.^{[2]:171}

It is probably the same as *Vala*, the enemy of the Vedic thunder god *Indra* and to *Velns* (Latvian) or *Vélinas* (Lithuanian), a devil of Baltic mythology and enemy of the Baltic thunder-god *Perkūnas* (cf. Slavic *Perun*).^[citation needed]

Word Volos written in old Russian as ligature may be read Slovo b.o. which means word. Wherefrom derives the original Vedic meaning occurred in other languages of the opening chapter of the Gospel of John thus read in the beginning was Volos, and Volos was with God, and Wolos was God.

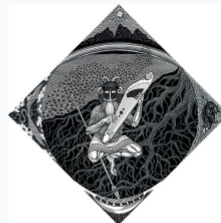
Enemy of Perun and storm myth [edit]

The Russian philologists *Vyacheslav Ivanov* and *Vladimir Toporov* reconstructed the mythical battle of Perun and Veles through comparative study of various Indo-European mythologies and a large number of Slavic folk stories and songs. A unifying characteristic of all Indo-European mythologies is a story about a battle between a god of thunder and a huge serpent or a dragon. In the Slavic version of the myth, Perun is a god of thunder, while Veles acts as a dragon who opposes him, consistent with the *Vala* etymology; he is also similar to the Etruscan underworld monster *Veltha* and to the dragon *Illuyankas*, enemy of the storm god of Hittite mythology.

The reason for the enmity between the two gods is Veles's theft of Perun's son, wife, or, usually, cattle. It is also an act of challenge: Veles, in the form of a huge serpent, slithers from the caves of the underworld and coils upwards the Slavic world tree towards Perun's heavenly domain. Perun retaliates and attacks Veles with his lightning bolts. Veles flees, hiding or transforming himself into trees, animals or people. In the end, he is killed by Perun and in this ritual death, whatever Veles stole is released from his battered body in the form of rain falling from the skies. This "storm myth", or "divine battle", as it is generally called by scholars today, explained to ancient Slavs the changing of seasons through the year. The dry periods were interpreted as the chaotic results of Veles' thievery. Storms and lightning were seen as divine battles. The ensuing rain was the triumph of Perun over Veles and the re-establishment of world order. On a deeper level, as has been said above, Perun's place is up, high and dry and Veles' down, low and wet. By

Veles

underworld, earth, waters, fertility, trickery, cattle, pasture, snakes, bears, wolves, medicine, music, and magic



Veles, Marek Hapon, 2014

Symbol	Bear, wolf, snake, dragon, owl, willow
Festivals	The Festival of Veles
Slavic equivalent	similar to <i>Flins</i> , <i>Triglav</i>
Canaanite equivalent	Baal



Probable image of Veles-*Triglav* from lower part of Zbruch 1 dol



Modern symbol of Veles, used by *Rodnovers*^[1]



The modern statue of Veles on Veliz mountain, Czech Republic



climbing up into the sphere of Perun, Veles disrupts the equilibrium of the world and needs to be put in his place. Perun does this in a fierce battle by smiting him with his lightning and drives him down into the water under the tree stub and the log and by putting him back in his place Perun restores order. Then they stop being adversaries and remain just opponents until the next time Veles tries to crawl up into Perun's realm.

The myth was cyclical, repeating itself each year. The death of Veles was never permanent, he would reform himself as a serpent who would shed its old skin and would be reborn in a new body. Although in this particular myth he plays a negative role as bringer of chaos, Veles was not seen as an evil god by ancient Slavs. In fact, in many of the Russian folk tales, Veles, appearing under the Christian guise of **St. Nicholas**, saves the poor farmer and his cattle from the furious and destructive **St. Elias** the Thunderer, who, of course, represents Perun.^[a] The duality and conflict of Perun and Veles does not represent the dualistic clash of good and evil; rather, it is the opposition of the natural principles of earth and water (Veles) against heaven/sky and fire (Perun).

