

Internet Safety Day 2015: Autism Campaigner subjected to vile trolling on Twitter

Monday 9 February, 2015

A leaked memo by Twitter's Chief Executive, Dick Costolo, has admitted that the company "sucks" when it comes to dealing with abuse and trolling on the service.

This revelation hardly comes as a massive surprise to us. For over a year now, Kevin Healey has suffered constant trolling and impersonation, including death threats. And Twitter has turned a blind eye to it. Even with help from MPs and the police, there hasn't been a single arrest made for this.

We have heard over and over again from public figures that "action must be taken", "online bullies must be brought to task", and countless other soundbites. But these words have not been backed up by actions.

To illustrate just how long this has been going on and how much this is affecting Kevin, here is an open letter he has composed, addressed to Twitter:

Dear twitter

There have been many requests from me and my supporters asking you to protect and verify my account, but sadly this still has not happened. Lots of people have contacted you to request for me to be verified, including staffordshire police, my MP, and celebrities have even taken the time to write to you directly. However, you still haven't responded.

I recall contacting your staff at twitter UK (feb 2014). I had a response from your HQ in march 2014, saying that I must refrain from contacting your staff, of which i only tweeted them a few times. I still have that email.

*In the email dated 14/02/2014 you seem to be disappointed that I've made contact with twitter re -my verification and state you would not accept any requests from third parties, **such as the police, my MP, Crime Commissioner. They have all written to you, and over 1580 have signed my petition and left hundreds of comments.***

I would like to know what you mean by carefully reviewing my account? and the minimum criteria....

and you're unable to make exceptions to your policies for me?

OK, Twitter, let's put the record straight: you only seem to verify the following people, and please do correct me if I'm wrong. You verify, MPs, celebrities, footballers, singers, authors - but not those fighting injustice.

I was also shocked to find out that when I had communication with one of your staff via the telephone, she stated "we can't verify you because you're not a NEW YORK best-seller. Well, Twitter, I now hundreds of people who use your platform and they are NOT New York best-sellers but they have their accounts verified.

I've had death threats on your platform, impersonation, cloning, and vile hate speech against my disability, but the most horrific is when i got LOTS of IMPERSONATION and cloning of my account.

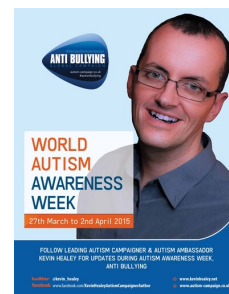
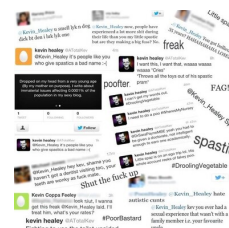
Because of these incidents, I now suffer with PTSD.

*I'm just asking for you to show some **compassion. That's all I want.***

This clearly illustrates that this issue has been going on for some time. Numerous public authorities have been contacted about it. We have provided clear evidence of the abusive comments being directed at Kevin, but has there been any action taken?No.

However, when a "celebrity" or "public figure" is the target of the same abuse, it is dealt with extremely quickly and decisively.

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Even though Staffordshire police have been very helpful, they have been unable to trace or locate the individuals responsible. The investigation has been ongoing for over a year now, so this isn't a recent issue.

We aren't asking for someone to be monitoring every tweet ever sent; we aren't asking for a dedicated team to deal with the reports. We are simply asking for Kevin's account to be verified, to prevent individuals from creating accounts designed to impersonate and intimidate Kevin.

When we have questioned Twitter on this, the default answer has been: "You don't meet the criteria". Despite repeated requests for this criteria, they have not been forthcoming with it.

Twitter's position on the use of verified accounts is that they are for the accounts of celebrities and public figures.

ENDS

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