

AOL DECLARES GUNS PORNOGRAPHY

Sharp *Guns and Ammo* readers have noticed that Jim Supica, owner of the Old Town Station Dispatch, Ltd. occasionally loans us an antique firearm, for our photo layouts. He is a Federal Firearms License holder and runs an honest, above-board business. It must have come as a complete surprise, when America Online summarily removed his Web site from its system and sent the following e-mail to his account address:

AOL wrote:

“We have become aware of a web page site that is part of your account. This web page violates Hometown AOL’s Community Standards, which prohibits sexually explicit graphics, links to other sites which Hometown deems offensive, harassment, the use vulgar or sexually oriented language, discussion of illegal activities and/or other activities that may impair the enjoyment of our community members. We have placed a note of this incident on your account history and consider this a first warning. We have removed all the files from your web page/ftp site. A second occurrence will result in termination of your account with no chance of reactivation.”

Although AOL has a right to say yes or no, to the types of web pages it permits, it seems a bit strong to call gun dealers pornographers. I’ve heard, from other dealers who got the same form letter and no-warning boot, from AOL. Supica said: “I mainly want to get on with my business, with the least possible hassle. AOL’s decision, to dump gun dealer sites, did not bother me, as much as the manner in which they did it.”

Thanks to Bill Clede of the *Shotgun News*, for the story, and to the Hodgdon Powder Co., for forwarding the information.

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SCOPE’s effort to get AOL’s side of the story:

It’s not that we doubted *Guns & Ammo*’s story but SCOPE wanted to verify this one, for ourselves. The following note was sent, to AOL and their CEO, Steve Case, to get their side of the story, with the above text included. Please stay tuned to the SCOPE web site, as I will post their response, when and if they send it. Now, I, for one, hope that they will give me a good reason to keep my AOL account but don’t really expect it.

Subject: AOL Community Standards
Date: Wed, 12 Apr 2000 02:47:06 -0400
From: Peter M. Jeremich
Reply-To: Webmaster@SCOPEny.org
To: SteveCase@aol.com

Dear Steve,

I have never written to you before, but this issue is just too important. Please see the note below submitted by me earlier on your web site AOL.COM | Write to Us:

As a loyal AOL user, for many years (account info deleted), I have a mayor dilemma on my hands. I need to know if the note, below mine, is true of your TOS and Community Standards, as the stories of AOL being anti-Second Amendment are rampant.

If it is FALSE, let me set the record straight, to the pro-Second Amendment community, by putting a posting on our web site, *ALERT mailings*, sending a notice to the NRA, whom we also work with, and try to show them your point of view, so we can stop the rumors and a possible boycott.

If it is TRUE, I would still appreciate an answer to this note, as there are many of us who need to know why a US-based company would take a stand against the Constitution of US and, also, let this serve as a termination notice of my account with you.

In conclusion, I am also the webmaster for a pro-Second Amendment Organization, NRA Life member, as well as a Federal Firearms Licensed Dealer and will work, very hard, in either case, to make sure that the rest of the legal gun owning (internet using) community (approx. 80 million strong) knows where you stand.

Regards,
Peter M. Jeremich, Webmaster@SCOPEny.org

Above text of the *Guns & Ammo* insert pasted here

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It's True! AOL does have an Anti-Gun Policy!

After repeated tries, to contact AOL, on this issue failed, months later (final week of 2000), I finally made contact with a very pleasant and helpful AOL customer service rep, who promised to look into this matter and get back to me, right away. True to his word, he did but it was not good news. Read his note, for yourself (he requested that his name be removed, as he did not want to be the only rep getting all the hate mail):

> From: deleted by request@aol.com
> Date: Tue, 2 Jan 2001 16:41:50 EST
> To: webmaster@scopeny.org
> Subject: Hometown policy

>

> Dear Pete:

> Thank you for your phone call concerning AOL's policies regarding guns, and specifically, AOL's policy within the Hometown area, where, as you are probably aware, our members are able to create their own personal Web pages or home pages.

> First, I want to address your question about Hometown's policy. Hometown's Community Guidelines prohibit the advertising or sale of firearms. We strive to communicate this policy upfront, so our members are aware of the guidelines and can then choose either to become a member of that particular community or not to participate. The following excerpt from those Community Guidelines is easily accessible to members creating a new page and from the main page of the Hometown area.

> "You agree that you will not use Hometown to distribute or facilitate distribution of any content including text, communications, software, images, sounds, data, or other information that: advertises and/or promotes the sale of products or services on AOL, including, without limitation: lotteries, ammunition, firearms, fireworks and other explosive materials, tobacco, alcohol, adult products and services, such as phone sex and escort services, illegal products and services, and other products and services AOL deems inappropriate."

> I also wanted to provide a bit more information on AOL's policy in this area. Members whose screen name is General Access (18 Years old +) are able to access firearms sites. These sites are available through AOL's search, through other search products or through direct link by typing in the URL of the site.

> In instances where parents have used AOL's Parental Controls to set a screen name on Kids Only and Young Teens, we do protect children from reaching firearms sites. A parent can choose, however, to shift their child's Web access to a Mature Teen setting if the parent wants their child to have broader Internet access, including access to informational firearms sites.

> I hope this addresses your question.

>

> Sincerely,

> Name deleted by request

Ref.: AOL's Agreement to Rules of User Conduct (last paragraph), AOL Hometown Guidelines

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