

EXHIBIT B

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'We Need Some Limits': A Very Brief Q&A With Gawker Founder Nick Denton

BY ZACH SCHONFELD 7/23/15 AT 2:43 PM

For nearly a week, Gawker has been in crisis mode.

A widely reviled story about a Condé Nast executive's private life—which was published July 16 and pulled by founder Nick Denton the following day—set the spark. Two top editors have resigned. The rest of the staff is seething. And the timing couldn't be worse: Gawker is in the middle of a \$100 million lawsuit over a Hulk Hogan sex tape and also rather busy moving offices.

Denton, the British entrepreneur who founded his flagship gossip blog out of a SoHo apartment in 2003, seems to acknowledge Gawker's identity crisis. Once, the philosophy was to publish anything, however lowbrow or scathing. Now, he tells Newsweek, "we need some limits." Gawker once preached the gospel of total editorial freedom. In this case, Denton didn't hesitate to interfere with his staff's editorial judgment—or to remind them of business concerns.

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We spoke with the Gawker founder by phone on Wednesday afternoon. He talked about Gawker's present state, the meaning of editorial freedom and the radioactive blog post that sparked this mess in the first place.

How are things at Gawker right now?

I think they're settling down. This is day seven since the story was published. I think yesterday [Tuesday] was the day of maximum drama.

In light of what has happened over the past several days, do you regret interfering with the post on Friday?

You know, I've heard so much about this. I'm not going to get into it.

You don't want to talk about that?

I'm not going to give anything, I'm not going to add anything more. You can find plenty of stuff that I've written where I say, this is the right decision. It was a difficult decision, but it was the right decision.

It looks like there's a bit of a revolt happening at Gawker right now, and a lot of the writers don't have much faith in you. What is your response to that?

We're meeting with the writers tomorrow. I'm not going to add any fuel to those flames. They're obviously understandably angry. They published a story that met with universal condemnation. The site lost its editor-in-chief, who resigned over the story. The writers have been used to... They had the license to publish absolutely anything under the guise of editorial freedom. And we need some limits.

That's very different from how you've spoken in the past.

In the more distant past, maybe.

You no longer believe in full editorial freedom for your staff?

I'm really not sure about the direction of your questions. I absolutely believe in editorial freedom for the staff to pursue worthwhile stories. This is not a worthwhile story. The editorial freedom is a privilege, and it's a privilege that is supported by the business. And it's protected by the First Amendment. And it is too important to waste on outing a private individual and taking relish in the story and the blow-by-blow of his exchanges with an escort.

You think the condemnation over that story was justified?

I shared their distaste for the story. The story itself was not... A lot of writers on Gawker and on the other sites are embarrassed about it. And they're angry that the post was taken down. Both of those emotions at the same time.

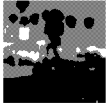
I actually have to get going. If you email me, if you have anything else, just email me, and I'll try to give you a response in writing, if that's OK.

[Note: At this point, Denton abruptly ended the interview but offered to answer additional questions via email. We've sent over questions and will update if we hear back.]

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MEDIA

2 Gawker Editors Resign Over Article's Removal

By RAVI SOMAIYA JULY 20, 2015

The executive editor of Gawker Media and the editor of its flagship site Gawker resigned on Monday after last week's removal of a controversial article about a media executive.

The article, which was widely condemned after it was posted Thursday night, had accused the married male executive of seeking, via text message, to pay for sex with a gay escort. It was removed on Friday and Gawker's founder, Nick Denton, said in a statement posted on the site that he regretted publishing the article.

In an email posted on Gawker on Monday, Tommy Craggs, the executive editor, said that companies had threatened to withdraw advertising from the site because of the article. He also said he had told other senior executives, known as the managing partners, that he would be forced to resign if they voted to remove the post.

It sent a message, he said, that his responsibility as executive editor was meaningless, and that "true power over editorial resides in the whims of the four cringing members of the managing partnership's Fear and Money Caucus."

As for the merits of the removed article, Mr. Craggs wrote, "This isn't the place to debate the merits of that story, other than to say that I stand by the post."

In his own email, also posted on Gawker, Max Read, the site's editor, described the article's deletion as an "unacceptable and unprecedented breach of the editorial firewall" which "turns Gawker's claim to be the world's largest independent media company into, essentially, a joke."

Mr. Denton, in response to the resignations, said in a statement to the editorial staff:

“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.”

The reaction to the resignations on social media ranged from current and former Gawker staff members lamenting that Mr. Craggs and Mr. Read would no longer be with the company to puzzlement that the two would resign over a story many found to be misguided. Greg Howard, a staff writer for the Gawker Media sports site Deadspin, which Mr. Craggs edited before becoming executive editor, said on Twitter: “Craggs is the best editor and ally I’ve ever known or seen or heard of, and losing him when we need him most is the worst possible thing.”

Plaintiff's Trial Exhibit 462

11/19/2015

Founder of Gawker Media Nick Denton: "...in this particular instance, the judgment call was wrong, and I had it reversed."

Today on *CNN's Reliable Sources*, Founder of Gawker Media **Nick Denton** joined host **Brian Stelter**. They discussed the recent events at Gawker which led to the resignation of former executive editors Tommy Craggs and Max Read, the changes Gawker is making, and Denton offering his staff members a chance to leave if they dislike the new direction of the company.

Reliable Sources airs Sundays 11 a.m. to noon (ET).

Video & Text highlights and a full transcript from the show are available below.

MANDATORY CREDIT for reference and usage: "CNN's RELIABLE SOURCES"

VIDEO:

Meltdown at Gawker Media: what now?



TEXT HIGHLIGHTS:

Denton on the departure of Gawker's top editors, Max Read and Tommy Craggs: "Both Max Read and Tommy Craggs are men of considerable principle and sometimes inflexible principle. They resigned over this particular issue. I don't think it was really a story worth resigning over. I don't think this was the particular hill to die on. I value their passion and their commitment to independent journalism. But it has to go hand in hand with trust from me in our editors to make judgment calls. And in this particular instance, the judgment call was wrong, and I had it reversed."

Denton on the types of stories Gawker will continue to publish: "We will continue to publish stories [Huik Hogan story] like that. I'm proud that we defend stories and we publish stories that many other media organizations will not touch, not because they're bad stories, but because they're fearful of the consequences. Somebody who is a public figure, who talks about their life, their personal life, who is interviewed by journalists, they don't get to say - to us at least - they don't get to say, 'oh, you can't ask questions about my personal life. You can't ask this particular question.' A lot of the time, journalists go along with the P.R. campaigns of celebrities. We don't, and we won't."

Denton on the changes Gawker Media plans to make: "I think we could calibrate a bit. The company is no longer the fly-by-night blog shop that it was. We're moving into new headquarters tomorrow on Fifth Avenue, north of 14th Street. The company has more than 100 million global readers per month. It is one of the four successful online media companies to emerge from the last few years."

Denton on advertiser pressure not affecting the editorial structure: "We have never, and we will never take down a story because of an advertiser's pressure. We are committed to running stories, the real story, and the story behind the story, precisely because that's what attracts our audience. That's what people come to us for. And the advertisers who come to us, they come for that audience. The editorial independence of the company is not just a principle. It's the core of our mission. It's the core of the company. And it's the core of our business."

Denton on offering staff a chance to leave and how many he believes will go: "This weekend, yes, we're offering both the staff members on Gawker.com and senior editorial management a chance to leave if they don't like the future direction of the company, as I have indicated. I don't know [how many staff

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RT @bleiningercnn Congratulations Tony Maddox &
@CNNFreedom! You make @CNN so proud
http://t.co/VJYj6NL6TO



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17

@CNNFreedom + @cnni Tony Maddox Honored by
@StateDept as #Trafficking in Persons Report Hero
cnn.it/1JLcAqE http://t.co/ktsU13dWEu



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RT @StateDept @JohnKerry Not only is this a fight we
must attempt - it is a fight we absolutely have to
win #EndSlavery #npy.tv/1gZF7jgp



11/19/2015
11:58 AM
17

RT @StateDept Secretary @JohnKerry honors

member will leave? I think probably fewer than one might think given the amount of discontent expressed last week. When it comes down to it, people have to make up their minds. Do I want to work at Gawker Media or do I want to work at some other company? And we are committed to producing the kind of journalism that I think the boldest and freest writers of the Web want to write. And so I believe that most people will actually want to stay.”

FULL TRANSCRIPT:

THIS IS A RUSH FDCH TRANSCRIPT. THIS COPY MAY NOT BE IN ITS FINAL FORM AND MAY BE UPDATED.

BRIAN STELTER, CNN HOST Welcome back.

Today, big changes are coming to *Gawker Media*. It's the no-holds-barred news and gossip site that owns blogs like *Jezebel*, *Deadspin*, *Gizmodo*, and its flagship, *Gawker*.

There's been nothing short of a revolt at *Gawker* this week. I have never seen anything like this before, with yelling and finger-pointing at staff meetings, and now the possibility of more resignations. So let me back up and tell you what happened. The site posted a shocking story earlier this month about a married media executive who is related to a former Obama administration official. And it talked about how he was allegedly attempting to hire a gay escort. The escort apparently blackmailed him.

Now, this whole story, it went online, and the negative feedback was immediate and overwhelming, with critics using terms like vile and repugnant to describe the story. And, as you can tell, we're not naming the person. We're not even going to show the blog post. I just - it's just not appropriate. But you can see here some of the reaction to it. The next day, *Gawker* founder Nick Denton chose to pull the post, delete it, over the strong objections of the entire editorial staff.

