



### Flash Mobbing in California

“**R**andom acts of mass absurdity,” “public displays of pure wackiness,” “strange antics,” “inane activities”—these are just a few of the descriptors the international press is using to define the actions of a “flash mob,” the newest tech-enabled craze garnering headlines these days.

In case you're out of the loop, the basics of a flash mob are the following: 200–300 people show up in one spot suddenly and from different directions; on signal, they perform some inexplicable act for 10 minutes; and then just as suddenly, disperse. All of this has been planned and communicated ahead of time via e-mail, blogs, or online forums. In Cambridge, 200 people mobbed a Harvard bookstore in search of a card for “Bill”; in Berlin, mobsters showed up in front of the U.S. Embassy wearing funny hats and popped champagne corks toasting “Natasha!”; in Rome, they descended on a record store and asked for nonexistent titles; in Manhattan, they stood on a Hyatt Hotel balcony clapping at nothing.

Never one to be left out of the fun, of course, California has been seeing its own brand of flash mobs. In San Francisco, a mob twirled across Market Street; another played “Duck, Duck, Goose” in a city park. But the goofiest antics are taking place in a different California city: Sacramento. There, a larger, more extended flash mob, the mother ship of flash mobs, if you will, is unfolding. The wackiness there is called the recall election.

Yes, the election to recall Governor Gray Davis got underway with a bang, with all citizens invited to participate in the party pranks. At one point during the pre-election festivities, mob members were near the 200 mark and climbing. Lots of people turned out because you only need \$3,500 and 65 signatures (you could round 'em up during a couple of hours in the Home Depot parking lot) to participate. If you don't have \$3,500, you're eligible to play with 10,000 signatures, which might require spending a couple of extra weekends with a clipboard at the mall.

One aspect that gives this flash mob an edge that many others lack is the knowledge that whomever gets the most votes wins, so even someone with very few votes could end up in the governors mansion. Is that a gas? Among voters' choices are a sumo wrestler, an action hero, a billboard pinup, and a former child star. Oh, and rest easy, the adult entertainment industry will not be under-represented: both *Hustler* publisher Larry Flynt and porn actor Mary Carey have thrown their hats into the ring.

Adding to the general hilarity is the whole money thing. The state education budget has just been cut by \$3 billion, there's a \$38 billion deficit overall, and the new election will run us about \$53 million to \$66 million. And if the recall fails, Davis's campaign expenses are eligible to be reimbursed by the taxpayers, so the fun factor just snowballs.

*The Denver Post* reports of flash mobs, “While they're harmless, some say they're part of a broader phenomenon that will change the world.”

Oh, goody.

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Editor in Chief

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