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Subject: Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sun, 24 Oct 2004 10:07:00 GMT

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Just for fun, I'll re-tell an old story. P.T. Barnum introduces something at a show claiming it's the biggest, fastest, loudest, and whatever. He has his shills do the introduction and a few in the crowd to cheer it on. So you might want to peer behind the curtain when the show is over to find out the real story. "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!" Our good Mr. Barnum volunteers to promote this thing, just for the thrill. The effort is to be a donation to the public good. But then after the thing catches on, minor changes are made and the "new and improved" model is immediately offered for sale. Was the promotion really for the greater good? Or was it bait and switch? Now for the best part, Barnum's gadget is based on a relatively cheap main component. It's great as a bang for the buck thing, and it's pretty good and all. But it is certainly not state of the art, and is actually quite common. The really cunning move is to give the impression that it is a top-notch statement product, and that its performance is better than anything else. "Nothing else even comes close." After cultivating this kind of reputation, why bother to make something that truly rises to the level of performance of a statement product? Better to use a catchy technical sounding name and call it a breakthrough. Why bother to introduce an overhead valve version when Mr. Barnum can convince everyone that his flathead version with the flashy name is great? Secretly, he does everything he can to stop others from introducing overhead valve engines. That might cut into sales, no good in that. All the while, Mr. Barnum looks for a way to take credit for overhead valve technology so that when it hits the market, he can say he was responsible for that too. This is nothing new and shouldn't be shocking to anyone. It is a common story. It is the story of Tesla and Edison. It is the story of Marconi. So it shouldn't be surprising to find it in other businesses too. Be sure to look behind the curtain...

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