

Members Ethics Advisory Panel (MEAP) Posts Ethical Questions for Response

Kristen Smith 2:06 pm on November 1, 2010 | [6 Comments](#) [Permalink](#) | [Edit](#)

The WOMMA Members Ethics Advisory Panel is considering two questions they would like feedback on as part of the Annual Ethics Code Review:

“Contests – how and when should disclosure occur in social media contests? For example, does a “material connection” exist between a brand and a blogger who enters a contest and writes about his or her contest entry?”

“Data scraping – The practice of using technology to “scrape” employee data, social media profile information, and in some cases discussions within private social networks, exists. Issues of privacy and respect for rules of venue may be raised by this practice. What do you think?”

Please post your responses as well as encourage other colleagues to post feedback. Thank you.

- [Keith Trivitt](#) 3:48 pm on January 4, 2011 [Permalink](#) | [Edit](#)

Contests:

Disclosure of relationships, motivation, compensation and other pertinent factors should be the basis of all forms of marketing and communications, including emerging practices like social media and online contests. Ethical marketing and communications require that marketers reasonably inform consumers of the motivations and intent of use behind the messaging they receive throughout the process, no matter the medium used.

There needs to be disclosure — by the marketer and by the person engaged in that contest — within every single message, blog post, tweet, etc. mentioning the contest. The breadth of social networks and how far they reach means that marketers now capture consumers’ interests at different times and through different lenses.

Where practical, social media contests should provide a link to a clear and simple Web page noting all of the uses for the contest, the information submitted as part of the contest and to whom that information will be given to and for what purposes.

A simple feature that would allow for all messaging and communications within a social media contest to contain the necessary disclosure, and within space/character limitations, can be found in a free service like CMP.ly (<http://cmp.ly/>), which provides a tiny URL link back to a comprehensive disclosure page relevant to that specific contest.

Material Connection within Contests:

A material connection does exist between a brand and a blogger (or any participant) when the blogger writes about and/or discusses his or her contest entry in any format (blog, Tweet, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). This is particularly true if the participant is trying to obtain some type of personal or professional benefit from the contest and/or from his/her promotion of that contest.

Rosanna Fiske, APR

Chair and CEO

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)

<http://www.prsa.org/>

Keith Trivitt is associate director of public relations at the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

- [Payroll Motherwell](#) 7:08 am on December 15, 2010 [Permalink](#) | [Edit](#)

There is no doubt that transparency and ethics are an absolute must in this area – people are appointed to positions and have trust placed upon them, of which they should uphold.

- [Mike Volpe](#) 1:33 pm on November 5, 2010 [Permalink](#) | [Edit](#)

RE: Data scraping –

I think that as long as the person has opted-in to receive communication from you in the first place, then any data that is publicly accessible (not behind a login) which a human could get by using a search engine should be acceptable to scrape. This is just where technology automates the process a human would do.

For instance, if I know your name because you filled out a contact form on my website with your name and email, I could search around in Google and find your Twitter profile and see your recent status updates. I could also have software do something like that, and display in my marketing system your name, email and last twitter status automatically, helping me to interact with you in a more personalized and productive way. I don’t see a problem with that. Of course I need to continue to have the right opt-out language in my communications and I should have a privacy policy on my website that says how I

use the data you give me, etc. If a human can do it manually, I think it should be fair game for software to do it as long as you have permission to communicate.

I do NOT think you should scrape data to initiate contact without the opt-in coming from a customer. I am in favor of laws more like the EU for this – you can't send unsolicited email at all. Currently in the US it is legal to scrape email addresses off of a website and then email those people. I find that annoying and wrong.

- [Tyler LeCompte](#) 8:26 am on November 3, 2010 [Permalink](#) | [Edit](#)

Contests – Disclosure of relationship, compensation and/or connection should be disclosed often and early in any SocMedia contests. This applies to both the organizers of the contest and the participants, wherever they may spread the “word” of the brand, the contest and their entry. A “material connection” does exist when a participant continues to discuss the contest that they have entered in any format (blog, SocMedia – FB, Twitter, etc.) especially if they are trying to garner support/votes to influence the final result of that contest.

Data Scraping – This is an unfortunate side effect of the technology age, and something that will be very hard to contain/control without proper security/privacy measures being installed into the software that runs a website/contest. If the organizers of a contest intend to share the public information (profiles, emails, screen names, data) for the purposes of garnering open communication between participants, then they need to disclose to those participants the level of privacy controls and security that they have installed PRIOR to people entering their personal information, so that they can make an informed decision about their participation.

Thanks for letting us share our thoughts WOMMA & MEAP!

- [Dan Wheeler](#) 5:49 pm on November 2, 2010 [Permalink](#) | [Edit](#)

I think full disclosure and transparency is important in both these areas – contests and data scraping.

Dan

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