The need for moderation
Encouraging civil discourse online

World Editors Forum
Bangkok, Thailand, 4 June 2013

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Interviews with 100 Online Editors, Social Media Editors, Community Managers

Survey of online comment practices and policies

Best practices and recommendations

To encourage engagement and civil discourse

July publication – look for it at www.worldeditorsforum.org
“The news industry’s future is about how citizens engage and participate in their society”
**Público, Portugal:** “I think comments make journalism more accountable. Journalists feel more touched because they get immediate feedback from readers.”

**Mail & Guardian, South Africa:** “It's really what online is about. We allow the conversation happen. That is essentially what sets us apart from the printed press - we have that to and fro of dialogue. It's one of the pillars of online journalism.”

**Seattle Times, USA:** “We have this obligation to allow people to interact and not just have it have it be a one way street. So this is a way to either have people call us out on something, provide additional info, solve problems. It happens where people have constructive conversations.”

**The Gulf News, UAE:** “It's vital to keeping a newsroom relevant.”

**Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany:** “It’s all about adding value to the reader, and through this, making the reader part of our community. It can be fascinating to get into an exchange with other readers.”
“The most thankless job in the newsroom.”

“We see the dark underbelly of the world.”

“A lethal combination of anonymity, opinion, and the safety of typing from a remote location all but guarantees that comment forums get out of hand.”
Dear everyone: Please stop sending us messages and posting on our wall about the "March Against Monsanto." We'll cover or we won't cover it, but the simply increasing the frequency of your posting on the subject will only adversely affect your desired outcome. xoxo, Dan Gibson, Editor, Tucson Weekly.
Initial Findings

- Legal issues more potential than reality at present
- Number of comments deleted vary widely
- Offensive comments more than hate speech
- But what constitutes hate speech?
- Irrelevant content/spam
- Insults directed at articles generally seen as OK
- Offense to individual commentators or groups deleted
Three broad ways to moderate

Pre-moderation
Resource issue (automation can reduce)
Delays – readers get frustrated
Greater responsibility for libel

Post-moderation by staff
Resource issue (some outsourcing)
Offensive comments remain ‘live’

Post-moderation by readers
Only respond when readers complain
Readers moderate themselves
But ceding control of content (but greater libel protection)
Emerging Best Practices

• Post guidelines for contributors on site, and use those criteria in moderation practices.

• Guidelines should encourage constructive conversation, encourage others to get involved – many of them don’t

• Educate your readers and users

• Highlight good comments

• Appoint a community manager/social media editor
Examples of Guidelines

User-Created Content
You are responsible for all content you post.

The Site and Digital Applications may include comments capability, bulletin boards, discussion groups and other public areas or features that allow feedback to The Economist and interaction between users and The Economist representatives ("Forums"). While The Economist does not control the information/materials posted to Forums by users (the "Messages"), it reserves the right (which it may exercise at its sole discretion without notice) to delete, move or edit the Messages and to terminate your access to and use of the Forums.

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- Post, link to or otherwise publish any Messages that infringe copyright;
- Post, link to or otherwise publish any Messages that are illegal, libellous, defamatory or may prejudice ongoing legal proceedings or breach a court injunction or other order;
- Post, link to or otherwise publish any Messages that are abusive, threatening or make any form of personal attack on another user or an employee of The Economist;
- Post Messages in any language other than English;
- Post the same Message, or a very similar Message, repeatedly;
- Post or otherwise publish any Messages unrelated to the Forum or the Forum's topic;

Home | Comments Guidelines

SOMETHING ON YOUR MIND?
We welcome as much interaction and vibrant discussion between our readers as possible -- but we do want the website to be a mature and thought-provoking environment, so some guidelines apply for posting comments.

1. All comments first have to be approved by the editorial team before they appear on the website. This may take anything from one minute to 24 hours.

2. Stick to debating the issues and respect other people’s views and beliefs. Comments launching personal attacks or that are hurtful and insulting will not be accepted.

3. Keep your comment as brief as possible: up to 560 words maximum. If you want to refer to an article on another website, place a link to that article in your comment, do not paste the whole article into your comment.

4. When you have finished crafting your comment, read it again before posting it. Consider whether others will understand your arguments. Something that you meant to be satirical or humorous might not be clear to another reader. Also, take into consideration that your words will remain on the internet for a very, very long time, if not forever.

5. A swearword in the right spot can work well, but gratuitous profanity won’t do. If you really have to swear, make sure it’s justified.

6. Don’t write your whole comment in capital letters only.

7. Comments that contain racist, sexist or homophobic remarks -- or that may be interpreted as such -- won’t make it on to the Mail & Guardian Online.
Highlighting good comments

1155 Comments

The knob  South Axford, nh
Magnificent piece that has brought together so much of the new and old media as to have defined for the first time the parameters of the future of journalism. What to call it? "Chroniclism?" The presentation of news and analysis will never be the same.
Dec. 21, 2012 at 12:37 a.m. · RECOMMEND 211 ·

bob  bk
As a skier, I was held spellbound while reading, asking myself what would I have done had I been there. The risks of skiing are always outweighed by the uniqueness to be juxtaposed to nature and thankful that only a tiny fraction of the population can experience this feeling. It must be clearly understood that no one (real skier) thinks long about the possibilities that exist that these tragic figures experienced or they wouldn’t venture onto skies. As a survivor, the young woman in this story probably asks herself from time to time, was it fate that spared her the same fate that her comrades experienced.
Dec. 21, 2012 at 1:09 a.m. · RECOMMEND 23 ·

Colin  Upstate CA
NYT, you really outdid yourselves. As a Tahoe-based backcountry skier and climber, I’ve seen so many incidents coverage in a sensationalistic, shoddy manner. This piece was not only groundbreaking in terms of multimedia presentation, but extremely well-researched and written.
Should journalists participate/respond?

Many community managers say they would like journalists to participate, but they generally do not.

Some do not want journalists to participate – that’s the reader’s area, staff shouldn’t get involved.

In some markets, journalists commenting can put them in danger.

Anonymity?

Some editors say you have better comments if you require real names, but not easy – or even desirable.

Anonymous people more free to comment
Difficult to check if names are real
People create extensive online identities (Twitter handles)
Log-in via Facebook and other social platforms – do you really want to do this?
Thank you!

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