So, this week, his two top editors resigned. And more writers might jump ship in the coming days. This has ever gotten the Taiwanese 3-D animation treatment. It depicts the boundaries between church and state, news, and advertising being crushed in this case. As you may know, *Gawker* is already facing a \$100 million lawsuit from the wrestler Hulk Hogan. And the company is trying to make the transition from the blog world, where really anything goes, to a more mature media business. That's fundamentally what this is about.

So, if *Gawker* is not a snarky, no-hold-barred gossip site anymore, what is it? Nick Denton is here to tell us. He's the founder and CEO of *Gawker Media*. Nick, welcome back to the show.

NICK DENTON, FOUNDER, GAWKER MEDIA Good to see you, Brian.

STELTER This blog post went up on a Thursday night. Did you read it ahead of time?

DENTON No, I didn't.

STELTER Did you know about it?

DENTON I did know about it. I knew that the team at *Gawker* and Tommy Craggs were working on a story.

STELTER How could you have not insisted on reading it before it was published on your Web site?

DENTON I have to say, I expected that it would take more time, that it would actually go some time on the Friday. I was surprised.

STELTER So you thought you would have time to read it? You would thought you would be involved?

DENTON I thought that there would be more time for the editorial team to discuss it before moving forward with the story. But I didn't see the point of the story as it was described to me. I made that clear. And when I actually saw the story later on, it was very, very clear, not just from the universal reaction, which was condemnation from our peers.

STELTER Right.

DENTON But anybody with any kind of humanity could see that this was not a story that was worth doing.

STELTER So you decided to take it down. There were reports there was a vote among your business leaders, and that most of them supported you. Why was it put up to a vote?

DENTON This was my decision. I ordered the post taken down.

(CROSSTALK)

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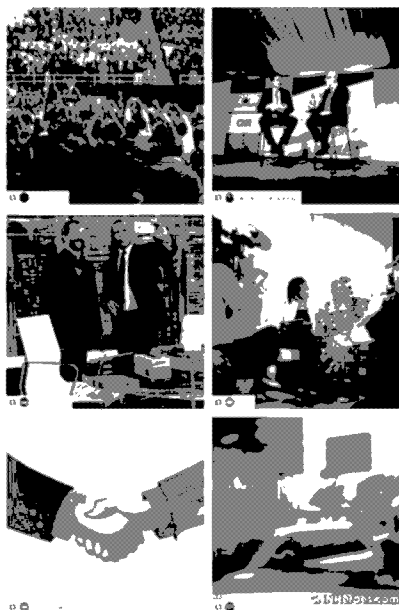
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July 2015

June 2015

May 2015

April 2015

March 2015

February 2015

January 2015

December 2014

November 2014

October 2014

STELTER So it wasn't a vote?	September 2014
DENTON The colleagues - my executives supported me in my decision - but it was my decision. I am the founder of the company. I was the editor of <i>Gawker.com</i> . I am the guardian of the editorial ethos of the company. This was counter to what I want us to be doing. And therefore, I had it taken down.	August 2014
	July 2014
	June 2014
STELTER But <i>Gawker</i> sort of has this reputation as being a place where anything goes. If it's true, you publish it. We talked about this a few weeks ago. Here is - here is actually part of the interview about Hulk Hogan.	May 2014
	April 2014
(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)	March 2014
STELTER Knowing what you know now - knowing all of the legal costs already - would you have still published the video?	February 2014
	January 2014
DENTON I am glad that decisions that are taken on publishing are taken at the time. And I'm glad that we only really look at whether the story is both true and interesting. This story was true and interesting. And we'd absolutely publish it again in a heartbeat.	December 2013
	November 2013
(END VIDEO CLIP)	October 2013
STELTER This was a sex tape involving Hulk Hogan. Now he's suing. And we can get into that lawsuit. But what you said is - all we really look at is whether the story is both true and interesting. Is that still the rubric for <i>Gawker</i> , or is it more complicated now?	September 2013
	August 2013
	July 2013
DENTON I think the difference between Tommy Craggs - the executive editor who resigned on principle over this matter - the difference between him and me - is that for Tommy and for some of the more hard-line editorial staff, truth itself is the only necessary defense, and the belief is that nothing should ever be taken down if it is true. As I said in that quote, I believe that it's not necessary - it's necessary for something more than just simply truth to be operative in a story. And truth and the interests - interest to our peers - interest to our audience - is essential.	June 2013
	May 2013
	April 2013
	March 2013
STELTER Would you publish that tape now - now that - now that it seems like <i>Gawker</i> is changing its editorial philosophy?	February 2013
	January 2013
DENTON The Hogan story is an entirely different story.	December 2012
STELTER OK.	November 2012
DENTON The Hogan story - this is a story about a public figure - a massive global celebrity who talks incessantly about his sex life.	October 2012
(CROSSTALK)	September 2012
STELTER And we learned - by the way - this week he was dropped by the WWE for racist remarks. That would seem to put him on the ropes a little bit - maybe helps your case?	August 2012
	July 2012
DENTON I think it shows something of his motivation - that maybe explains why he's been so forceful in fighting this particular case. But the facts of our dispute with Hulk Hogan are clear. The law is clear. And we look forward to the chance of defending this story in the courts. We will continue to publish stories like that. And we will continue.	June 2012
	May 2012
	April 2012
STELTER Well, that's what people are wondering.	March 2012
DENTON And we will continue to defend stories like that. And I'm proud that we defend stories and we publish stories that many other media organizations will not touch - not because they're bad stories - but because they're fearful of the consequences.	February 2012
	January 2012
	December 2011
STELTER Would you out a private person again - the way this blog post did?	November 2011
DENTON We would absolutely out a public figure. We - I have personally been involved in stories about Tim Cook - the CEO of Apple.	October 2011
(CROSSTALK)	September 2011
STELTER That was before he spoke publicly about being gay.	August 2011
	July 2011
DENTON That's right - about two years before he spoke publicly about being gay - and stories about Anderson Cooper.	June 2011
STELTER Again - before he spoke publicly about it. And so you're OK with that? You're OK with publishing those kinds of stories?	May 2011
	April 2011
DENTON Somebody who is a public figure - who talks about their life - their personal life - who is interviewed by journalists - they don't get to say - to us - at least - they don't get to say - oh - you can't ask questions about my personal life. You can't ask this particular question. A lot of the time - journalists go along with the PR campaigns of celebrities. We don't, and we won't.	March 2011
	February 2011
	January 2011

January 2011

December 2010

November 2010

September 2010

May 2010

February 2010

STELTER Well so what is going to change then? It does seem like you have decided *Gawker* needs to be a bit friendlier

DENTON I think we could calibrate a bit. The company is no longer the fly-by-night blog shop that it was. We're moving into new headquarters tomorrow on Fifth Avenue north of 14th Street. The company has more than 100 million global readers per month. It is one of the four successful online media companies to emerge from the last few years.

STELTER And it's got a lot of advertisers. Aren't you thinking more about advertising and making sure that they're comfortable with the site? And doesn't that affect the editorial structure?

DENTON We will never, and we have never, and we will never take down a story because of an advertiser - of an advertiser's pressure. We are committed to running stories, the real story and the story behind the story, precisely because that's what attracts our audience. That's what people come to us for. And the advertisers who come to us, they come for that audience. The editorial independence of the company is not just a principle. It's the core of our mission. It's the core of the company. And it's the core of our business.

STELTER You say that, but your two top editors resigned. I asked them to come on the program today, and they declined. But they resigned because of you meddling, they should say, with the newsroom.

DENTON Both Max Read and Tommy Craggs are men of considerable principle, and sometimes inflexible principle. They resigned over this particular issue. I don't think it was really a story worth resigning over. I don't think this was the particular hill to die on.

STELTER Are you saying they are too extreme - they were too extreme about this?

DENTON I value their passion and their commitment to independent - independent journalism. But it has to go hand in hand with trust from me in our editors to make judgment calls. And in this particular instance, the judgment call was wrong, and I had it reversed.

STELTER People who don't want to stay and work for the new *Gawker*, the slightly kinder, gentler *Gawker*, are you offering them buyouts? Are you inviting them to leave?

DENTON This weekend, yes, we're offering both the staff members on *Gawker.com* and senior editorial management a chance to leave if they don't like the future direction of the company, as I have indicated.

STELTER How many are you expecting to leave?

DENTON I don't know.

STELTER Well, any, you think?

DENTON I don't know. I think probably fewer than one might think, given the amount of discontent expressed last week. When it comes down to it, people have to make up their minds. Do I want to work at *Gawker Media* or do I want to work at some other company? And we are committed to producing the kind of journalism that I think the boldest and freest writers of the Web want to write. And so I believe that most people will actually want to stay.

STELTER You expect most of the staff to stay. But the door is open now. That's an unprecedented move, isn't it, Nick?

DENTON I don't think that a company can be held hostage and a company's ethos.

STELTER Held hostage?

DENTON A company's ethos can be driven by the determination of some writers to go in a different direction. At some point, we all have to decide, are we in this together or not, all in or out? And I think it's just - it's fair - no antagonism. There doesn't need to be any kind of bad feeling here. It's a very generous buyout offer. But if people want to pursue their own course that's different than the course that I want to pursue, they should be free to do so. And they shouldn't suffer such bad financial consequences for following a matter of principle.

STELTER So bottom line, *Gawker* growing up, you're saying?

