

Copy of an open letter published at the general forum Trekearth at Dec. 25th 2008.

Open letter to the management of TE

As taking the initiative for a solidarity strike at TE some days ago, here is my summary of the experience after 7 days – as the action now ends.

The initiative was taken spontaneously after learning that the TE management had introduced a new form for ban – locking accounts for 7 days. As we too many times lately have seen what seems to be a form for a random reaction from the mods to photos or members – it felt right to invite to this action of solidarity. Also combined with the management's behaviour to not respond to issues raised, or to give relevant information when mods remove photos, lock or delete forum threads etc. In general simply return little or no respect to serious members work at the site.

Many active, well known members joined the strike. This was important as it is active members that is the core of TE. Through their activities they make TE attractive by keeping up a high number of hits (views) to TE. For each hit combined with a visitor clicking one of the many ads, money is generated, turnover is secured, resulting in the owners' profit of the place.

The less activity by active members, the less income and profit for the site.

Some thoughts and statistics

Can one member be important in this game? Example: I have posted app. 1000 photos. Each photo is viewed 500 times (just an estimate and example). For my photos alone this means (over time until today) a potential for 500.000 hits each adding a chance for profit to the owners. Now, if I left the site and deleted my account, of course this opportunity would not be there in the future.

We have seen in the last months many active members leave TE. Say 25 members at my activity level left. That will reduce the income potential with 12.500.000 that is: 12,5 million hits (over some time). Of course this is a situation that can not be wanted by the management. So the target was also to stress this fact for the management.

What did we achieve?

I really do not know. The frustration under the new management have been increasing in the last period but can we measure it?. Let's take a look at some statistics (ref. alexa.com):

There is no significant change in the last 3 months average for visits to TE. The development is not as good as Flickr but better than Pbase.

Still there is at TE a 14% drop in number of pages viewed each day, by each user in the last 3 months average. That's significant and not so good!

Let's keep an eye to this statistics in the time to come – and be aware again that it is our posted photos that makes a win or loose situation for TE.

The importance of the active members is always essential. Alone the 100 most active members have posted some 80.000 photos that is 10% of all photos at TE. An average of 800 photos pr. member – not so interesting then to have a register that total 74.000 registered members with an average of less than 10 photos.

(Or: It takes 80 average members to equal 1 of the most active). Should the active members join forces as in a strike or 'time out' it will for sure not be a good situation for the management.

The sometimes strange life of the mods (moderators)

In the heat of this strike/action and the ban of 2 members for 7 days we could observe some interesting behaviour from the mods.

In a thread started by an experienced moderator, a warning to paste in text in photos (Christmas Greetings), some member pointed out a strong and clear TOS violation where 2 photos was used to cut and paste, constructing a most flattering photo. Some years ago I remember an equal case where Adam (owner at the time) not only removed the photos but immediately deleted the members account. What did this experienced mod do after this forum information was given (in the mod's own thread)? So far – Absolute nothing!

The same mod in these days added the creative variant of locking a thread *against* the strike in a French language version, but keeping the content. While this mod or a colleague deleted the whole English language version in *favour* of the strike. hmm... coincidence or what?

We also in the process had the dubious pleasure to get acquainted with 2 new moderators. One J Cogan and some Alex. The latter was right enough only communicating through e-mails with another member – I wonder why? Any way I was reading their insertions and was thinking: These guys must be very young and inexperienced. Should I be right it is for me difficult to understand why the management puts such mods in a situation where they must deal with experienced members, often adult persons.

There are some basic rules for interactions in communicating and a way that seldom works is when 'children' is expected to moderate 'parents'. Of course this model is also valid when grown ups communicate after such a behaviour model.

Conclusion

Some basic rules for moderating a forum is already inserted in 2 other threads here at TE. It should be worth looking into for the management. Also with regard to future temporary member bans and/or removal of photos. We do respect the TOS as we at the same time expect some respect when we time after time raise questions in the forum. No one denies the management its owner status to the site – but let there be no doubt that the content and life on the site is made by the members. For many the time is over when we stand in the door twining our fingers with bowed head and say thank you for letting us be guests on your site.

TE is today just a small operation in the mother company Internet Brands that have a turnover near 80 mill. dollars in the first 3 quarters of 2008. How much of this turnover is TE representing? What do I know. But even if it is only 0,5% it would be 400.000 dollars – worth taking care of.

Don't expect Chief executive Robert N. Brisco or Lisa Morita/Chief Operating Officer to jump in their chairs because of some mouse whining in this forum. But be sure they both wants to see some development and profit coming from the site – which is the key that we the members hold (if we do not yield under any pussycat syndrome and become scared of being 'banned'.) Internet Brands responsible for consumer products is Lisa Morita (recruited from Yahoo last year) and for my part I am ready for a constructive and problem solving dialogue at anytime with her or any appointed responsible person for TE.

Personally I'll post one more photo and then continue with a personal 'time-out' keeping an eye to the site and returning when I believe there is a better climate between management/mods and the members. Enough is enough. I'm afraid I lost 2 TE friends, which I both have met personally, in this process. Unfortunate but maybe what you have to pay for launching such an action.

Dec. 25th. 2008.

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