The Ivanov/Toporov conception of "the key myth" of Slavic mythology has been criticized by several authors, including **Leo Klejn**^[b] and **Igor M. Diakonoff**.^[c] Many, including Klejn, pointed out that Ivanov and Toporov often tended toward unjustified generalizations and considered many of their arguments "far-fetched". Supporters of the theory, on the other hand, include **Boris Uspensky**, T. Sudnik and T. Tsiyan, and others.



"Veles" in wolf form, from *The Mythology of All Races* (1918).

God of magic and musicians [edit]

According to Ivanov and Toporov, Veles' portrayal as having a penchant for mischief is evident both from his role in the storm myth and in carnival customs of Koledan shamans. In his role as a **trickster** god, he is in some ways similar to both Greek **Hermes** and Scandinavian **Loki**. He was connected with magic. The word *volhov*, obviously derived from his name, in some Slavic languages still means sorcerer while in the 12th century Ruthenian epic *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, the character of Boyan the wizard is called Veles' grandson. Since magic was and is closely linked to music in many societies, particularly earlier ones^[*citation needed*], Veles was also believed to be protector of travelling musicians. For instance, in some wedding ceremonies in northern **Croatia** (which continued up to the 20th century), the music would not start playing unless the bridegroom, when making a toast, spilled some of the wine on the ground, preferably over the roots of the nearest tree. The symbolism of this is clear, even though forgotten long ago by those still performing it: the musicians will not sing until a toast is made to their patron deity.^[6]

Post-Christian Veles [edit]

After the advent of Christianity, Veles was split into several different characters. As a god of the underworld and dragons, he, of course, became identified with the **Devil**. His more benevolent sides were transformed to several Christian saints. As a protector of cattle, he became associated with **Saint Blaise**, popularly known among various Slavic nations as St. Vlaho, St. Blaz, or St. Vlasij. In **Yaroslavl**, for example, the first church built on the site of Veles's pagan shrine was dedicated to St Blaise, for the latter's name was similar to Veles and he was likewise considered a heavenly patron of shepherds.^[10] As mentioned already, in many Eastern Slavic folk tales, he was replaced by **St. Nicholas**, probably because the popular stories of the saint describe him as a giver of wealth and a sort of a trickster.

Honors [edit]

Veles Bastion on **Brabant Island**, Antarctica is named after the deity.^[11]

See also [edit]

- Chaoskampf**, the battle between Indo-European thunder gods and their chaotic serpentine opponents
- Golosov Ravine**—ancient Veles shrine in **Moscow, Russia**
- Jormungandr**, the world-serpent of Norse mythology
- Typhon**, primordial serpent of Greco-Roman mythology
- Velež Mountain** in **Herzegovina**
- Vritra**, brother of **Vala** in Hindu myth and enemy of **Indra**; he steals **Usas**, the rivers/waters, and **cattle**, which **Indra** must free

Notes [edit]

- ↑ On rudiments of pagan cults in Slavic folk Christianity see: (Успенский 1982)

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V · T · E	Slavic religion	[show]
V · T · E	Slavic folklore	[show]
V · T · E	Underworlds	[show]
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Exhibit B



Welcome
to Veles,
Macedonia,

News Factory
to the World.

The News in Crisis



INSIDE THE MACEDONIAN FAKE-NEWS COMPLEX

by Samanth Subramanian | photographs by Guy Martin 2.15.17



THE FIRST ARTICLE about Donald Trump that Boris ever published described how, during a campaign rally in North Carolina, the candidate slapped a man in the audience for disagreeing with him. This never happened, of course. Boris had found the article somewhere online, and he needed to feed his website, Daily Interesting Things, so he appropriated the text, down to its last misbegotten comma. He posted the link on Facebook, seeding it within various groups devoted to American politics; to his astonishment, it was shared around 800 times. That month—February 2016—Boris made more than \$150 off the Google ads on his website. Considering this to be the best possible use of his time, he stopped going to high school.

Boris isn't his real name. He prefers the anonymity because he doesn't want to break ranks with the other people in his town of Veles, in the Balkan nation of Macedonia. Nobody here wants to dwell on Trump anymore. Veles has the feel of a small community clamming up out of a suspicion that it's being talked about for all the wrong reasons.