DENTON Yes.

STELTER Nick, thanks for being here.

DENTON Good to see you.

STELTER Good talking with you.

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BUSINESS

Gawker Reels Amid Identity Crisis

Outside investors, advertisers keep distance in light of Hulk Hogan suit, recent blog disaster



'It's regrettable what has happened,' said Nick Denton, founder and CEO of Gawker Media, an interview. *PHOTO: MATTEO PRANDONI/BFA*

By **LUKAS I. ALPERT**

July 21, 2015 6:14 p.m. ET

Seven months ago Gawker Media said it would stop “pandering to the Facebook masses” and return to its roots as an edgy blog network that speaks truth to power. The transition has been anything but smooth.

In the wake of a blog post that blew up on the company last week, Nick Denton, founder and CEO, said in an interview Tuesday, “Tabloid gossip stuff no longer works and has really been where Gawker has been at its worst.”

Fallout from last week threatens to aggravate Gawker Media’s mounting financial woes. Legal costs, which at times have hit hundreds of thousands of dollars a month, related to an invasion-of-privacy lawsuit filed by former professional wrestler Hulk Hogan already have precipitated a need for outside investment, Mr. Denton said. But outside investors

have opted to remain on the sidelines until the Hogan case—postponed until the late fall—is resolved, he said.

The current disaster stems from last week’s post on Gawker about a little-known media executive who allegedly tried to hire a gay escort. The story—which had opened the floodgates of opprobrium from the public—was later taken down by management. Mr. Denton said he was uncomfortable with the nature of the post before it went up but didn’t expect such a strong backlash. The post’s removal set off an internal rift, precipitating the resignation of two top editors and an outcry from the staff, which recently voted to unionize, about allowing business concerns to interfere with the editorial process. The site was built on the notion that it should post anything it knows to be true.

The post led some marketers to put their Gawker advertising on hold. Mr. Denton insisted he would have pulled the post—which he described as “pure poison”—regardless of how advertisers reacted because of the damage to Gawker Media’s reputation, but told staff in a memo on Monday that it could have caused seven-figure losses in ad revenue had it remained up.

“It’s regrettable what has happened,” Mr. Denton said in the interview. “But hopefully it will allow us to have a proper discussion about what Gawker should be in the future. I’ve wanted a gentler Gawker for a while.”

Mr. Denton said he worried whether the fallout from the gay-escort post could cause problems for Gawker’s defense in the Hogan case, which has largely been built around a First Amendment argument that Mr. Hogan is a well-known figure who has openly discussed his sex life in public. The subject of the taken-down post isn’t a high-profile figure.

‘Hopefully it will allow us to have a proper discussion about what Gawker should be in the future. I’ve wanted a gentler Gawker for a while.’

—Nick Denton

Founded in 2002, Gawker Media has grown into a network of eight sites focusing on subjects including cars, technology, sports and feminism. But while Mr. Denton says the

company's seven other sites have registered strong audience growth and solid advertising revenue, the namesake Gawker site that focuses on gossip has foundered in its focus and its mission.

While all the sites combined registered a nearly 7% increase in unique visitors in June from a year earlier, the Gawker site declined 13% to just under 14 million unique visitors, according to comScore Inc.

Gawker, more than any of the other sites, has been facing an internal identity crisis, subject to the whims of its founder. In the Monday staff memo, Mr. Denton said “the editorial ethos of Gawker needs a calibration more than a radical shift,” and envisioned the end result as being somewhere between “a stolid Vox Media and a more anarchic Ratter; close to the edge, but not over it.”

A pioneer in digital media, Gawker Media now finds itself battling with a slew of well-financed new-media outlets. Last year alone, investors pumped \$50 million into BuzzFeed, \$500 million in to Vice Media and \$46.8 million in Vox Media.

Gawker had resisted taking outside money, but the legal expenses stemming from the Hulk Hogan litigation forced the company to secure an \$8 million bank loan and seek an outside minority investor for the first time. The case centers on a 90-second video clip that Gawker posted in 2012 of Mr. Hogan—real name Terry Gene Bollea—having sex with the wife of a radio shock jock named Bubba the Love Sponge. Costs also have been mounting for a planned move to expensive new headquarters near Union Square in Manhattan.

The financial squeeze has resulted in the company falling behind in the industrywide rush to develop robust video capabilities, Mr. Denton said. The company says it has shown steady revenue gains over the past five years, taking in \$44.3 million in 2014, and posted consistent, if modest, profitability.

Mr. Denton described the development of the Gawker site—which was the second created at the company following tech site Gizmodo—like the building of the city of Troy, with newer variations being built upon older ones with the result being that vestigial traits from earlier times would periodically re-emerge. In its earliest days, Gawker focused heavily on media water-cooler gossip. Later it pivoted to more tabloidy scandal coverage. He hopes it can now evolve into more of a “guide to culture and for looking at the world by critiquing the way media presents it.”

He said the site would never shy away from controversy. “We’ve been through a lot of

drama before,” he said, pointing to contentious stories that prompted heavy blowback in the past like when it procured a leaked prototype on the iPhone 4, or posted an internal Scientology video featuring actor Tom Cruise discussing the church’s inner workings, or revealed that Toronto Mayor Rob Ford had been caught on video smoking crack cocaine.

If the latest storms ultimately blow over, Mr. Denton said he is interested in eventually expanding Gawker Media’s portfolio into areas like travel and fashion, but, for now, he said he needs to right the ship.

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Gawker's Future: A Conversation With Nick Denton



Nick Denton, the founder and chief executive of the digital media company Gawker Media, at its offices in Budapest in 2013.

AKOS STILLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



On July 16, the news and gossip website Gawker, a digital-media pioneer partly responsible for the tone and sensibility of web journalism, published an article that accused a married male media executive of seeking, via text message, to pay for sex with a gay escort. It was swiftly condemned as an unseemly invasion of privacy, and Gawker's founder and chief executive, Nick Denton, decided to remove the article from the site. Two of his editors resigned, accusing Mr. Denton of violating editorial independence.

He has since vowed, in a series of publicly released memos, to change the site, to make it “nicer” and less tabloid in its sensibilities, and perhaps even change its name, as a reflection of a changed media environment and to safeguard the rest of his portfolio — including the sports site Deadspin and the gadget site Gizmodo.

“This is an opportunity to be seized, our best shot as an independent media company supporting the freest journalists on the web,” he wrote in a memo to staff members on Sunday. “We will face up to celebrities and other public figures who use the courts and other pressure to suppress the truth; reinforce the existing church-state divide; establish a clearer standard of newsworthiness; inject some more humanity into Gawker.com; bring in more experienced executives, managers and editors; and refine our workplace culture; and continue. This is the next stage of our evolution.”

The following conversation was conducted by instant message on Sunday afternoon, the day before a kind of reintroduction of Gawker, as it moves to new offices. It has been edited for length and clarity.

Q. Can you describe your thought process before the story about the media executive was published?

A. As I’ve said before, I couldn’t see the point of the story, or why the subject’s position was relevant. This was not a story about the conduct of his job, or the culture of the company he worked for.

Q. So what responsibility do you bear for its running? Both culturally and specifically?

A. I bear responsibility for dodging a real debate about the purpose of Gawker. The truth is necessary to a story, but it’s not sufficient. In my view, there has to be some meaning. It has to be interesting. And my ethos diverged from that of the editorial leadership. The one good thing to come out of this misbegotten story is that we are finally having that discussion about editorial standards.

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Q. *Does that have anything to do with the fact that you yourself got married?*

A. I did get married last year, to Derrence. And we are hoping to start a family. So I am less of a sexual outsider than I was. At this point, I probably socialize as much with married people as I do with single people. I'll leave others to psychoanalyze that.

Q. *Do you think Derrence agrees with what you do?*

A. We are a couple, and Derrence has a powerful effect on my thinking, but I'm not going to speak for him.

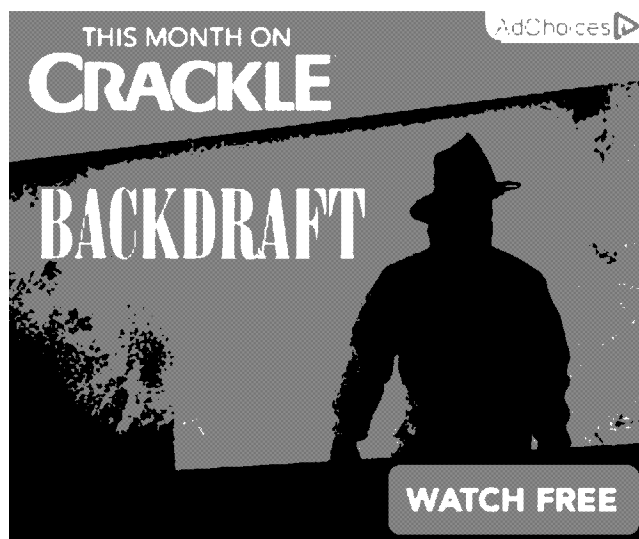
Q. *Have you been more hands-off at Gawker in recent years? Have you left it a little rudderless, perhaps?*

A. There was a rudder. It was just pointing in a direction that ultimately I didn't agree with. The company has more than 250 people. I have to be able to trust the heads of the major departments, editorial included.

