Pinterest slashes contractor pay for the holidays



It's been a big week for investigations here at *The Interface*. On Monday, we published my investigation into the mental health woes of content moderators for Google and YouTube who remove terrorist content from the web. And on Tuesday, Zoe published a follow-up investigation into the high-flying luggage company Away. There's a lot in there: an OSHA complaint, failed heating and air conditioning systems, cockroaches and mice in stores, and the indelible phrase "these fumes got me zeeted high key."

Both stories explore the lives of workers that don't often make headlines: the entry-level workers and contractors who are essential to the day-to-day functioning of companies like Google and Away. Time and again, we see how these workers are asked to make do with a lower standard of working life: lower pay, fewer benefits, worse offices, and so on.

This tends to play out in the most petty of ways. Take this, from Zoe's story:

> *"It's like we have been brushed aside and forgotten," Eric adds. In previous years, full-time monogramming artists were included in company-wide events, like Away's annual holiday party. After the move to Brooklyn, the team was told they would have a separate event, though full-time artists could attend both.*
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> *Earlier this month, those artists realized the Google invite for the main holiday party had been removed from their calendars, and the team no longer had access to the company's main Slack channels.*

Holidays are when we are typically at our most generous, and so it always looks bad when a company claws back even a perk as simple as a party invitation in December.

For the same reason, companies are generally loath to slash pay or plan layoffs around the holidays. And so I was surprised to learn recently that Pinterest was implementing cost-cutting measures this month that will affect its most vulnerable employees.

Like lots of companies, Pinterest gives employees the week between Christmas and New Year's Day off while paying them as if they had worked. Unlike lots of companies, Pinterest has traditionally extended that benefit to the contractors who work on the company's culinary and maintenance staff, which the company calls HosPin.

This year, Pinterest decided to claw back that benefit. Contractors will still get their days off — they just won't be paid for them, except for Christmas and New Year's Day. The company will pay contractors a nominal holiday bonus, but the money will fall well short of a week's pay. Instead, Pinterest is offering the workers extra shifts during the shutdown week that they previously spent with their families.

The move will likely make life more difficult for contractors who once relied on that money to buy Christmas presents, pay rent, and purchase other necessities. And meanwhile, the full-time employees who might not even blink at the loss of four days' pay will be paid to do nothing over the break just as they always have.

Unfortunately for some Pinterest contractors, life won't be getting much brighter in the New Year. The company plans to change vendors for its San Francisco maintenance staff, *The Verge* has learned, a move that will result in more than half of existing positions being eliminated. Pinterest says employees who lose their jobs will be invited to apply at

other vendor locations.

”Contractors at Pinterest are an integral part of our team and we work hard to make sure they are compensated accordingly,” the company told me in a statement. “This year, our HosPin contractors will be paid for the Christmas and New Year’s holidays. Although they will not be paid for the additional days the office is closed they will receive a bonus. Because of this change, we’re working with them to offer additional shifts throughout those days. Separately, we are not laying off any HosPin personnel, that is incorrect.”

On one hand, it’s reasonable for a company to cut costs. Pinterest’s stock is below the price it sold for at its initial public offering, and it reported disappointing earnings for its most recent quarter. The company has never turned a profit.

Still, a good way to see what a company truly values is to see what it spends money on — and what it spends less money on. And the case at Pinterest this Christmas, as at so many companies, is that the costs of cost-cutting fall hardest on those least equipped to bear them.

The Ratio

Today in news that could affect public perception of the big tech platforms.

Trending up: Facebook is spending six figures on a free e-learning course for newsrooms called “Identifying and Tackling Manipulated Media.” The material, developed by Reuters, seeks to help journalists identify photos or videos that have been altered to present inaccurate information.

Trending up: Facebook expanded **Instagram’s** third-party fact checking program globally, to allow fact-checkers to assess and rate misinformation. The program launched in the US in

May.

Trending down: Google fired another employee active in internal organizing, this time for sending internal pop-up messages about labor rights. It's the latest in a series of controversial terminations recently at the company.

