

NICK DENTON

To All of Edit at Gawker Media



Nick Denton
7/20/15 12:28pm



The Managing Partnership as a whole is responsible for the Company's management and direction, but they do not and should not make editorial decisions. Let me be clear. This was a decision I made as Founder and Publisher — and guardian of the company mission — and the majority supported me in that decision.

~~This is the company I built. I was ashamed to have my name and Gawker's associated with a story on the private life of a closeted gay man who some felt had done nothing to warrant the attention.~~ We believe we were within our legal right to publish, but it defied the 2015 editorial mandate to do stories that inspire pride, and made impossible the jobs of those most committed to defending such journalism.

I'm sorry also that Jordan Sargent, reporting this story impeccably despite a personal drama, was exposed to such traumatizing hatred online, just for doing his job. And I'm sorry that other editors and writers are now in such an impossible position: objecting to the removal of a story that many of them found objectionable.

The company promotes truth and understanding through the pursuit of the real story — and supports, finances and defends such independent journalism. That is and remains its mission, and this story was in violation of it.

We pride ourselves on pushing boundaries and know that every story requires a judgment call. There was strong internal disagreement on whether the right judgment was made. I believe it was not and could not defend it.

~~Were there also business concerns? Absolutely. The company's ability to finance independent journalism is critical. If the post had remained up, we probably would have triggered advertising losses this week into seven figures.~~ Fortunately, though, I was only aware of one advertiser pausing at the time the decision to pull the post was made; so you won't be able to pin this outrage on advertising, even though it is the traditional thing to do in these circumstances.

No, I was thinking in the broadest terms about the future of the company. The choice was a cruel one: a management override that would likely cause a beloved editorial leader to resign on principle; or a story that was pure poison to our reputation just as we go into the Hogan trial.

It was such a breach of everything Gawker stands for, actually having a post disappeared from the internet. But it was also an unprecedented misuse of the independence given to editorial.

Under Tommy's leadership, Gawker and other sites have done more ambitious reporting. There have been many scoops we are indeed proud of: those arising from the Sony email hack, for instance, or the Bill O'Reilly or Hillary Clinton exposés. But even the best of our stories fail to get credit, in part because of Gawker's reputation for tabloid trash, given another lift by the unjustifiable outing of a private individual in turmoil, in front of a potential audience of millions.

That post wasn't what Gawker should stand for, and it is symptomatic of a site that has been out of control of editorial management. Our flagship site carries the same name as the company, and the reputation of the entire company rests on its work. When Gawker itself is seen as sneering and callous, it affects all of us.

From recent research, it is clear that the Gawker brand, for both flagship website and the company, is both confusing and damaging. A friend of the sites attests:

"First thing I'd say is being called Gawker is a big problem - all their other sites are more advertiser-friendly than Gawker itself. All the other sites are innovative, sharp, have a focused point of voice but not too snarky. Gawker itself is too snarky for me to recommend to advertisers, too risky. They're really bitchy. The other sites are bitchy too but with Gawker itself it feels like it's bitchy without a reason."

The Hogan case has shown we can't escape our past, and I can't escape Gawker. Of the site's qualities, some of its best and most of its worst were mine: the desire of the outsider to be feared if you're not to be respected, *nip the ankles till they notice you*; contempt for newspaper pieties; and a fanatical belief in the truth no matter the cost. It is a creature of my own making. And even if it's been seven years since I edited Gawker, I still have to represent it. Heather does in court and I do in the press. But not this time: for the first time that I can remember, I cannot stand by a story, or just agree to disagree, or keep silent.

This Geithner story was legal, but it could not be justified to colleagues, family members and people we respect. Nor was there any way to explain it to journalists and opinion-makers who decide whether we deserve the great privilege of the profession, the First Amendment that protects our most controversial work. The episode had the potential to do lasting damage to our reputation as a company, and each of our own personal reputations.

The insistence the post remain up despite our own second thoughts: that represents an extreme interpretation of editorial freedom. It's an abuse of the privilege. And it was my responsibility to step in to save Gawker from itself, supported by the majority of the Managing Partners.

This is a one-time intervention, I trust, which will prompt a debate about the editorial mission, and a restoration of editorial independence within more clearly defined bounds.

To any that resign over the deep-sixing of the Geithner story, and to any that find a gentler editorial mission too limiting: I respect the strength of your convictions. This is a decision you're taking to preserve principles you believed I still shared. And since you were abiding by a policy we had not formally superseded, we will treat all resignations as being constructive dismissal, subject to severance.

We need a codification of editorial standards beyond *putting truths on the internet*. Stories need to be true *and* interesting. I believe we will have to make our peace with the idea that to be published, those truths should be worthwhile.

~~And some humane guidelines are needed — in writing — on the calculus of cruelty and benefit in running a story. Everybody has a private life, even a C-level executive, at least unless they blab about it. We do not seek to expose every personal secret — only those that reveal something interesting. And the more vulnerable the person hurt, the more important the story had better be.~~

The editorial ethos of Gawker needs a calibration more than a radical shift. Gawker needs to keep being Gawker. If you're wondering whether a more explicit editorial policy will turn us into some generic internet media company, I'd say no: I see Gawker Media occupying a space on the online media spectrum between a stolid Vox Media and a more anarchic Ratter; close to the edge, but not over it.