Q. *Now to Gawker itself. In what way have Gawker's readers changed?*

A. Gawker's readers have changed along with the society they're part of. My sense is that glee at information that spills out on the Internet has given way to a greater concern for personal privacy. More and more people have public lives on social media. And nobody wants to live in a world in which it's so easy for your smartphone texts to spill onto the web — and so easy for media to justify spreading the embarrassment.

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Q. *You said in a recent memo to all of Gawker staff that “even the best of our stories fail to get credit, in part because of Gawker’s reputation for tabloid trash.”*

How do you define tabloid trash?

A. I define tabloid trash as a scandal without any point. Infidelity, drug use, illness: These may be sufficient justification for a tabloid news site. But Gawker is supposed to be an intelligent tabloid, that covers juicy stories that show how the world works. I'm proud of our coverage of Bill O'Reilly's temper, Hillary Clinton's secret kitchen cabinet, the privilege of Michael Lynton's daughter. In all those examples, there was a point, and a public interest in the truth getting wider circulation.

Q. *Is it fair to say that Gawker will become more like the publications it set out in opposition to?*

A. Gawker will be at the very edge of the mainstream. It will look for real stories either in the compromises of mainstream media companies, or in the principled anarchy of free-for-all web communities such as Reddit. I don't think The New York Times should relax just yet.

Q. *Are you at all worried about the rapid rise of competitors like BuzzFeed and Vice?*

A. There are four big online media groups to emerge on the web: BuzzFeed, Vice, Vox and [Gawker Media](#). Unlike the others, we have achieved scale and profitability without a dollar in external investment.

Q. *But do they threaten Gawker Media? Are they at all behind your reaction to this , and the desire to be nicer?*

A. BuzzFeed and Vice are taking a different path. There is plenty of room for all of us. If anybody should be worried, it is the established media company that has not been able to bring TV and print audiences online.

Q. *Speaking of which: You outlined, in your latest memo, that Gawker should be about getting the real story — the story that journalists at more conservative publications tell in the bar after work. Do you think it is possible to do that without ending up with a post like the one you removed?*

A. To publish the story behind the story, there has to be a story in the first place. In the instance of the media executive and the escort, there wasn't a story, not by any editorial standard that I'm aware of. We will continue to run stories that others deem too distasteful. Our standards will be looser than those of The Times and other established news organizations. But there will be clearer standards.

Q. *You said recently that Ta-Nehisi Coates would be your dream Gawker*

executive editor. Why? What does he offer, or represent?

A. I'm not going to talk about individual candidates. But we are looking for a mixture of news judgment, intellectual framework and humanity. The ideal candidate was actually a colleague of yours, David Carr, now sadly no longer with us.

Q. *Is humanity an important component of journalism?*

A. Yes, David Carr was described as the most human of humans. Let the writers run a little wild, but they need to be saved from their own selves by editors with a conscience.

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Q. *So what would you like to see Gawker as in a year or two's time? And what changes will you be making, apart from the move, to ensure that?*

A. I'd like Gawker to be the best version of itself, taking the best of each era of the site. The scoops of John Cook. The investigations of Adrian Chen or J. K. Trotter. Pop culture from Rich Juzwiak. And some of Max Read's excellent [vision for the site](#). All the ingredients are there, and the talent. And I'd like to see other properties — category leaders like Gizmodo, Lifehacker, Deadspin and Jezebel — come out from Gawker's shadow. "Gawker is your one-stop guide to media and pop culture. It is the place you come to learn the real story — the account you won't (or can't) find anywhere else." That's from Max's memo at the start of the year.

As for how we get there, most depends on bringing in experienced newsroom leaders and establishing an formal editorial code.

Q. *How hands-on will you be?*

A. I do not want to establish bad precedent through my intervention in the case of the media executive. Our main focus will be on the hiring of an executive editor who shares my editorial ethos, and a formalization of decision making in the event of disagreements over a story.

Q. *Will there be hard limits in that code? Stuff you won't cover?*

A. Nobody wants a long document that no writer will internalize. A few paragraphs, openly debated with editors and writers, would be most effective. From my memo, "At Gawker Media, it is not enough for a story to be true; it has to be true and interesting. It should be interesting not only to an in-house editor, but to our reader communities. And the interest should be worth the hurt inflicted."

Q. *You said the media environment has changed. How?*

A. I think the gap between the reader and a public figure has narrowed. We have more of a feeling that celebrities and the subjects of stories are people just like us, with secrets that others don't have an automatic right to. And Gawker itself is larger. In the past, the site might have been seen as an ankle-biter, its wilder posts dismissed or ignored. Now, we're The Man. And a writer's fight against the system can come across as plain bullying of an individual who is as much a prisoner of the system as anybody else.

Everybody will be back to work this coming week. New office. New execs. Gawker always bounces back. This is just the way that crises play out in open organizations. And I know I would say that, but it is also true. Just think about it: an all-hands meeting in which everybody is free to speak, and they're backchanneling on Slack [an instant messaging app] and live-blogging on Twitter. Total transparency. Most companies would be terrified!

Q. *Will you be changing the name?*

A. The name change is just a proposal. Nothing imminent (though I would like Gawker to be free of such responsibility for the whole company's reputation).

Q. *Is it a serious proposal? One that has traction and might happen? Or more of a musing?*

A. It might happen.

Q. *What are the potential names?*

A. It won't be anytime soon. We are considering it. It is more of a distraction. We are committed to making Gawker a brand the whole company can be proud of.

Q. *You offered buyouts to any staff members who could not go along with these changes. How many have taken them?*

A. I am not sure. I'm leaving it to Heather [Dietrick, the president and general counsel of Gawker Media]. I really don't want to get dragged into editorial personnel decisions, though obviously I have views about writers.

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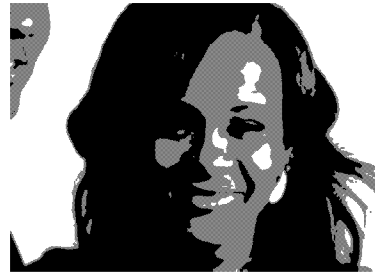
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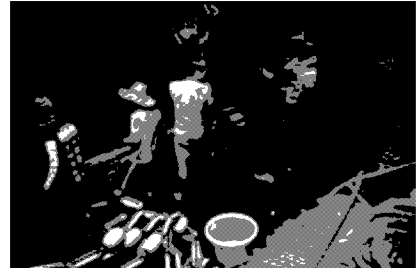


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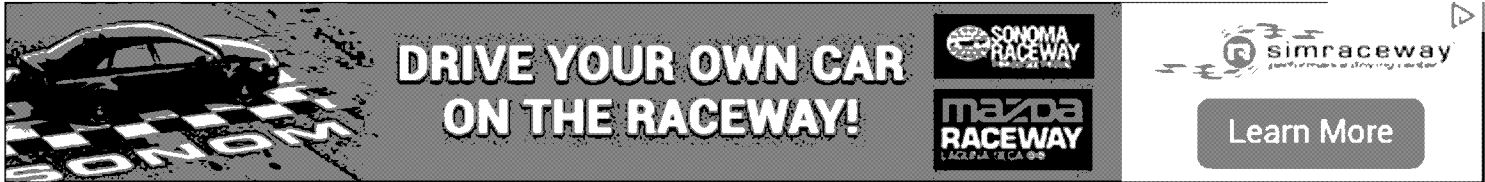
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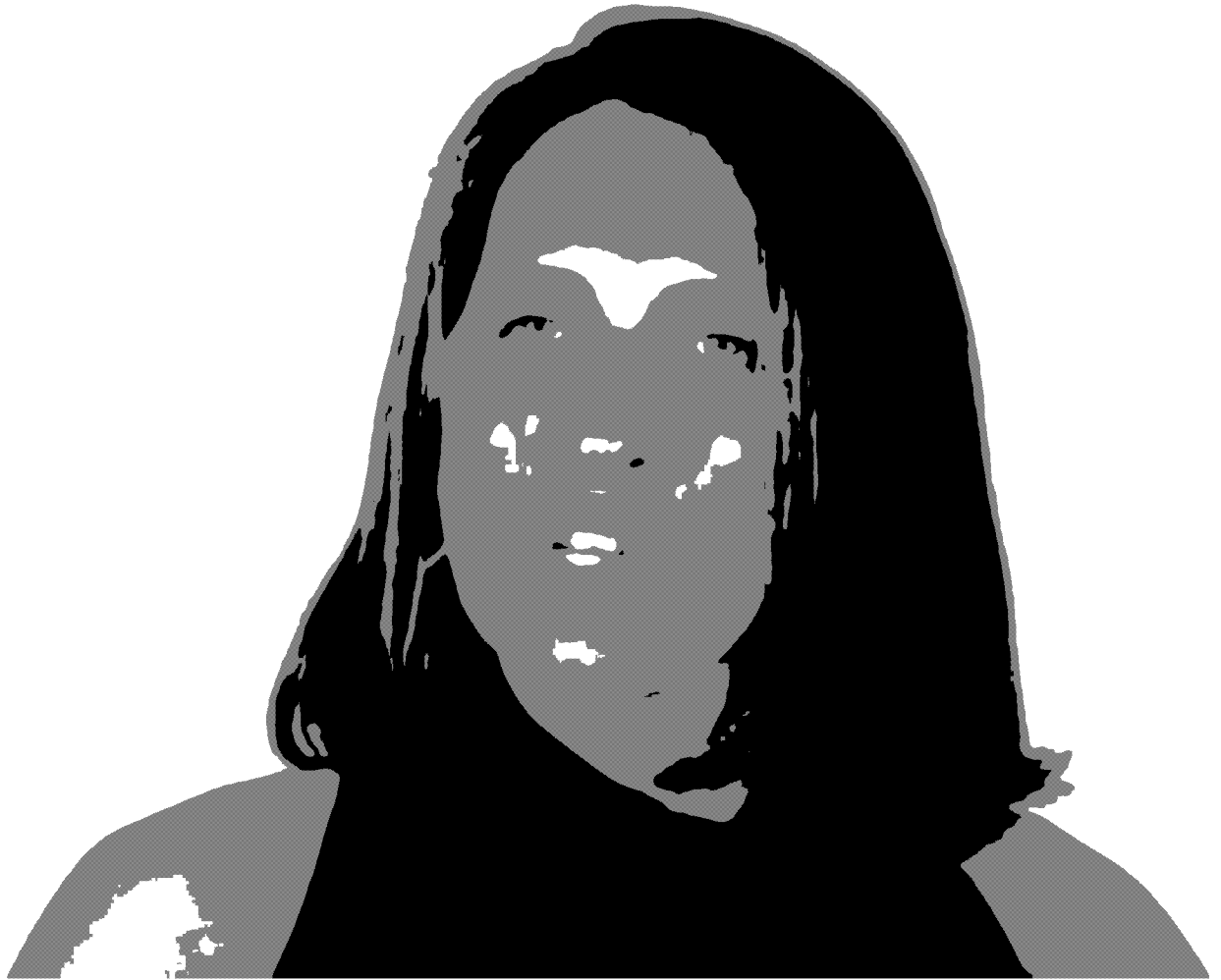
Meet the young, fearless lawyer behind Gawker

