

# Digital Detox: A navigator's handbook to tackling trolls



Social media platforms are becoming more contentious with the presence of bots and an overall decrease in moderation. Navigating this challenging environment requires strategic community guidelines and practices to have productive and appropriate online conversations and lessen negative interactions for social media managers.

In the face of online toxicity, having well-defined **community guidelines** is the first line of defense. These guidelines can be internal for social media managers to be mindful of, or external guidelines that are easily accessible to your community members.

For example:

*Our community values respectful and constructive dialogue. We do not tolerate personal attacks, hate speech, or misinformation. Violators may face warnings, be suspended from commenting, or be banned based on the severity of their actions.*

## Turing test for trolls

### How do you know whether the account that's engaging on your page is a bot or a person?

- **No bio or photo:** People generally use social media to connect with each other, and that connection includes a brief summary of self to find like-minded folks. While not everyone who doesn't have a bio is a bot, a lack of personal details is an indicator that you should look deeper at the account before engaging.
- **A lot of copy-paste:** Bots can only do so much – they are programmed to automatically generate responses to certain keywords, hashtags, or social media handle mentions. If you spot repetitive content and high posting frequency from the same account, it's a good indicator that the account is a spam profile and not a human being.
- **Only replies on hot topic issues:** Trending topics offer cover to bots and spam accounts. Human beings have a wide range of experiences and tend to talk about them with nuance. Accounts that only engage with trending issues can help you differentiate between a spam and genuine account.

In all cases, be vigilant to identify patterns in posting habits, language, and behavior. **When it's a bot, just hide or block!** Not a bot? Use the guide below to navigate disagreement with real people in your online community.



## Real people engagement guide

<p><b>Emotional/Invested and receptive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• These individuals are emotionally invested in the cause and seek acknowledgement to feel heard and understood.</li><li>• <i>Advice:</i> Engage by acknowledging their feelings and values. Respond with empathy and align with shared values.</li><li>• <i>Sample:</i> “We understand your passion and share your commitment to this cause. Your input is valuable, and we appreciate your dedication to making a positive impact.”</li></ul>	<p><b>Not emotional but receptive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• These individuals are not emotionally driven, but are open to thoughtful discussions. They seek intelligent and well-reasoned arguments.</li><li>• <i>Advice:</i> Engage with a counterpoint or provide additional information to stimulate a constructive conversation.</li><li>• <i>Sample:</i> “Thank you for raising this point. Here’s an alternative perspective that considers [additional information]. What do you think?”</li></ul>
<p><b>Emotional/Invested but not receptive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Despite emotional investment, these individuals may not be open to different perspectives. Engaging in good faith is recommended, but there’s a point where disengagement is necessary.</li><li>• <i>Advice:</i> Engage in good faith initially, but if the conversation becomes unproductive or violates your community guidelines, consider muting, blocking, or reporting the account.</li><li>• <i>Sample:</i> “We appreciate your passion, and we’re here for constructive dialogue. [Restate values to end conversation, and do not reply to further comments.]”</li></ul>	<p><b>Just trolls:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• These individuals are solely seeking to disrupt, derail, or provoke. Engaging with them will likely be unfruitful.</li><li>• <i>Advice:</i> Just block and move on. Avoid wasting energy on unproductive interactions. If comments violate the social media platforms code of conduct (for example, promotes violence), reporting is always an option though the response from platforms lacking moderation is lackluster at best.</li></ul>

# Principles for managing socials

1. **Define your engagement goals:** Before engaging with community members who disagree, clarify your goals. Whether it's persuading someone, addressing inappropriate comments, or restating your position for onlookers, having a clear objective guides your interaction.
2. **Lead with empathy:** When engaging with real people, acknowledge emotions such as anger, fear, or frustration. Lead with your heart, demonstrating empathy and understanding.
3. **Connect through storytelling:** Share personal stories when possible to connect on a human level. Stories evoke empathy and understanding, fostering a sense of community. Wherever possible, conclude with a hopeful message, emphasizing the potential for collaboration and positive change.
4. **Restate positions for visibility:** If persuasion seems unlikely, consider responding to restate your position and drive traffic to appropriate links on your website. This ensures that other community members witness your commitment to your beliefs and values.
5. **Strategically engage in persuasion:** When aiming to persuade, focus on presenting your position with clarity and supporting evidence. Be mindful of fostering constructive dialogue rather than escalating disagreements.
6. **Define what a safe space means for your online community:** Address inappropriate or harmful comments promptly to maintain a safe online community. Reinforce the importance of respectful discourse and adherence to community guidelines.
7. **Embrace the block button:** The block button is a powerful tool — use it liberally to keep trolls and bots at bay. Prioritize maintaining a positive and safe online space.

By adhering to these principles, your organization can navigate online interactions effectively, foster a supportive community, and contribute to the greater good in the digital realm.

## Additional Resources:

- [Don't Feed the Trolls: How to Deal with Hate on Social Media - Center for Countering Digital Hate](#)
- [Trolls Aren't Like the Rest of Us, by Arthur C. Brooks - The Atlantic](#)
- [10 Effective Tactics to Defeat Internet Trolls, by Julia McCoy - Search Engine Journal](#)

Thank you members of the [Radical Communicators Network](#) for additional advice!

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## Water Hub

Zakiyaa Taylor | [zakiyaa@waterhub.org](mailto:zakiyaa@waterhub.org)