In the final weeks of the US presidential election, Veles attained a weird infamy in the most powerful nation on earth; stories in [The Guardian](#) and on [BuzzFeed](#) revealed that the Macedonian town of 55,000 was the registered home of at least 100 pro-Trump websites, many of them filled with sensationalist, utterly [fake news](#). (The imminent criminal indictment of Hillary Clinton was a popular theme; another was the pope's approval of Trump.) The sites' ample traffic was rewarded handsomely by automated advertising engines, like Google's AdSense. An article in [The New Yorker](#) described how President Barack Obama himself spent a day in the final week of the campaign talking "almost obsessively" about Veles and its "digital gold rush."

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Within Veles itself, the young entrepreneurs behind these websites became subjects of tantalizing intrigue. Between August and November,

Boris earned nearly \$16,000 off his two pro-Trump websites. The average monthly salary in Macedonia is \$371.

WE'RE SORRY, BUT SOMETHING WE WRONG.

Maybe check out these 3D-printed speake

WATCH NOW

Boris is 18 years old, a lean, slouching youth with gray eyes, hair mowed close to his skull, and the rudiments of a beard. When he isn't smoking a cigarette, he's lighting one. He listens to a lot of gangsta rap: the Notorious B.I.G., Puff Daddy, Wu-Tang Clan; after watching *Notorious*, the 2009 biopic of B.I.G., he decided he would like to visit Brooklyn, a New York City borough he imagines overrun more by gangsters than hipsters. He is an affable raconteur, with a droll sense of humor and a clear-eyed view of himself and his town. Someday he wants to leave Veles, because of how little there is to do. You can live with your parents and have them pay for your evenings in a bar, or you can bus tables in a café. If you're a gym rat, you might work security. A few factories on the outskirts of town still offer regular employment, but nothing lavish. "We can't make money here with a real job," Boris says. "This Google AdSense work is not a real job."

At best, Boris' English is halting and fractured—certainly not good enough to turn out five to 10 articles about Trump and Clinton every day for weeks on end. Fortunately for him, the election summoned forth the energies of countless alt-right websites in the US, which manufactured white-label falsehoods disguised as news on an industrial scale. Across the spectrum of right-wing media—from Trump's own concise lies on Twitter to the organized prevarication of Breitbart News and NationalReport.net—ideology beat back the truth. What Veles produced, though, was something more extreme still: an enterprise of cool, pure amorality, free not only of ideology but of any concern or feeling about the substance of the election. These Macedonians on Facebook didn't care if Trump won or lost the White House. They only wanted pocket money to pay for things—a car, watches, better cell phones, more drinks at the bar. This is the arrhythmic, disturbing heart of the affair: that the internet made it so simple for these young men to finance their material whims and that their actions helped deliver such momentous consequences.





VELES LIES PLUMB in the center of Macedonia, on either side of the Vardar River, and its red-shingle-roofed buildings appear to be climbing the slopes of low knuckled hills. It was once a town of modest glory, turning out revolutionaries and intellectuals and alive with industry. One of its largest factories, a ceramic works named Porcelanka, employed 4,000 people. For a time, its residents recall with perverse pride, Veles was the second-most polluted town in the former Yugoslavia.

For a week in July, Boris experimented with fake news extolling Bernie Sanders. “Bernie Sanders supporters are among the smartest people I’ve seen,” he says. “They don’t believe anything.”

After Macedonia became independent in 1991, though, Veles began to decline. The factories closed; the jobs evaporated. The local soccer team, FK Borec, won so infrequently that it was dropped from the first division to the third. The town’s only movie theater folded a decade and a half ago. Its downtown withered. Briefly, in the mid-2000s, the economy shook itself awake when a few men splashed around money they’d made selling heroin in Germany and Austria, but the police soon

broke up that drug ring and Veles returned to its state of morose dilapidation.

For Boris, growing up here, Veles didn't have much to offer. His father worked for the town as a plumber. Like other kids, Boris wandered around up near the old Ottoman clock tower or down by the river, loitering in one coffee bar after another. He played soccer but later discovered that he was more proficient at the videogame version of the sport. He joined a *Counter-Strike* club: nine or 10 teenagers gathered in a room, sitting behind their laptops and shooting each other up.