by Jeff John Roberts

@jeffjohnroberts

AUGUST 18, 2015, 11:54 AM EDT





Fortune

At the age of 34, Heather Dietrick is general counsel of a controversial media company – and loving every minute of it.

Journalists confront powerful people. When those people strike back, it's good to know a lawyer. That's especially true at Gawker Media, which takes particular glee in publicizing the antics of thin-skinned athletes and politicians.

The journalists at *Gawker*, which also runs *Jezebel* and *Deadspin*, know Heather Dietrick has their backs. As the company's general counsel and president, Dietrick not only vets the sites' stories, but also steps in when angry men (yes, they're usually

men) try to threaten the writers and editors into backing down.

“I knew I wanted to move somewhere that pushed the envelope and Gawker is a natural choice for that,” Dietrick said, explaining why she chose to join a company that has had legal tussles with everyone from wrestler Hulk Hogan to quarterback icon Brett Favre to the crack-smoking ex-mayor of Toronto, Rob Ford.

Dietrick always wanted to fight for the First Amendment and, after obtaining her law degree at the University of Michigan and clerking for a federal judge, she landed a fellowship at Hearst Media, where she stayed on as a lawyer.

“It’s really critical for young lawyers to get their foot in the door in what is a pretty small media law world,” she said, explaining the challenge of breaking into the tight-knit media bar.

Now, at Gawker, she faces the enormous responsibility of regularly making legal decisions whose outcomes can determine the fate of the company. To get an idea of the stakes, consider the \$100 million lawsuit Hulk Hogan is pursuing over Gawker’s decision to publish a short clip of him having sex with the then-wife of his

friend.

Dietrick says she doesn't feel scared in helping Gawker stand up to powerful celebrities. Instead, she says she finds the work "exhilarating," even when the company's controversial editorial decisions lead to turmoil. And she says that being a woman has not made her job any more difficult, though her age—at 34 she is very young for a general counsel—has at times surprised people.

"Being young in this position can sometimes stop people in their tracks, such as when you're in court and fighting for the right to speak," she said. "Being a woman has helped get women's stories out there when pushing the envelope. Internally, our company is a meritocracy so being a woman or young is not such a big deal."

So what tips does Dietrick have for those who want to follow a similar path? Her advice can be summed up in one word: network.

"You hear as a young person starting your career 'network and build your relationships' and you don't really understand why that's going to be meaningful to you," she says. "Then you start seeing much you can learn from people. You take something away in business and personally from everyone you end up networking with."

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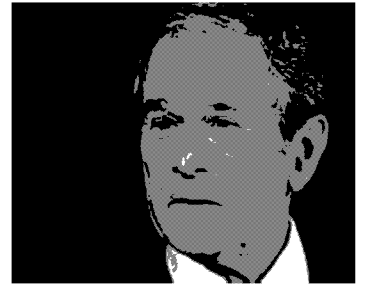
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Gawker Editor-In-Chief Resigns After Controversial Post Gets Take Down



Gawker founder Nick Denton

Photo: Justin...



by Erik Hayden

Founder Nick Denton called the item "pure poison" to the site's reputation.

Gawker editor-in-chief **Max Read** has resigned in protest of a decision to take down a controversial post that founder **Nick Denton** called "pure poison to our reputation"



"This was not an easy decision. I hope the partnership group recognizes the degree to which it has betrayed the trust of editorial, and takes steps to materially reinforce its independence," Read wrote in a memo on Gawker's website on Monday.

Gawker Media executive editor **Tommy Craggs** resigned from his position as well.

The resignations follow a tumultuous weekend for Gawker Media. Last Thursday evening, the website published a story by staff writer **Jordan Sargent** that claimed that a Conde Nast executive attempted to solicit a gay escort.

A day later, after a firestorm of criticism, Denton issued a notice saying that the post would be taken down. Denton said that the decision included a vote by the managing partners of the company, which includes business side employees.

"It is the first time we have removed a significant news story for any reason other than factual error or legal settlement," Denton wrote on Friday about the take down.

In a Monday note to edit employees, Denton said that he "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." He also apologized to Sargent, whom he said was "exposed to such traumatizing hatred online, just for doing his job."

Denton also referenced the upcoming **Hulk Hogan** sex tape case against Gawker and its potential legal implications for the company.

He also said that editorial needs a "calibration more than a radical shift. ... close to the edge, but not over it" and mentioned that the site could now exist in between the sensibilities of more mainstream Vox Media sites and new tabloid web start-up Ratter.

In the resignation note on Monday, Read stated "Ultimately my decision is about the process by which this happened. If the partnership had not conducted some kind of utterly opaque backroom vote to delete it—if we had simply posted Nick's note, as much I disagreed with and disliked it—I think this Monday would be very different."

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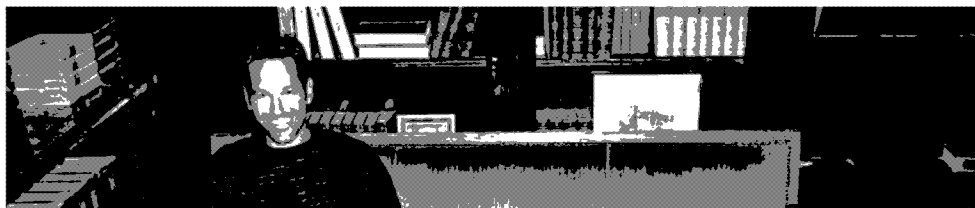
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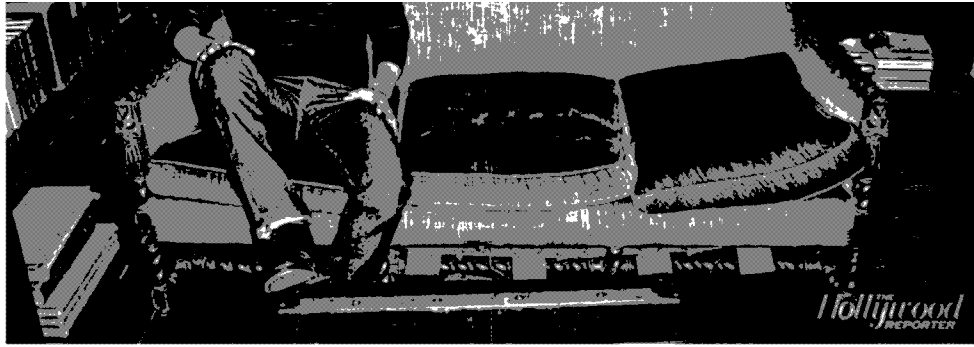


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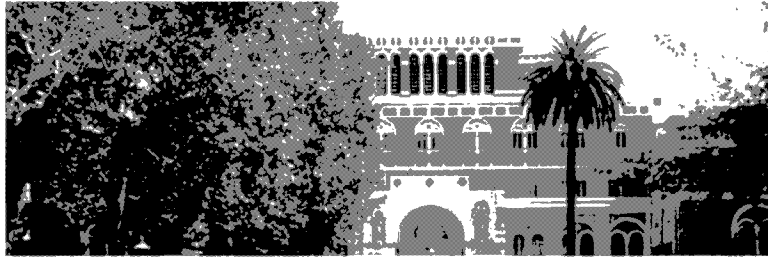


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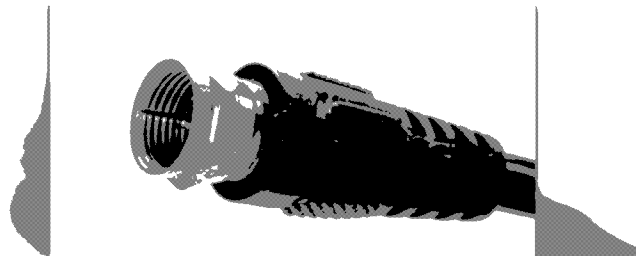




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Mark

Gawker is a sewer, the people who work there, little better than pornographers



Kat A.C. Milanista

I'm glad to see anyone leave Gawker but his reason is backwards!



guest

Good for this resigning editor. It was a corrupt double standard to delete that story. News sites should not be subject to crowd influence.