As Heather says: *Keep doing the great stories. Keep writing on the edge. Just make sure you're proud of it. Make sure people you respect can be proud of it.*

At 1pm, Heather and I will come to the 4th Floor to take questions and criticism from New York editors and writers. At 12.30 on Tuesday, we will hold an all-hands meeting again on the Fourth Floor, with out-of-town editors included and other people who are getting back to town. The Managing Partners will be present.

Last week's story — and the drastic reaction — cannot become a habit. We are open to a full debate on editorial independence — and the evolved editorial mission that must define it. There are also some ideas about governance floating around. There's plenty to discuss, but hopefully not too much text to write: we don't need a bureaucracy; but we do need some clarity.

This is a company built on stories: from the very first gadget recommendation on Gizmodo in 2002; through to the Tom Cruise video that marked a newsier Gawker in 2008; the iPhone 4 story that made Gizmodo and broke its staff in 2010; to the heyday of the sensational scoop in 2013, when Gawker and Deadspin revealed both Rob Ford and Manti Teo in their lurid glory. This story, and the aftermath, look like a low-point right now. But it can also be the catalyst for necessary change. Gawker's best stories are ahead of it.



Charlie Jane Anders · Nick Denton

7/20/15 12:53pm

Hey Nick, I too was ashamed and horrified by the Geithner story, which I felt was an unconscionable attack on a public citizen who had done nothing wrong. At the same time, I feel like there had to be a way to have a conversation about changing the editorial direction of the company without another public bloodbath. If it's true that you've had concerns for over a month, I wish you'd found a way to address them publicly before now.



Annalee Newitz · Charlie Jane Anders

7/20/15 12:58pm

I agree with Charlie. It feels like this turned into a war when it could have been a debate.



OhJustSomeGuy · Charlie Jane Anders

7/20/15 1:15pm

I think a lot of us bystander readers are sympathetic to your concerns but would like to know why *none* of you were willing to comment publicly about the original story until after Gawker's leadership took the action that you felt

affected you personally. It's a lot harder to take your side — which I would be naturally inclined to do — when any principles that were offended by the post were so publicly silent until after the post was removed.



Annalee Newitz Annalee Newitz

7/20/15 1:25pm

I should add that I told Nick via email that I didn't like the story after it went up. I didn't ask him to remove it, but I did say in no uncertain terms that I felt that the story was a condemnation of gay people, as well as people who hire sex workers. Neither of which are groups I think deserve condemnation.



Charlie Jane Anders OhJustSomeGuy

7/20/15 1:26pm

I honestly try to stay focused on making io9 as good as I can possibly make it. I only have so much bandwidth and mental energy, and I usually think the best statement I can make is to make io9 something that speaks for itself.



Lohan's Labia Nick Denton

7/20/15 1:03pm

I work for a media outlet, and the thing that blows my mind to no end is that the Gawker editors literally believe that they can publish absolutely anything without blowback or consequences from the people who cut their checks. As per usual at Gawker, this was handled in clusterfuckerific fashion, but the nonsensical 'principles' of the editors is beyond comprehension. A plague on both your houses, really.



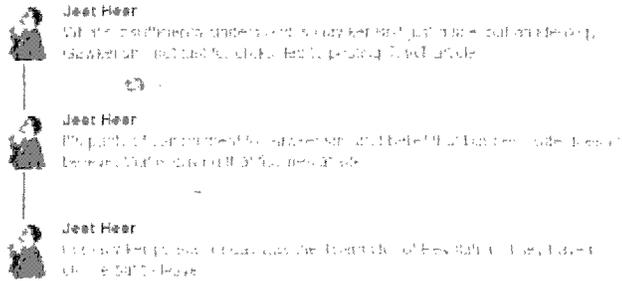
The Homework Ogre Lohan's Labia

7/20/15 1:20pm

The thing is, the post in question was so squarely within the stated-but-not-exhaustively-articulated mission that Nick himself has either repeatedly given in interviews about Gawker over the years or implicitly approved through the repeated publication of questionable posts — that there's no such thing as privacy, hitting figures high up the chain in media outfits is what we do, involuntary outing isn't really all that bad — that it's hardly surprising that Craggs, Read and Sargent believed they could post the article in question with zero consequences from the business side. In a lot of ways, it was the Ur-

Gawker post, and thus I'm sure Editorial felt they'd have Nick's support. That no longer jibes with the current reality of the company (i.e., run by a board of individuals whose interests do not necessarily reflect those of Nick Denton on any given day), and this is the result.

TNR's Jeet Heer summed this up better than I could:



burner6969420 Nick Denton
7/20/15 12:49pm

Still pretty tone-deaf, especially this portion of a sentence:

story on the private life of a closeted gay man

Which is a thing that you have no idea of the validity of. Asserting not only that he's 'gay' but also 'closeted' is pretty irresponsible. You have no idea what goes on in this man's private life. Inserting 'closeted' and 'gay' into that sentence is entirely superfluous, as you could just as easily have said 'story on the private life of any person'. You seem to still think that it's somehow salacious that he might be gay or closeted.



JaniceWaffle Nick Denton
7/20/15 1:41pm

Why did Sargent, and the editorial team, think it was okay to go after Geitner, "who some felt had done nothing to warrant the attention," instead of outing the porn star? HE is the one who did wrong, and now Geitner's life is ruined because Gawker IS bitchy and pithy. It may have been perfectly legal for Gawker to run the story, but morality and responsibility must be factored in as well, and you failed spectacularly at both.



imaginaryfriend · Nick Denton

7/20/15 1:29pm

Translation: Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.