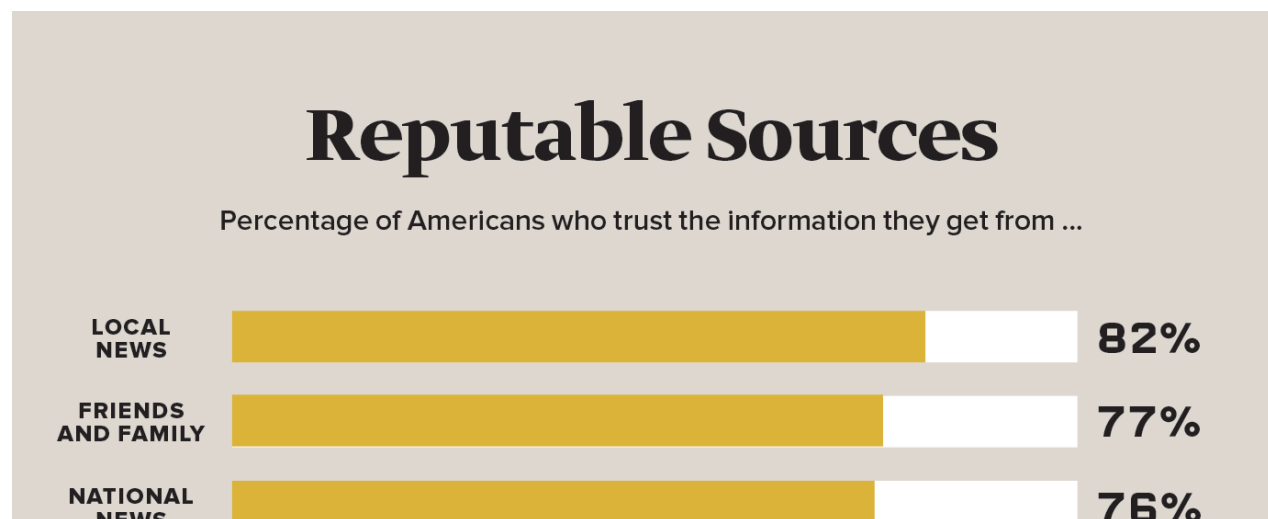
The Central Market in Veles. The town's economy declined throughout the 1990s after Macedonia gained its independence.



One day a couple of summers ago, Boris was walking to school when he saw a BMW 4 Series parked by the side of the road. “What the fuck?” he thought. “My favorite car is in this town?”

He asked around, but no one seemed to know who owned the BMW. Later, in a café, he met a *Counter-Strike* acquaintance named Aleksandar Velkovski. “Aleksandar, I saw this BMW 4,” Boris told him. Velkovski revealed that the car was his. He’d bought it, he said, with the money he made off his website.

In Veles, Aleksandar and Borce Velkovski are so renowned for the health food website they started that they’re known as the Healthy Brothers. HealthyFoodHouse.com is a jumble of diet and beauty advice, natural remedies, and other nostrums. It gorges on advertising as it counsels readers to put a bar of soap under their bedsheets to relieve nightly leg cramps or to improve their red-blood-cell count with homemade beet syrup. Somehow the website’s Facebook page has drawn 2 million followers; more than 10 million unique visitors come to HealthyFoodHouse.com every month.





SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

After seeing the BMW, Boris decided to start some websites of his own. He already knew there was money to be made off the internet; for a while, when he was 17, he'd been one of the many peons around the world laboring online for MicroWorkers.com, earning something like a tenth of a cent for liking a YouTube video or leaving a comment. Now he bought a succession of domains from GoDaddy—GossipKnowledge.com, then DailyInterestingThings.com—built basic WordPress sites, and stuffed them with sports, celebrity, health, and political news, the articles all pilfered from elsewhere. (Boris pulls out his phone and logs into WordPress to show that he does, in fact, own the sites he mentions.) When the piece about Trump slapping a man turned briefly white-hot, he sensed the intrinsic viral potential in the American election and founded NewYorkTimesPolitics.com, a website that resembled *The New York Times* homepage and carried plagiarized articles on American politics. The *Times* sent Boris a cease-and-desist order; Boris received the email when he was out somewhere, and he was so terrified that he took down the website right away, from his phone. In August, Boris set up PoliticsHall.com, and a couple of months later, he added USAPolitics.co to his portfolio. That was when the money really began to roll in.