Michael Anthony

Perhaps, but then again the subject was a person no one even knew about or cared about, until the article. Its like publishing the list of average citizens arrested for solicitation. While celebs don't deserve it either, they are at least public people. And for them, not all press is good. Never has been. You're delusional, as others are too, if they think Gawker is any different than gossip rags of the past. The star tabloids going back many decades had their "game on" when attacking a celeb.



Nope

Regardless of your feeling that Gerthner is someone people shouldn't care about, the fact is the CFO of a powerful media company, and brother of former Treasury secretary, being involved in an extortion plot is inarguably newsworthy. He is far from the "average citizen." You're not really arguing newsworthiness. What your comment is really about is you want a double standard because the news subject is gay. You wouldn't say a peep if the man were heterosexual. So stick your personal insult.



WildBill0283

Reputation

HAHAHAHAHAHA!!!!



ksimms

This is like a South Carolina state senator resigning because the Confederate flag was taken down.



Two Piece and Biscuit

the day I removed gawker from my bookmarks was a day I have never regretted



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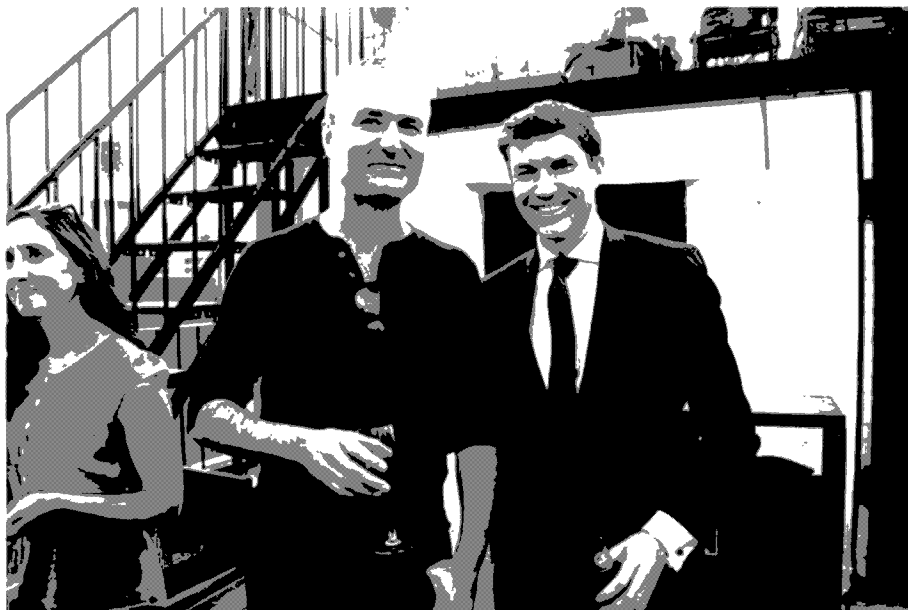
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Civil War At Gawker Media: Nick Denton Has 'No Chance' Of Winning Back Trust

By Brendan James on July 20 2015 5:26 PM EDT

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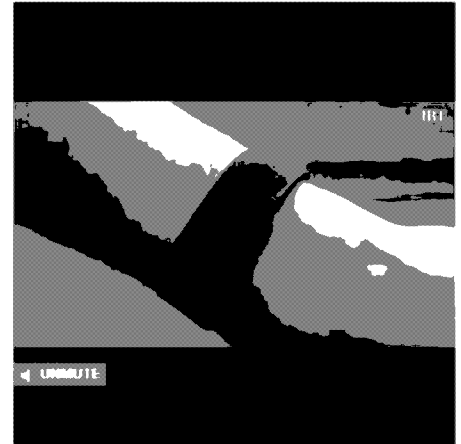
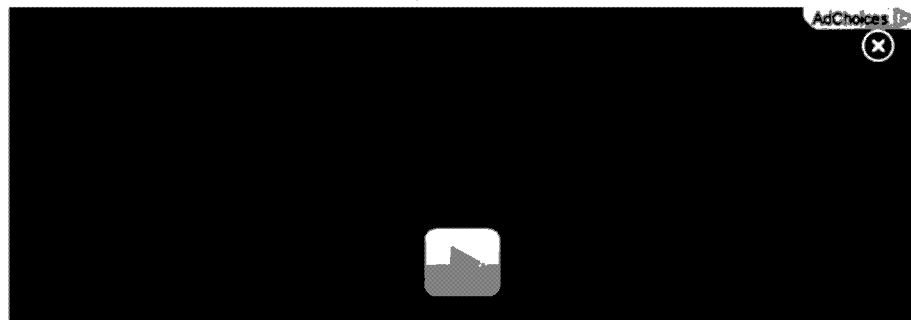
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Nick Denton, center, the founder of Gawker Media.

Gawker founder and CEO Nick Denton told International Business Times on Monday that the decision to take down a widely-criticized post on Friday was "extraordinary" and readers should not view the move as anything other than a last resort.

"The piece was extraordinary. I don't think one should read in too much of a precedent," Denton told IBT in an email.



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The piece, published Thursday, was an [anonymously-sourced report](#) alleging that the CFO of Conde Nast had unsuccessfully solicited a gay escort. On Friday, after massive blowback over the article from readers, fellow journalists, and the company's business side, Gawker's management partnership voted 4-2 to take the post down, with only Executive Editor Tommy Craggs and President Heather Dietrich dissenting.

But anyone who read Gawker would know that the story wouldn't end there. The site has a long history of taking its feuds public, comments sections and all.

Shortly after the post went down, Gawker staff released a statement condemning the removal as a breach of the firewall between editorial and business. By Monday, [Craggs and Editor in Chief Max Read had resigned](#).

"It was, by definition, setting a precedent," Gawker editor Alex Pareene told IBT.

At a meeting held Monday, staffers wailed on Denton for taking down the article. Alongside several other writers, Pareene himself told Denton that "journalists don't disappear things when they make mistakes."

One Jezebel staffer told IBT that Denton "kept losing his train of thought in the meeting, rambling incoherently."

Several Gawker staffers said Denton was "rewriting history" in justifying the vote to remove the post.

"People immediately started questioning why ad sales was exerting editorial control," one writer said. "So Nick decided the vote was actually just a fun approval vote and that he was the sole decider."

"Why take the vote if Nick was acting unilaterally?" the writer said, calling the explanation "ridiculous."

The complaints echoed Read's and Cragg's [letters of resignation](#), which on Monday aimed particular vitriol at President of Advertising Andrew Gorenstein.

Pareene came away thinking the same thing.

"He wanted to shield himself from responsibility but also didn't want people blaming Gorenstein," he said.

As for how to prevent anything like this from happening again, Pareene says all hope lies in Gawker's recently-stamped union cards, which the editorial side won in another very public showdown back in June.

"Nick has no chance of winning back the trust of senior editorial staff," he told IBT.

"Next step is the union giving the right to remove editorial decisions from him and

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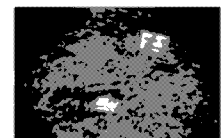
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best case is the union wins the right to exempt editorial decisions (not hiring and firing but publication and unpublication) from being voted on by business and tech.”

Amid the showdown between Denton and his staff, Read's deputy Leah Beckmann has taken over the duties of editor-in-chief. When asked about how Gawker will permanently fill the positions left behind by Read and Craggs, Denton demurred.

“We'll talk about that tomorrow,” he said. “First we need to recognize we just lost two talented people.”

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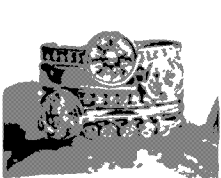
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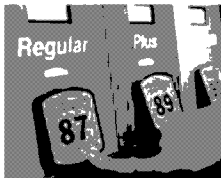
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Plaintiff's Trial Exhibit 477

Max Read's Moralizing Justification for Gawker's Vile Article

Glenn Greenwald

July 17 2015, 9:29 a.m.



272



(updated below)

Last night, Gawker published one of the sleaziest and most repugnant articles seen in quite some time from an outlet of its size and stature. The story had no purpose other than to reveal that the male, married-to-a-woman Chief Financial Officer of a magazine company – basically an executive accountant – hired a male escort. When the escort discovered the real-life identity of his prospective client – he's the brother of a former top Obama official – he began blackmailing the CFO by threatening to expose him unless he used his political connections to help the escort in a housing discrimination case he had against a former landlord. Gawker completed the final step of the

blackmail plot by publishing the text messages between the two and investigating and confirming the identity of the client, all while protecting the identity of the blackmailing escort. I don't want to reward them or contribute in any way to this disgrace by linking to it: Google it if you must.

Gawker's story, written by Jordan Sargent, instantly and almost universally provoked unbridled scorn, and rightfully so. The article's 1,000+ comments from Gawker's own readers overwhelmingly expressed disgust, and as *The New Republic's* *Joel Hoer* observed, the "debacle" is "uniting people from all across the political & cultural spectrum . . . in shared revulsion." One Gawker writer, Adam Weinstein, publicly distanced himself from the sleaze.

