

Managing news media conversations in today's online environment

The [2016 Global Online Commenting Report](#) confirmed widespread dissatisfaction with the abusive tone and poor quality of many online conversations, which saw some news organisations abandon comments below articles altogether or shift conversations to Facebook.

The report, from the World Editors Forum (WEF) explores best practices for online comment moderation to generate audience loyalty and revenue and manage conversations with their audiences in an increasingly toxic online environment.



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The three-month survey of 78 organisations in 46 countries noted that the majority of editors surveyed (82%) are persisting with comments, most in the hope that a technical solution will emerge to help newsrooms better manage and moderate conversations on their own sites.

The report, which can be accessed online or downloaded free, set out to update the 2013 study, [Online Comment Moderation: Emerging Best Practices](#), and find examples where news organisations are succeeding in promoting constructive conversations with their audiences, building loyalty and making money.

Other findings

- Closing the comment section remains a strong consideration due to quality issues, the cost of moderation, legal liability and lack of use.
- A handful of news organisations maintain a vibrant constructive commenting community through consistent investment in comment moderation and are reaping the benefits in terms of reader loyalty and revenue.
- Most of the news organisations surveyed say comments are important, “adding to the debate” (53%), “providing ideas and input for future stories” (53%) and “encouraging diversity of opinions” (47%).
- Specific laws concerning the liability of reader comments and hate speech are emerging. Different interpretations of ‘freedom of speech’ and its limits, and the country’s stage of democratic development influence the approach to managing comments.

Despite the challenges, many news organisations continue to seek ways to engage and solicit comments using best practices such as:

- Revisiting their mission and making commenting a priority.
- Reducing the number of stories open for comments, enabling tighter, focused moderation and rewarding good commenter behaviour.
- Continuously looking for better technological solutions.
- Building a community and incorporating comments into content.