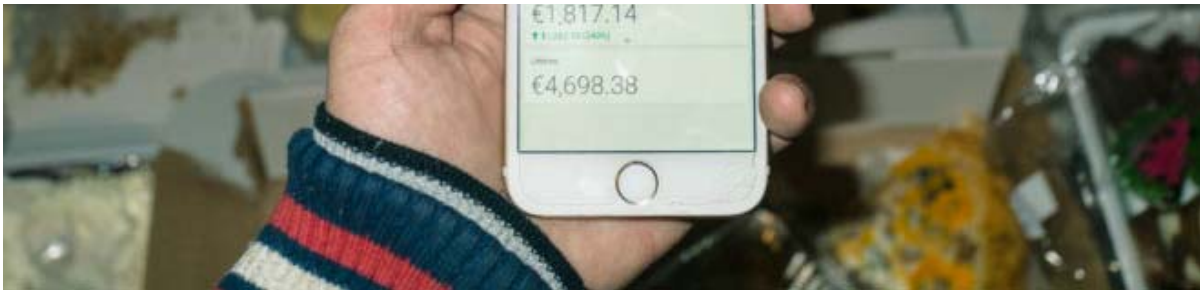
Boris developed a routine. Several times a day he dredged the internet for pro-Trump articles and copied them into one of his two websites; if JavaScript prevented an easy copy-paste, he opened a Notepad file and typed the articles out. After publishing a piece, he shared the link in Facebook groups with names like My America, My Home; the Deplor-

ables; and Friends Who Support President Donald J. Trump. Trump groups seemed to have hundreds of thousands more members than Clinton groups, which made it simpler to propel an article into virality. (For a week in July, he experimented with fake news extolling Bernie Sanders. “Bernie Sanders supporters are among the smartest people I’ve seen,” he says. “They don’t believe anything. The post must have proof for them to believe it.”) He posted under his own name but also under the guise of one of 200 or so bogus Facebook profiles that he’d purchased for this purpose. (A fake profile with a Russian name cost about 10 cents; for an American name, the price went up to 50 cents.) The most shares one of his posts ever aggregated, across various Facebook groups, was 1,200; Boris dimly recalls only that the post had something to do with Trump’s proposed wall on the Mexican border. Boris learned tricks to better monetize his websites: big ads breaking the text up, for instance, so that one in five visitors to a page would end up clicking on an ad. His RPM—revenue per 1,000 impressions—hovered around \$15, he says. He fed the beast with diligence. “At night I would make four or five posts to share the next day. When I woke up, I shared them. I went to drink coffee, came back home, found new articles, posted those articles on the website, and shared them. Then I went out with friends, came back home, found articles, and shared them to Facebook.”





Men gather in a garden shed for moonshine and winter caroling. Holding the mic is a resident who profited from political websites.



The same man shows the ad revenue he earns from his websites, which churn out (sometimes fake) content.

When his ad engines started to pay out, Boris bought himself things: new clothes, an Acer laptop to replace his old Toshiba, a vacation at a resort on Lake Ohrid. His phone carries a photographic record of the life he could briefly afford. “It was like: ‘Buy! Buy! Buy!’” At one point, practically all of Boris’ friends had set up similar websites, and they all had money to blow. As a posse, they’d go to one of Veles’ three nightclubs—Tarantino or Club Avangard or Club Drama—and order \$100 bottles of Moët to shake and spray. “I don’t drink champagne,” Boris says. “I bought it for spraying. All eyes on me!” It was nothing but the best for Boris. “Moët! Moët! Roberto Cavalli! Jack Daniel’s!” he says, making a gesture with his hand as if hailing a bartender. “It’s part of life. You must live once.”