Governing

 2020 candidates aren't doing much to fight disinformation, researchers say. Many simply don't have the resources to spot false statements or get them taken down before they spread, they say. Davey Alba at *The New York Times* has the story:

> *Campaigns and political parties say their hands are tied, because big online companies like Facebook and YouTube have few restrictions on what users can say or share, as long as they do not lie about who they are.*
>
> *But campaigns should not just be throwing their hands up, said some researchers and campaign veterans like Ms. Kaplan, who now runs a start-up that helps fight disinformation. Instead, they said, there should be a concerted effort to counter falsehoods.*
>
> *"Politicians must play some defense by understanding what information is out there that may be manipulated," said Joan Donovan, a research director at Harvard University's Shorenstein Center. Even more important for politicians, she said, is pushing "high-profile and consistent informational campaigns."*

Twitter is bringing back labels for US election candidates. The company will label 2020 candidates for US House, Senate, and gubernatorial races, as it did in 2018. It will not label them "good" or "bad," as I had requested. (Jay Peters / *The Verge*)

Peter Thiel is at the center of political divisions at **Facebook**, and Thiel himself has advocated for the company continuing to sell political ads. “Mark is friends with Peter Thiel and a lot of Republicans,” said a former Facebook employee who worked in its political group. “It’s a reality people aren’t willing to accept.” (Emily Glazer, Deepa Seetharaman and Jeff Horwitz / *Wall Street Journal*)

Facebook banned several groups promoting black salve, a dangerous and unproven skin cancer treatment. The company said the groups were banned not for the rules prohibiting “sensational health claims,” but for violations of Facebook’s rules prohibiting “violent and criminal behavior.” (Katie Notopoulos / *BuzzFeed*)

A pro-Trump media outlet, TheBL, is creating fake **Facebook** profiles using algorithmically generated faces from ThisPersonDoesNotExist.com. The profiles serve as administrators and members of dozens of Facebook groups. Sounds coordinated and inauthentic to me, but the page remains. (Sarah Thompson / Lead Stories)

Congress signed a deal to give the states more funding for securing their voting systems, but Democrats argued that it doesn’t do enough to protect US elections from hacking or other interference. They’re calling for more funding and stricter standards. (Alexa Corse / *Wall Street Journal*)

The chair of a US congressional panel asked **Google** and **Apple** whether they require apps to disclose overseas ties. The question follows months of scrutiny over Chinese influence of apps like **TikTok** and **Grindr**. (Reuters)

The chairman of Samsung was convicted of violating South Korean labor union laws and sentenced to 18 months in jail. The court said he disrupted union activities. I bet this story is widely read inside Google! (Eun-Young Jeong / *The Wall Street Journal*)

India’s internet shutdown in Kashmir is the longest ever to be imposed in a democracy, advocacy groups say. Only authoritarian regimes such as China and Myanmar have cut off the Internet for longer. (Niha Masih, Shams Irfan and Joanna Slater */ The Washington Post*)

Industry

 Snoop Dogg is starring in a scammy debt-relief campaign on **Facebook** that targets people with financial troubles. It’s part of a multilayered effort to funnel Facebook users toward opaque debt-relief firms, says *Vice’s* David Uberti. This is the last time we rely on Snoop Dogg for financial advice!

> *The rap legend made dozens of such appearances in a $274,000 ad campaign across Facebook and Instagram, according to the company’s public ad archive. The content, from a page called “Debt Council,” shilled a “Christian-led” program that promised to zap unpaid bills through a $7.6 billion government loophole. It ushered users toward financial freedom in the form of 800-number hotlines and a website bearing vague testimonials and stock imagery.*
>
> *“Listen to your boy Snoop D-O-Double G ,” one ad pleaded with Facebook users, adding that “thousands of $$ you are rightfully entitled to” were at stake.*
>
> *But there’s a big problem: The loophole doesn’t seem to exist. “It is a scam if there is no such program,” said Seth Rosenberg, a managing member at The Seattle Litigation Group, a law firm that advises on debt relief. “To my knowledge, there is no government program.”*

A thief stole payroll information for tens of thousands of **Facebook** employees in the US. The information was being stored on unencrypted corporate hard drives that were lifted from an employee’s car. (Kurt Wagner / Bloomberg)