The reasons for regarding the story as deeply repugnant are self-evident. The CFO they outed is not a public figure. Even if he were, the revelation has zero public interest: it's not as though he's preached against gay rights or any form of sexual behavior. It's just humiliating someone and trying to destroy his life for fun, for its own sake. By publishing the article, Gawker aided the escort's blackmail plot, arguably even becoming a partner in it. Even worse, the story (probably unwittingly) reeks of all-too-familiar homophobic shaming: it's supposed to be humiliating at least in part because he's a man hiring a "gay porn star," as Gawker editor-in-chief Max Read put it as he promoted the "scoop." The escort's identity has been confirmed by others and he seems to have a history of serious mental distress, which Gawker is clearly exploiting. Beyond all that, Gawker has an ongoing war with Reddit, owned by the magazine company for which the CFO works, which suggests this is part of some petty, vindictive drive for vengeance, with the CFO as collateral damage.

My friend and former colleague Natasha Vargas-Cooper, now at Gawker's Jezebel, justified the story by arguing that "stories don't need an upside. Not everyone has to feel good about the truth. If it's true, you publish." But if "truth" is the only journalistic metric, that would mean nobody has any personal privacy of any kind, and that journalists should publish everything they learn about everyone, no matter how scurrilous or personal, without regard to whether it has any public interest or without regard to the privacy rights of the subject. She also invoked the ethos of adversarial journalism by arguing that journalists should "have an antagonistic relationship to people in power." But even if you want to regard an accountant for a magazine company as "powerful" (I personally think every Gawker writer who can publish things of this sort has more power than this glorified corporate bean-counter), not every revelation about a person's private life is justified simply because they're influential. There has to be some public interest to the disclosure, otherwise it's just sleazy tabloid gossip for prurient enjoyment, not adversarial journalism.

I'm not writing in order to pile on to the mob of outrage that has assembled

against Gawker, even though I fully agree with its premises. Nobody needs me to repeat what is already clearly recognized about what they did here. Beyond that, I've long thought that Gawker – in addition to some click-bait garbage and malicious gossip – does a lot of really good, innovative journalism, and I'm a fan of several of its writers. No media outlet should be judged by its worst moment. I'm certain Gawker will do great journalism in the future and I'll cite and praise it when they do.

I'm writing because the justification for this story offered by Gawker editor-in-chief Max Read is utterly laughable, and it's grounded in a premise that is very common when people want to wallow in others' private lives, yet incredibly toxic. To me, it's Read's justification that is worth discussing:



max read
@max_read

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given the chance gawker will always report on married c-suite executives of major media companies fucking around on their wives

6:33 PM · 10 Jul 2015

👍 75 🌟 100

Let's leave to the side the obvious farce of Read's sanctimonious posturing as the morality police: oh, yes, Gawker is simply on the prowl to locate and punish adulterers who are vandalizing the sanctity of their marital vows. It's just about solemn retribution for sinners. At least have the decency to admit that you did this because you're hungry for clicks, or because you get voyeuristic pleasure by scrounging around in other people's sex lives, or because vicariously living through other people's private sexual experiences lets you alleviate your own personal boredom and frustration, or because you have some twisted notion that your jihad against Reddit is advanced by sexually humiliating its publisher's accountant. Ditch the moralizing pretexts: nobody is going to buy that.

What's significant to me is the unstated premise of Read's claim: that the wife of this CFO is a victim. Read is posing as her chivalrous defender: he only published this article to avenge the wrong done to her. There's even the strangely sexist formulation to his vow: Gawker, he declares, will always "report on married [] executives of major media companies fucking around on their wives." What about when the cheating executives are women and the spouse is a man? He doesn't say. His self-proclaimed mission is to protect this little lady from the harm that has been inflicted on her. This is far and away the most common justification cited for sniffing around in the private, sexual lives of people: we're just upset for the victim-spouse.

But even if one wants to pretend that the sentiment is genuine, the logical

flaw is glaring and obvious. Max Read has absolutely no idea what this CFO's wife knows about what her husband does, nor does he have any idea what agreement or arrangement they have governing their marriage. Nor should he know, because it's none of his business.

Long-term marriage between two complex adults is a very complicated dynamic to navigate. People invent all sorts of ways to manage that. It's of course possible that the CFO's wife thought she was in a rigid, life-long monogamous relationship with a purely heterosexual male and is shocked and betrayed to learn otherwise, but it's also very possible that she was well-aware that he isn't any of those things, and the spousal agreement between them permits this flexibility on one or both of their parts. It's possible the wife is a victim of his private behavior, but it's also very possible there are no victims and he did absolutely nothing wrong.

In order to know any of that, one has to delve into the most intimate and private aspects of their marriage, mucking around in the deepest crevices of their personal lives. That's something no decent human being should have a desire to do when they haven't been invited to do it. But that's exactly what Read is doing here, although to justify it, he's feigning knowledge that he in fact completely lacks: the private, intimate understanding between the CFO whose life he tried to destroy and the wife whom he has deluded himself into believing he's protecting.

A good rule of decency is to stay out of the private, personal, and sexual lives of consenting adults, absent some very compelling reason to involve yourself (such as damaging hypocrisy on the part of a political figure). The temptations to intrude into and sit in judgment of those aspects of other people's lives are powerful, but they're almost always lowly, self-degrading and scummy. If you have any doubts about that, reading that vile Gawker post will permanently dispel them.

UPDATE: According to Gawker, "the managing partnership of Gawker Media voted, 5-1, to remove" the article. Gawker Media founder and publisher Nick Denton wrote a long post explaining why he supports that decision.

Photo: 1926 movie The Scarlet Letter

CONTACT THE AUTHOR:



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272 Comments

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2 Gawker Editors Resign Over Article's Removal



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MEDIA

? Gawker Editors Resign Over Article's Removal

JONATHAN MAHLER JULY 20 2015



Tommy Craggs, above, executive editor of Gawker Media, and Max Read, editor of Gawker, resigned.

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When Gawker posted an article on Thursday night about a married male media executive's futile attempt to hire a gay escort, it was hoping to create a scandal.

But this was not the scandal it had in mind.

In the face of opprobrium across the Internet, Gawker's founder, Nick Denton, voluntarily took down the post on Friday, a highly unusual step for the 12-year-old company.

This may have helped quell one controversy, but it created another. Monday morning, the

quit in protest. The inflammatory post was now at the center of a debate over journalistic integrity, with Mr. Craggs and Mr. Read saying that the decision to delete it, against their wishes, constituted an unforgivable violation of the site's editorial independence. It made for a strange spectacle — two editors standing on principle in defense of such an unsavory article.

Gawker, which is known for nothing if not flouting the conventions of good taste, has generated plenty of controversy in the past. But this scandal seems especially ill timed.



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Gawker's Moment of Truth



Nick Denton and Heather Dietrick, Gawker Media's managing partners

The company is about to move into much larger and more expensive offices in Manhattan. And Mr. Denton, who with his family owns about 68 percent of Gawker, has been hoping to sell a minority stake in the company.

Maybe most significant, Gawker faces a \$100 million lawsuit brought by Hulk Hogan, claiming that the site violated his privacy by posting excerpts from a videotape of him having sex with a woman who was then the wife of a friend of Mr. Hogan's. The latest scandal may not have a material effect on the case, but from at least a public relations standpoint, it is not going to help Gawker advance its image as torchbearer for the values of the First Amendment. (In the midst of the controversy on Friday, Mr. Hogan sent a one-word Twitter post: "Gawker.")

Mr. Craggs first told Mr. Denton about the initial post concerning the media executive at a meeting Thursday afternoon, a few hours before it went up. Mr. Denton expressed qualms about the article at the time. "I couldn't imagine the headline and couldn't see the point," he said in an email. "What was revealed?"

Nevertheless, he did not interfere with the editorial process or ask to see a copy of the article before it was published that evening.

The next day, as criticism of the article intensified, Mr. Craggs proposed that he issue a statement. It was not exactly an apology. In the statement, which Mr. Craggs sent to Mr. Denton but which was never published, Mr. Craggs noted that Gawker was founded as a media gossip site and had always covered the lives — "unapologetically and often mercilessly" — of the people who work in and run the industry. "We stand by the story, which meets our simple, unwavering standard of being both true and interesting," he wrote. "But too many people whose opinions we trust were appalled by the post for us not to have a conversation about how we approach these kinds of stories going forward."

Mr. Denton never responded. Instead, he called a vote of the company's six managing partners about whether to retract the post. Mr. Craggs, the only strictly editorial employee in the group, learned about the vote while on a plane to California. He was one of two partners who opposed taking down the article. (The other was Heather Dietrick, Gawker's president and general counsel.)

"That this post was deleted at all is an absolute surrender of Gawker's claim to 'radical transparency,'" Mr. Read wrote in his letter of resignation. "That noneditorial business executives were given a vote in the decision to remove it is an unacceptable and unprecedented breach of the editorial firewall, and turns Gawker's claim to be the world's largest independent media company into, essentially, a joke."

It was the first time, Gawker said, it had ever deleted a post for anything other than factual or legal reasons.

The reversal speaks to how much both the company and the culture of the Internet have changed since Mr. Denton started Gawker from his living room in 2002. At the time, Gawker had two part-time employees and no advertisers; today, it has about 260 full-time staff members and some \$50 million in advertising revenue. What is more, the rise of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter has provided a platform for people to gather and express their outrage en masse.

On Friday, Mr. Denton issued a measured statement about the decision to take down the post, noting that he considered it true and

FROM THE ARCHIVE


MEN WALK ON MOON

well reported. (For his part, the subject of the article disputed its accuracy.) "In light of Gawker's past rhetoric about our fearlessness and independence, this can be seen as a capitulation," Mr. Denton wrote of removing the article. "And perhaps, to some extent, it is."

