

Moderating social media



What does this cover?

This document is meant to offer guidance to volunteers who manage social media; i.e. how to engage with users and deal with negative or abusive comments. It can be applied to social media, networks, forums, blogs, websites and message-boards – essentially any interactive online space.

How to engage online

The internet has become a more socially interactive place, where people can network and share content with one another. People are able to have conversations about their interest, or an organisation, without a particular brand telling them what to think.

How to moderate

Moderators should monitor social media regularly. Engagement keeps a community enthused. If not monitored sites can quickly become filled with spam, offensive or negative comments and drive away the genuine user.

Effective engagement relies on transparency with the ability to 'give up' control, i.e. enable users to decide on discussions and choose their own direction/topic/tone. This is liberating for the user and can have huge benefits for the organisation – if we get a good peer rating, that goes far further than paid-for advertising and people will remain loyal to us whilst spreading positive word of mouth.

There are also downsides – negativity, trolls, spammers and abusive commentators. More on this below.

A few basic rules on moderation:

- Always be transparent and open and try to enable healthy, open debate even if it is critical of the organisation.
- Whilst abusive or offensive comments should not be tolerated, there is a difference between negative comments and abusive comments – see below.
- Spam should always be removed and repeated offenders blocked.
- Advertisements which are not part of an agreed partnership promotion should be removed, though the moderator should assess the situation and as necessary politely point the advertise to the correct channel, or inform them advertising is not accepted on this site.
- There should be short and clear behaviour guidelines on the site. No-one wants to read 100s of rules – a template message is included below.

How to deal with negative or critical comments

If a user is posting negative comments these should be treated with caution, but not removed. If a forum only has positive comments, genuine discussion is limited and it becomes a branding exercise for the organisation - this is definitely not the point of online forums.

Criticism helps us learn and if it is done in a constructive way then it shouldn't be a problem. In most cases when negative comments are made, other members or users will defend the organisation and a healthy debate will ensue. This happens all the time on the Ramblers facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ramblers>).

The moderator should monitor negative comments, however not take action unless it threatens to

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dominate the entire site, in which case you need to review why people are being so critical. Is there truth in what people are saying? Perhaps this should be passed to the group, area or Ramblers staff to look into?

If negative commenting is inaccurate, then it is important to add content which resolves inaccuracies or adds an alternate view. Alternatively the moderator can ask a 'friendly' user to post a comment with a different viewpoint, or a new discussion topic.

How to deal with trolls

Unfortunately online 'trolls' exist. These are people who are repeatedly negative and their negativity can be at best off-putting and at worst offensive.

Often the best way to deal with trolls is to attempt to engage with them, for example if they have the wrong impression about an organisation, state this in a friendly way and try to help them engage more positively. It may work – or it's quite likely that they will continue to be rude, negative and, well, trollish!

Unless they are offensive or abusive they should not be blocked or removed. You will find in the majority of cases other (positive) members will engage with the trolls, or if you ignore them, eventually they will give up and go away. On the Ramblers facebook page many trolls have been dealt with in this way – most have given up or in a few rare cases, become positive members!

How to deal with abusive or offensive comments

Abusive comments include offensive, abusive, obscene or discriminatory comments, personal attack and incitements to violence. They should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

If abusive or offensive comments are made, the moderator should remove the comments immediately. Most social networks will enable you to do this in an easy way, for example facebook will give you several options: hide the post, delete the post or ban the user.

If the user offends repeatedly, or it's obvious they are a spammer, consider blocking them but be transparent and consistent. Never ban someone just for being critical or having a controversial opinion! It is the best way to alienate people. Assess the comments against your behaviour guidelines.

Behaviour guidelines

This can be adapted as appropriate. For example on forums such as Facebook, it might only be necessary to include the first point.

This is your space - a place to share your passion for walking and tell us your views. In order to keep it a friendly place, we have a few guidelines on appropriate behaviour. We reserve the right to remove posts and comments that violate these guidelines.

- *Be polite and courteous. Offensive, abusive, obscene or discriminatory comments, personal attack and incitements to violence will be deleted. Repeat offenders and spammers will be banned.*
 - *Please stay on topic. Don't add comments about something unrelated to what the original post is about*
 - *Provide appropriate explanatory context for posted links, photos, and videos.*
 - *Do not solicit or market products.*
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