

Nominet Forum Moderation and Etiquette

discussion paper

1. Introduction

It was agreed at the July meeting that some additional thought needed to be given to moderation of and code of conduct for the new nom-steer forum.

2. Questions: What do we want from the Forum?

The forum is intended to be a space for dialogue between Nominet members including the PAB. The objectives are to:

- Facilitate better member interaction;
- Increase the number of members taking part in the debate; and
- Allow members to focus on the areas where they want to debate.

However, the visibility of the forum will also reflect on the professionalism of Nominet, its members and the PAB and how they are viewed in the wider community.

This suggests that we should aim to ensure the forum users in their postings and in dealings with others are:

- Professional;
- Courteous;
- Inclusive (of views & opinions);
- Friendly;
- Relevant;
- Tolerant;
- A “community”;
- Fair & unbiased; and
- Constructive.

We need to consider how to encourage that type of community, both in terms of rules/acceptable behaviour, as well as moderation.

3. Some rule ideas/questions

There are probably a number of basic rules applied generally by on-line forums that are not contentious. For example, the following should probably be considered as inappropriate behaviour:

- Advertising: the forum shouldn't be a venue for people to promote their own services – the dividing line here can be quite fine and may need to be left to a moderators' discretion;
- Cross-posting (posting same post in more than one forum);
- Off Topic posts (posts which aren't relevant for the forum or the thread);
- Offensive posts / inappropriate language & topics;
- Impersonation / multiple identities – Posters should only ever post as themselves. Bearing in mind that this is a membership forum, it is appropriate for users to be identified both individually and by the member name;

- Posting of personal details (your own or those of others, including direct dials or mobile phone numbers for Nominet staff or staff of tag holders);
- Defamatory / libellous remarks (the important point here is the professionalism expected from a professional discussion platform);
- Proprietary / illegal content – not posting content you don't have rights to (or any illegal material). Nominet reserves the right to remove any such material;
- Personal comments regarding staff: the PAB has already agreed that this is entirely inappropriate behaviour, whether on this forum or elsewhere; and
- Using the forum to attack individuals or organisations. The Forum is not intended as a public pillory and such use will again reflect badly on the PAB and the Nominet membership.

4. Moderation

Setting rules implies some process of ensuring compliance, which implies some form of moderation. The following issues need to be addressed:

- Type of moderation
- What is expected of moderators
- Reporting mechanism
- Complaints procedure
- Sanctions

As noted above, Nominet retains the ultimate right to exercise editorial control (e.g. in protecting staff or members from harassment; defamation; and in the exercise of its legal responsibilities).

5. Other issues

There are a number of other issues that need to be considered such as the editing and deletion of posts by the originator, the "lifetime" of a post and of a discussion thread, the ownership of copyright of the material etc.

6. Recommendation

I would welcome a discussion in the PAB that identified some of the key principles associated with codes of conduct and moderation of the forum.