On Monday, however, he struck a different tone in a long note to Gawker's editorial staff. "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," he wrote.

Mr. Denton acknowledged that business concerns were a factor — "If the post had remained up, we probably would have triggered advertising losses this week into seven figures" — but he said that his view of the article was informed to a greater degree by his vision for the company's future.

"Some humane guidelines are needed — in writing — on the calculus of cruelty and benefit in running a story," he wrote. "We do not seem to expose every personal secret — only those that reveal something interesting."

These sentiments stand in stark contrast with many things Mr. Denton has said in the past about Gawker. He has boasted in interviews about the "shamelessness" of certain Gawker articles, and has long characterized the site's mission as one of "putting truths on the Internet" — whether or not these truths have any redeeming social value, and regardless of the damage they might cause.

"My view of the original post was that it fell solidly within the traditions and practices that Nick had established through the years at Gawker Media," said Tom Scocca, the executive features editor at Gawker.

In this sense, the decision to take down the post was less a capitulation than a repudiation of Gawker's identity.

"Nick saw this as a pretext for remaking Gawker in the way that he wanted to remake it," Mr. Craggs said in an interview. "If it cost him the core values of the company, then so be it."

For the moment, Gawker's editorial employees seem less interested in debating the merits of the initial post than in criticizing Mr. Denton's handling of it and in bemoaning the loss of two of the company's most admired editors.

"Nick has a long road ahead of him in terms of gaining back the trust of editorial employees," said Lacey Donohue, the executive managing editor of Gawker Media, "if he ever does."

Ravi Somaiya contributed reporting.





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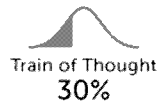
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Plaintiff's Trial Exhibit 486

The 'Gawker tax' is getting too high, Denton tells his staff



Nick Denton. (Luffington Post)



By Peter Sterne 9:49 a.m. | Jul. 22, 2015 3

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Gawker Media is a business.

That's the message that C.E.O. Nick Denton had for his editorial employees yesterday, and it's a message that he repeated many times over the course of a meeting that stretched for nearly two hours.

"Yes, it's a business. At some point, people have got to recognize that it's a business that supports editorial freedom and the mission of the editorial business, but it is a business and it needs to exist and it needs to survive in order for it to support that," he said.

Gawker is willing to sacrifice a lot of potential ad revenue to protect its editorial freedom, Denton said, but there's a limit.

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"There's a thing called the Gawker tax which represents the cost of selling these brands that any moment can blow up, they can blow up because of internal dissension, they can blow up because of a story that goes wrong, and they call it the Gawker tax. My estimate of the Gawker tax is the gap between the revenues of Gawker

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Media and the revenues of Vox Media, the gap is around \$20 million a year and the gap is increasing," he said.

The comparison to Vox is interesting because a number of Gawker staffers say that they fear Denton wants to "Vox-ify" the company, which Denton has denied.

"Now, I don't want to close that gap and I don't want to become Vox Media, but the fact of the

matter is that it is really hard to sell Gawker, Gawker.com in particular, because Gawker.com likes to pick fights with pretty much everybody. That's just the reality," he said.

Denton's point was that his editorial decisions must be informed by business and advertising concerns, in addition to his own editorial judgment.

On Friday, he decided to **remove a controversial Gawker post** about a married publishing executive who allegedly solicited a male escort, which Gawker had published on Thursday night. That decision, he said, was motivated both by editorial and business concerns.

Gawker's editorial staff have criticized the process by which the post was removed, arguing that it shows that the company's business and advertising executives are interfering with editorial decision-making.

On Friday, Denton discussed whether to remove the post with the company's managing partnership—which at the time included Denton, president and general counsel Heather Dietrick, C.O.O. Scott Kidder, advertising head Andrew Gorenstein, chief strategy officer Erin Pettigrew and executive editor Tommy Craggs. Four of the partners—Denton, Kidder, Gorenstein, and Pettigrew—voted to remove the post, while Craggs and Dietrick voted to keep it up.

Craggs and Gawker editor in chief Max Read **resigned in protest** of the vote. In his **resignation letter**, Craggs also said that Gorenstein, the head of advertising, had said in a previous meeting that Gawker senior writer Sam Biddle should be fired for writing posts, such as "**Brands are not your friend**," that cost the company advertisers.

The Tuesday meeting was a chance for editorial staffers, led by investigations editor John Cook, to get the message across that Gawker's business concerns were compromising its editorial mission and to grill the partners on their votes.

Cook asked the managing partners whether they believed they had the authority to make editorial decisions.

Gorenstein, Pettigrew and Kidder—who voted on Friday, with Denton, to take the post down—all said that they do not think they have that authority. Their votes on Friday, they said, were to support Denton.

"I think Nick has a unique vision, as founder of the company and as owner of the

company and as editorial ethos of the company, to make editorial decisions. My vote was supporting Nick in making a very difficult editorial decision," Kidder said.

"This was not Robert's Rules of Order, OK, I'm entering a motion to take down a post. Who in favor says aye? I actually don't really think I would ever make that motion to take down that post and I don't think Erin would and I don't think Andrew would either," he added.

Gorenstein said that the partners were not voting on whether to take down the post, but whether to support Denton.

"This was not a vote. This was support for a decision that Nick made that Nick has the absolutely right to do for the company, based on what he thought was in the best interests of the company, and I support that decision," Gorenstein said.

Cook then asked the obvious question: why even have the partners vote, if they were just going to rubber-stamp a decision that Denton had already made?

Denton said that he saw the vote as a kind of vote of confidence.

"If I had made a recommendation, a proposal, if I had made a decision, which I did, if I had made a decision that the partners did not by a majority support, I would have been forced to reconsider my position," he said. "I would have had to resign."

Denton said that the post threatened the site's very existence and asked his editors to consider what they would have done in the same situation.

"Let's say you are a member of the managing partnership. You are responsible not simply for your department, but you are responsible for the future of the company and here you have a story which is threatening to blow up the company, threatening its reputation, threatening its ability to actually fight its way through the Hogan trial and threatening its business," he said.

Denton kept returning to this theme that Gawker was a business and he had to do distasteful things—removing the post, for example—in order to protect all of the company's employees.

"I am the founder of the company and as someone who has helped build up the sites through editorial work, writing and editing, I have a view on the overall editorial ethos of the company, of the whole operation," he said later in the meeting. "I have above all a responsibility to the whole company to take into account all of the factors, whether it is the editorial principles at stake, the communication challenges, the legal challenges, the business challenges, and all the other challenges that we face."

Denton also defended Gorenstein's comment that maybe Biddle should be fired, saying that it was Gorenstein's job to let him know that Biddle's posts were costing the company a lot of ad revenue and it was his job to weigh that against the desire for editorial freedom and make a decision.

Cook objected to this calculus, asking whether *The New York Times* also weighed its reporters against its advertisers.

This sparked a shouting match between Denton and Gawker features editor Leah

Finnegan, who previously worked as a staff editor at the Times.

"It doesn't! I know that for a fact. It does not and it never will," Finnegan said.

"I think at some level, yes they do. I know enough *New York Times* people to know that," Denton said.

"Nick, I worked there for two and a half years. They canceled ads in favor of journalism."

"Do you know how much money we lose all the time, because of cancellations in ads? I cannot, I cannot believe that you are actually saying this!"

"Make this into an advertising company then! Say what it really is! It's not a place for journalism!"

Cook told everyone to calm down and the conversation moved on.

But the question of the *Times*' policies came up again an hour or so later, after Denton said that no media company gives its journalists greater protections from advertiser pressure than Gawker does.

What about the *Times*, Cook asked.

"*The New York Times* moves people around from beat to beat in order—and you know this because you heard the story—in order to satisfy advertisers sometimes. They won't actually remove a journalist, they won't fire a journalist; they'll actually just put a weak journalist on the beat so that the coverage isn't quite as toothy as it would otherwise be," Denton said.

This was just how the media industry worked, Denton said, and if Gawker writers did not realize that, it was only because he had gone out of his way to insulate them from advertiser pressure.

"There are dirty deals being done all over the place," he said. "Your attitude, your naïveté when it comes to that and then outrage when you discover that actually that's how the world works, it's sort of natural and it's sort of a function of where we are as a company."

Update: The *Times* told our colleague Hadas Gold that Denton's statement about moving journalists to other beats was not true.

This story has been updated to correct a quote from Nick Denton. Denton said John Cook "heard the story," not "wrote the story," Cook wrote on Twitter.

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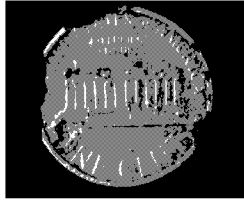


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Alam Kusif

Gawker editorian staff are completely delusional. Thankfully, most of them will probably have difficulty finding a new job in media after Gawker shuts its doors.



Ryan Arko

It's almost like Nick Denton is a bad father dealing with overly petulant children. Leah Finnegan can say she's about journalism all she wants but at the end of the day, she left a news organization to work for a tabloid. She's no journalist and hasn't been for a bit. None of those at Gawker's media family are journalists, something that can be identified with titles like "Penelope Cruz f***ed a steak," or tags like "athlete d**k pics."

Denton is an awful human being and it says a lot when Gawker is disgusting to even him.



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This article is riddled with typos.

