

Reddit calls for “a few new mods” after axing, polarizing some of its best



reader comments

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Reddit is campaigning to replace numerous longstanding moderators who were removed from their positions after engaging in API protests. Over the past week, a Reddit employee has posted to subreddits with ousted mods, asking for new volunteers. But in its search, the company has failed to address the intricacies involved in moderating distinct and, in some cases, well-known subreddits. And it doesn't look like the knowledge from the previous moderators is being passed down.

Redditors were enraged over suddenly high API access pricing, and the social media platform's subsequent responses to protests and feedback have beleaguered Reddit for weeks. A two-day blackout of over 8,000 subreddits, for example, shut Reddit down for three hours in June. Protestors complicated matters further with moves like suddenly making subreddits not-safe-for-work (NSFW), all about John Oliver, or focusing on some unhelpful tweak of its original topic (like r/malefashionadvice only allowing posts related to the stylings of the 18th century).

It's a tough job...

Reddit's response has included threatening to remove moderators who are engaging in protests to actually removing them. Recently, efforts to replace the departed volunteers who were booted or quit have picked up steam. A Reddit employee going by ModCodeofConduct (Reddit has refused to disclose the real names of admins representing the company on the platform) has posted to numerous subreddits over recent days, including r/IRLEasterEggs, r/donthelpjustfilm, r/ActLikeYouBelong, r/malefashionadvice, and r/AccidentalRenaissance.

Ars Technica spoke with a moderator via email who resigned from r/AccidentalRenaissance after they say Reddit threatened to remove the mod team after they took various forms of protest within the subreddit. The user, who asked to be identified as M.R. for privacy reasons, said the biggest challenge for replacement mods would be dealing with some of "the worst photos they could imagine":

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Child porn, dying animals, dying children, brutal 3rd world scenes of horror, and quite a lot of literal poop. So if anyone was bothered by graphic images, they should stay well away...

And because your Reddit account can be permabanned at any

time by Reddit's Anti-Evil Operations bot with a modest amount of reporting from a number of sockpuppet accounts, you're not able to tell these people to fuck off and go to hell when they inevitably ask why you're discriminating against them and their sickening photos.

You have to maintain a veneer of pleasantness for even the most vile photos and the most abusive Redditors because those are the people that can and will get you banned in retaliation.

In addition to the aforementioned types of nastiness mods are tasked to cull from subreddits, mods Ars has spoken with over the weeks have frequently pointed to the potential for burnout, death threats, long training sessions (from other volunteer mods), and rapid turnover for Reddit mods.

Another Reddit user, who asked to be identified as Zach for privacy reasons, was a moderator for r/malefashionadvice for years before Reddit removed him. He put a lot of free labor into the community, he said, from banning trolls and "hateful people" and removing comments to making content and facilitating discussions to keep the subreddit's 5.5 million members (as of this writing) interested.

"[E]very year we tried to test out whether our rules were well designed for this purpose and suspended what were called the 'Daily Questions Megathreads,' where questions and advice request went, and allowed people to post in a free-for-all fashion," Zach told Ars, describing examples of the unique work done. Even the megathreads required the hand of moderators, as advisors eventually grew weary and took time off, and "lurkers and random posters" would start offering "garbage advice."

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Without mods proven to be dedicated and experienced, it's unclear how fervently such efforts will continue in the

future.

... and not everyone can do it

Various subreddits, (such as r/AskHistorians and r/science) have complicated moderation systems that not everyone can handle.

M.R. pointed to the r/AccidentalRenaissance moderation team formerly boasting “art history backgrounds, formal education, and an instinctual grasp of what makes a photo ‘Renaissance.’” Those principles are listed via a sidebar on the subreddit, but M.R. says that new mods haven’t properly instilled them since taking over.

Now, the subreddit boasts images that, M.R. laments, are simply “Not Renaissance.”

Imagine our dismay when the day the new mods came in, the subreddit’s profile photo became a closeup of the fingers touching in Creation of Adam. And the banner became a side-by-side comparison of a soccer player with his arms out at his sides, doing a side-by-side comparison of a Renaissance painting in a matching pose, but nothing else matched. Not lighting, not composition, not colors. ... Literally nothing but ‘vaguely crucifix-shaped human.’

It became immediately clear to us that the new mods didn’t know the first thing about art ...

M.R. doesn’t think the replacements mods were properly vetted and believes “Reddit picked the most loyal bootlickers who would churn out the maximum amount of content.”

Zach argued that r/malefashionadvice, as well as other large fashion subreddits (Zach currently moderates other fashion-focused communities) adhere, to some degree, to the 90-9-1 rule, which says that among sites with user-generated and

user-edited content, 90 percent are lurking viewers, 9 percent contribute minimally, and 1 percent do almost all the work.

When Ars asked Zach if he thinks Reddit will find quality moderators through ModCodeofConduct's calls, Zach said:

Not a snowball's chance in hell. I think Reddit committed to a pretty stupid and self-defeating path here.

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