Facebook built an entire *Game of Thrones*-themed kingdom for its employee holiday party, complete with White Walkers, swords and archery. This theme would have seemed really cool about three years ago. (Rob Price / *Business Insider*)

An Army **Facebook** post about the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge sparked fierce pushback yesterday over its display of a Nazi war criminal. The post appeared on the verified Facebook page of the XVIII Airborne Corps — which fought in the monthlong battle between Allied and German forces in 1944. (Tim Stelloh and Ben Collins / NBC)

A look back at the most downloaded apps and games of the decade shows **Facebook** and Facebook Messenger have dominated. The most downloaded game was Subway Surfers, which I have somehow never played. (Adithya Venkatraman / App Annie)

Instagram will now automatically warn users when they're about to post a "potentially offensive" caption. The app will encourage users to edit potentially offensive captions, but it will also give them the option of posting it unchanged. (Jon Porter / *The Verge*)

She writes, "it can seem sensible, even automatic, to think of your body the way that a McKinsey consultant would think about a corporation: identify underperforming sectors and remake them, discard whatever doesn't increase profits and reorient the business toward whatever does." (Jia Tolentino / *The New Yorker*)

YouTube has signed up more than 800,000 subscribers for its paid services in India, since it debuted back in March. The services have been growing faster than rival paid music offerings in the country, including **Spotify** and local players Gaana and JioSaavn. (Lucas Shaw / Bloomberg)

A **YouTuber's** videos were demonetized, allegedly because of his Aussie accent. Here's your content-moderation-is-hard story for the day: A human content moderator flagged Fynnpire's work

for “strong profanity used in a hateful or derogatory way” after hearing him said the word “car” and thinking it was *another* c-word. (Cameron Wilson / BuzzFeed)

A **Twitter** bug notified people when they were added to private lists. *Vice* broke the story after investigative journalist Caroline Haskins got a notification that she was added to a list called “haters,” by a PR coordinator at **Amazon’s** surveillance company **Ring**. Haskins has been reporting on Ring, and we have met her personally and dispute the fact that she is a hater. (Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai / *Vice*)

Young leftists are breaking down the points behind their political ideology on **TikTok.** Their goal is to make it easier for the next generation of voters to understand and get pulled into socialism. “Let’s go make TikToks about socialism” sounds like a joke that people just kept telling each other until they started actually doing it. (Ryan C. Brooks / *BuzzFeed*)

World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) launched on **TikTok**. It’s making its entrance themes for more than 30 Superstars and Hall of Famers – including “Stone Cold” Steve Austin, The Undertaker, Ultimate Warrior, Becky Lynch, John Cena and Sasha Banks – available for people to use into their own videos. Some (me) are calling this the best news of 2019. (Todd Spangler / *Variety*)

Some people who work on decentralized networks aren’t impressed with **Jack Dorsey**’s announcement about the future of a decentralized **Twitter**. They say he’s stomping into an existing field with a lot of noise and very little detail. (Adi Robertson / *The Verge*)

WhatsApp fixed a bug that could have allowed hackers to crash the app and delete group chats forever. The security flaw was uncovered by researchers at Check Point who work with WhatsApp to ensure it can’t be exploited by malicious attackers. (Danny Palmer / *ZDNet*)

There’s a responsible way to make deepfake technology, this writer argues. He lays out the positive applications for the technology and a framework for developing it safely. (Aviv Ovadya */ MIT Technology Review*)

SF Gate created a slideshow of the funniest **Nextdoor** posts from 2019. There are people throwing salami at parked cars and neighbors advocating for pet ducks. (Amy Graff */ SF Gate*)

And finally…

It isn’t often that I find the lives of tech CEOs completely relatable. But:

> *Last year, Snapchat CEO Evan Spiegel quietly applied to the French consulate in Los Angeles to gain French citizenship because ‘he loves France’. https://t.co/YWS4KGqUDQ*
>
> *— Ruqayyah Moynihan (@QayyahMoynihan) December 17, 2019*

Toutes nos félicitations, Evan.

Talk to us

Send us tips, comments, questions, and your final 2020 social media predictions: casey@theverge.com and zoe@theverge.com.

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