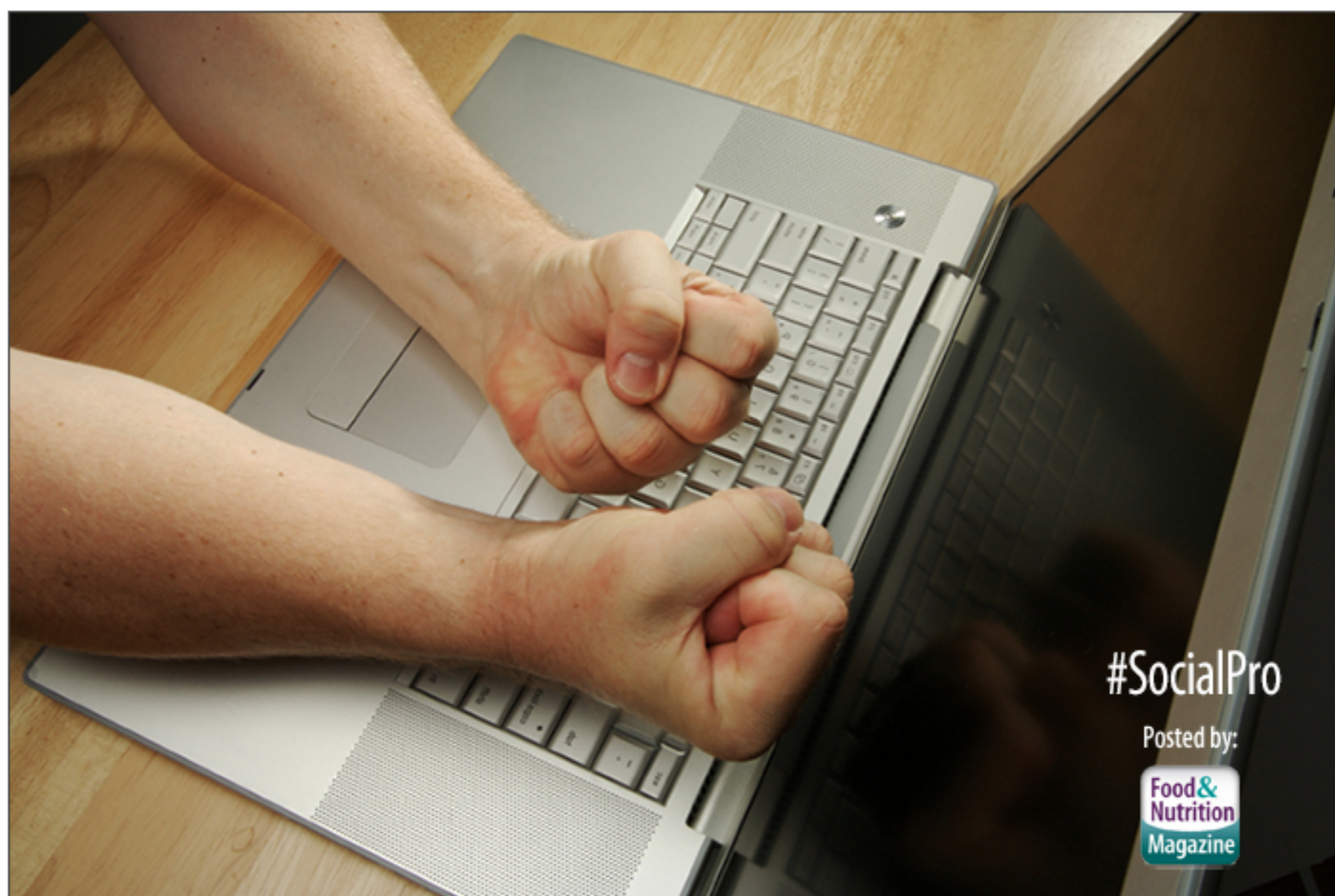


Features

SocialPro: How to Deal with Internet Trolls

By Matt Alderton | Published: Monday, April 29, 2013



Internet trolls lift themselves up by putting others down. Here are five tips for handling their harassment.

In folklore, trolls live under bridges and taunt passersby. Today, trolls are no less vile. Like everything else, however, they've gone digital, lurking online. Their goal isn't engaging online communities; it's enraging them.

An Internet troll is someone who posts off-topic, aggressive or unnecessarily controversial comments on online forums like Twitter, blogs and Facebook. A digital rabble-rouser, a troll is not someone who respectfully disagrees with you, says something you don't like, or who makes a legitimate complaint.

Rather, a troll bullies, often anonymously.

Cyber bullies can be aggravating and detrimental to your online brand or image. Dealing with them, therefore, requires a careful approach that quells quarrels but keeps your dignity intact. Following are five anti-troll tactics worth trying:

1. Starve the Troll

Trolls gain satisfaction not from posting rude comments, but rather from the reactions they elicit. When confronted with an Internet troll, therefore, one's first reaction should be silence. Ignoring the poster and refusing to engage will likely bore the troll and persuade him or her to go elsewhere. Responding and reacting on the other hand — including deleting their post, which only eggs them on — gives trolls exactly what they want, making it that much harder to get rid of them.

2. Kill the Troll with Kindness

Try being nice. Trolls thrive on aggression and anxiety. The more defensive you become and the more confrontational you get, the more entertaining and enticing a target you become. Being polite, therefore — thanking them for their constructive criticism, for instance — can be a surprising reaction that neutralizes the situation.

3. Befriend Troll Hunters

Trolls aren't intimidated by the author of an article or blog, or by the company they're following on Facebook or Twitter. If they were, they wouldn't comment in the first place. Peer pressure from fellow users, however, can be a powerful deterrent. Instead of expending energy on trolls, invest it in advocates. For instance, don't respond to negative comments from trolls; instead, *do* respond — vocally and graciously — to positive comments from supporters. Likewise, keep a list of your biggest fans and reward them with exclusive information, invitations to events or simply private notes of thanks. When trolls strike, these people will leap to your defense.

4. Police the Troll

You can discourage and control trolls with an official comments policy (like that of the sites such as the [Huffington Post](#)). It's common, for instance, to require that users provide a valid email address before they can comment in public forums. This ensures that you can contact someone privately about inappropriate comments, and also discourages trolling by preventing users from hiding behind a veil of anonymity. Likewise, it's common to moderate comments — in other words, to "approve" comments before they're published — and to set ground rules for what comments won't be approved. For instance, you might stipulate that comments containing profanity or insults won't be tolerated, or that comments must be civil. That way, when someone violates your policy, you can send them a private note explaining why their comment was not published. As long as you make your policy public, and clearly outline what comments aren't allowed, you have fair grounds for restricting — and even evicting — trolls.

5. Ban the Troll

Speaking of eviction, the final defense against trolls is banning them, which you can accomplish by blacklisting their IP address (i.e., their computer's "fingerprint"). Although an IT person can help you do this easily, it should be considered only in extreme cases and when other tactics fail, as IP banning can cause you to accidentally block legitimate users from your website and can also send the wrong message to other users, who could view the action as an unjust act of censorship.

Although aggravating, keeping your cool is your best defense against trolls. By reacting rationally instead of rashly, you'll find that even the most stubborn agitators can be foiled.

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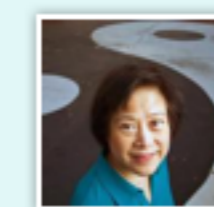
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