Boris still goes to the clubs, but he says he has lost his taste for expensive things. “It isn’t interesting anymore.” Which is just as well, because on November 24, after an eruption of concern about the malign effects of fake news, Google suspended the ads from his websites. The last item Boris posted to USAPolitics.co was a poll that inquired: “Do you support immediate deportation of all criminal illegals?” In one of the Facebook groups where Boris shared the link, the post received 292 shares and 361 responses. It looked like another blockbuster from USAPolitics.co. But then the Google ads vanished, so Boris lost interest and consigned his websites to the deep oblivion of the internet.



IN MACEDONIA, WRINGING money out of web advertising is a game that long predated Trump's bid for the presidency—and will probably outlast it as well, despite Google's and Facebook's postelection attempts to crack down. Mirko Ceselkoski began to play in the early 2000s. He built seven or eight websites—about muscle cars or celebrities or superyachts, all oriented toward the American reader, because an American reader is roughly three times more valuable than a non-American one. For five or six hours of daily toil, Ceselkoski says, you can earn approximately \$1,000 a month. Many Macedonians can spare the time; the unemployment rate is around 24 percent.

Ceselkoski built seven or eight websites—all oriented toward the American reader. This made sense. In web-advertising terms, an American click is roughly three times more valuable than a non-American click.

Ceselkoski turned to coaching in 2011—first with a six-week classroom course in the Macedonian capital of Skopje, where he lives, and now online, in dense three-week modules. For around \$425, his students learn how to prepare, populate, and promote their websites. A full third of the syllabus is dedicated to the mastery of Facebook. The Healthy Brothers once took Ceselkoski's course. So did, in early 2016, a few members of the Veles squad who went on to operate pro-Trump sites. They surprised him. "I never instructed my students to write fake stories," he says. "Maybe they discovered they could get away with this kind of practice and increase their virality." He sounded like a delighted physics professor talking about how a pupil had stumbled upon a brand-new law of thermodynamics. After the election some of

Ceselkoski's students called him, panicking because Google had yanked its advertising without paying them all the money they had already earned. One young man, Ceselkoski says, believed he was owed more than \$60,000.

Ceselkoski was visiting Las Vegas around the time of the election, and Trump's victory stunned him. He thought about the website operators in Veles. "It's possible, maybe, they changed a few percentages."

Making Fake News Pay

Here's how advertisers follow you around the web—and how their money flows to fake news sites. —Davey Alba

Brands

Companies used to designate exactly where they wanted their ads to appear. Now they increasingly rely on automated advertising—a system that matches ads to anonymized profiles of consumers, based on data like what they have searched for.

Ad Tech Companies

These outfits track consumers as they browse the internet, serving ads on any site they visit—provided it hasn't been blacklisted.

Websites

Sites that traffic in hardcore violence, hate speech, or pornography tend to get blacklisted, but those with content that is less clearly objectionable are often fair game. Which is why even sites publishing fake news can profit by hosting ads based on your browsing history.

Boris will have none of that. The so-called news he and his colleagues were filching was already on American websites, heating up the

American bloodstream. How could their duplications of these articles, on their rinky-dink websites, upset the election of such a powerful country? “If Americans wanted Hillary Clinton to win, Hillary Clinton would have won. They voted for Donald Trump. Donald Trump won.” But now that everything has come to pass, Boris finds it difficult not to care about the result. “Some crazy man has won the election. Maybe the guy will start World War III.”

He sits in a coffee bar on a December afternoon, two days after a parliamentary election in Macedonia. Here too a minor pestilence of fake news swept through the campaigns. Websites run out of Serbia and Croatia alleged that the leftist opposition leader, Zoran Zaev, wanted to divide the country between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Voters got taken in; Zaev’s coalition lost, narrowly. Boris feels disenchanted with the whole process. There is too much politics in life, he thinks. “People are fighting each other. One brother is for one party, the other brother is for the other party, they argue.” He shakes his head. “The media is washing our brains, and the people are following like sheep.”

