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User Generated Content: time to consider the ethical conundrums as well as the opportunities

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User Generated Content: time to consider the ethical conundrums as well as the opportunities

Abstract

Local police confirm there is an active shooter situation in a shopping centre... User-generated content is going to be the only source of content before your crews can get there. A producer identifies someone in the shopping centre. You can see that they have a good vantage point because they've already tweeted a photo of what looks like bodies on the ground. If verified this would be the first image from inside. How do you proceed?"

Keywords

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World News Publishing Focus

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User Generated Content: time to consider the ethical conundrums as well as the opportunities

"Local police confirm there is an active shooter situation in a shopping centre... User-generated content is going to be the only source of content before your crews can get there. A producer identifies someone in the shopping centre. You can see that they have a good vantage point because they've already tweeted a photo of what looks like bodies on the ground. If verified this would be the first image from inside. How do you proceed?"



That is one of the User Generated Content (UGC) related ethical conundrums posed by a panel of experts at the International Newsroom Summit in Amsterdam last week. The panel, featuring the BBC's **Steve Herrmann**, AP's **Fergus Bell** and Google's Director of Communications for Europe, the Middle East and Africa **Peter Barron**, was moderated by UNHCR social media strategist **Claire Wardle**, **Jessica Sparks** and **Alice Matthews**

explore the UGC issues that should have newsrooms ethically engaged.

HARNESSING USER-GENERATED CONTENT

"People feel empowered to tell stories. They want to show that they were there, they want to be a part of news and part of telling that story [and] the more UGC that they see, the more that they feel they want to contribute," **Fergus Bell**, AP's International Social Media and UGC editor, told the World Editors Forum

He says as audiences recognise they can be involved in the news process, newsrooms will be presented with a plethora of rich content.

"We don't know what that content's going to look like yet and that's exciting and an opportunity."

Claire Wardle says UGC is still a growing area, but has great promise in offering content gathered and produced amidst the action, where it wouldn't have otherwise been.

"Increasingly the best pictures are the ones captured by eyewitnesses at the scene with a camera-enabled phone. By the time a professional crew arrives, the 'action' is often over," she told the World Editors Forum.

"Newsrooms should be harnessing those pictures, and then providing the context to the pictures and the story."

Providing the context of UGC is proving to be a major challenge facing the fast-paced, digital-first newsroom. As UGC is still a new area, best practice is still developing.

RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS CONTENT CREATORS

"Is it ever right to ask [users] to go and film something? If they get injured or something happens to them, what is our duty of care to them? Are we responsible for them?" **Fergus Bell** asks.

He says managing UGC comes down to "working out your standards *before* you have to deal with it". These standards need to address issues such as crediting and informed consent.

Bell says users are becoming more aware of their rights.

"They understand that they own that content, so I think that's something that we need to address as an industry really quickly - how we deal with permissions and is it ever ok to run something without permission?"



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