

Why U-T generally won't unpublish content

Removing online stories erases the past

By [Adrian Vore](#) 9:54 p.m. March 13, 2015

I took a heartbreaking call a couple of months ago from a woman from out of state. She asked that a U-T story be removed from the website. The article, several years old, reported the accidental drowning death of her child in a North County home's pool. She didn't want any reminders of this devastating tragedy.

Calls and emails asking that stories and references in stories be removed from the U-T website have occurred more frequently in recent years.

People Google their names, see them pop up, and, in some cases, prefer they wouldn't.

Tom Mallory, the U-T's online news director, makes the decisions on these requests.

People want, in some cases demand, an item be removed for a variety of reasons.

One woman wanted a picture of her posing for the camera while holding a drink at a social gathering deleted from a gallery of photos of the event. A man asked that a short story on his wedding be dropped because the marriage ended in a nasty divorce. Another man who pleaded guilty to laundering money for a gang wanted stories on the case removed.

In all these examples, Mallory's answer was no.

There are some instances when the U-T will remove items, however, Mallory explains: If a story had inaccuracies that damaged a person's reputation, as in an instance of mistaken identity; if information used to support the foundation of a story has since been shown to be false; if a situation has changed and now the past publication of a name is endangering the person; or if the item did not meet professional standards, including being unfair.

One example was a social-scene-type party photo Mallory deleted in which the camera's flash shined through a woman's blouse and clearly revealed too much. Mallory says the photo never should have been posted.

In most cases he hesitates to remove anything of record. It takes more than a person being embarrassed or regretful, or even for news to be horribly sad.

I believe readers should applaud that. News organizations are in the business of publishing information, not excising it. What I think readers should not want is what happened in Europe last year.

The European Court of Justice ruled in May that people have "the right to be forgotten."

Under the ruling, European Union privacy regulators called on Google in November to remove links to content on its European search sites that individuals claim is out of date, irrelevant or not in the public interest.

People submit an online application form to Google if they seek to have links removed. According to an article by the Telegraph last month, 250,000 requests have been made to Google.

The Telegraph reported a number of links to its stories that have been deleted. They include one on a former Harrow boarding school student who drove his Mini, which his parents had given him the day before, through the grounds before crashing. Another was an article about a businessman, his brother and mates who “terrorised” a shopkeeper and his wife before a soccer game as they stopped to steal beer.

Google says it will “attempt to balance the privacy rights of the individual with the public’s right to know and distribute information.”

I think the public’s right to know is a bigger issue than a “right to be forgotten.” U-T readers should hope this decision stays in Europe, I believe.

Martin Kruming, a lawyer and former editor of the San Diego Daily Transcript who now teaches media law and ethics at SDSU, warns that removing information runs the risk of one side being favored over another.

“Erasing the past can create all kinds of problems,” he said.

To contact the Readers’ Representative on accuracy and fairness in the news, email readers.rep@utsandiego.com, or adrian.vore@utsandiego.com or call (619) 293-1525.

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After reading the article, answer the following question in a thoughtful manner, providing evidence from the novel *1984*

Can you relate this article with the novel *1984*? How so? Be as specific as possible, highlighting the similarities with Orwell’s dystopian vision of the future, as well as the differences