Boris’ days are now consummately unoccupied. Mostly, he and his friends convene in this coffee bar or in one of the others clustered on the same street. They always pick a table on the veranda, despite the cold, so that they can smoke and smoke. They fiddle with their phones for about the same proportion of time that they spend talking to one another. Boris hasn’t yet considered returning to school, but he thinks, vaguely, that he wants to study coding and go on to work at a company like Microsoft or Apple. First, though, he wants to construct more websites. Facebook and Google have unveiled new systems for screening out misinformation, but they’re not built for catching every low-level fib circulating around the internet. Boris won’t focus on political fake news, in all probability—but there are plenty of other topics of interest, plenty of websites from which to swipe content, and

plenty of potential readers around the world who may click in sufficient numbers to finally buy him his BMW.

Samanth Subramanian ([@samanth_s](#)) is a Dublin correspondent for *The National*.

This story is part of our special coverage of [The News in Crisis](#).

Exhibit C



“Veles”



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About 6,470,000 results (0.48 seconds)

en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Veles_(god)

Veles (god) - Wikipedia

Veles also known as Volos (Russian: Волос, Влас, Власий listed as a Christian saint, Armenian: Մուրր Վլասի; germ: Blasius; fr: Blaise; sp: San Blas; port: São ...

Symbol: Bear, wolf, snake, dragon, owl, willow Canaanite equivalent: Baal

Slavic equivalent: similar to Flins, Triglav Festivals: The Festival of Veles

Sources · Etymology · Enemy of Perun and ... · Post-Christian Veles

See results about

Veles (City in the Republic of Macedonia)

Weather: 32°F (0°C), Wind NE at 2 mph (3 km/h)

Points of interest: Mladost, Gemidzii

Veles Inc (E commerce agency in Brooklyn, NY)

2273 E 24th St, Brooklyn, NY 11229

Municipality of Veles

Veles is a municipality in central part of the Republic of Macedonia. Veles is ...

People also ask

What is Veles?

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en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Veles

Veles - Wikipedia

Veles may refer to: Veles (god), Slavic deity; Veles Municipality, in North Macedonia; Veles, North Macedonia, a city, seat of the municipality; Veles, singular of ...

www.slavorum.org › veles-the-slavic-shapeshifting-god-of-land-water...

Veles – The Slavic Shapeshifting God of Land, Water and ...

Veles or Volos is the Slavic god of fields, pastures, forests or crops, cattle, and animals. His animal form is a bear, while in Christianity he took over the role of ...

www.ancient-origins.net › myths-legends › veles-and-perun-legendar...

Veles and Perun: The Legendary Battle of Two Slavic Gods ...

Mar 24, 2016 - Veles and Perun are two deities found in the religion of the Slavs prior to the coming of Christianity. The Pre-Christian Slavs were polytheists, ...

www.wired.com › 2017/02 › veles-macedonia-fake-news

Inside the Macedonian Fake-News Complex | WIRED

Feb 15, 2017 - Within Veles itself, the young entrepreneurs behind these websites became subjects of tantalizing intrigue. Between August and November, ...

www.thoughtco.com › ... › Mythology & Religion

Veles (Volos), Slavic God of Cattle and the Underworld

Nov 27, 2019 - Veles, also known as Volos, was the God of the Underworld in pre-Christian Slavic mythology, who fought a mighty battle with the thunderous ...

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Veles | Etsy

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en.wikivoyage.org › wiki › Veles

Veles – Travel guide at Wikivoyage

Veles (Macedonian: Бенес) is a city in the Povardarie region of North Macedonia on both sides of the Vardar, the country's most important river. The city is home ...

 www.reddit.com › TheOA › comments › perun_and_veles_russian_c... ▼

[Perun and Veles, Russian cosmology : TheOA - Reddit](#)

I did some digging and there are 2 deities in pre Christian Russian tradition. Perun and **Veles**. **Veles** is associated with magic and the underground. The symbol ...

 en.wiktionary.org › wiki › veles ▼

[veles - Wiktionary](#)

See also: **Veles**, **velés**, **vêlés**, and **vêles** ... **veles** in Charlton T. Lewis (1891) An Elementary Latin Dictionary , New York: Harper & Brothers; **veles** in Gaffiot, Félix ...

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