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/ You Can't Win an Argument with an Internet Troll, So What Can You Do?

# You Can't Win an Argument with an Internet Troll, So What Can You Do?



There are trolls online. Not the fairytale kind that sits under bridges; we're talking about the mean, nasty individuals who use online anonymity to be cruel, spread their own brand of hate, destroy reputations and products, and generally try to upset and crush as many people and companies as they possibly can.



Trolls agitate to start fights between friends or strangers; they torment those struggling with illnesses or with the loss of a loved one, people unsure of their identity or their looks, or any other weakness a troll can find. They disrupt forums with off-topic comments, brag nonstop about themselves, ridicule the thoughts of others or insert controversial comments to disrupt conversations.



Trolls spread lies, deceive and cause damage, and they enjoy every minute they can make someone else miserable. They may be obnoxious teens, but more often than not they're seemingly "normal" adults who use internet anonymity to shed their veneer of decency and

show their ugly selves. Trolls are basically cyberbullies on steroids – cowards afraid to show their face but nastier and more dedicated than garden-variety bullies. They are often fairly tech savvy, willing to dig up a comment or information from your past to distort, thereby “justifying” their actions.

If you’ve spent any time online, you’ve probably run across trolls even if you didn’t know the term. You may have tried to reason with them, be nice to them or virtually shout back at them. Don’t bother. You’re more likely to win an argument with a tree than you are with a troll.

## What trolls need

In order to attack others, trolls need a victim pool and a public forum of some kind, and they usually want an audience.

This means trolls gravitate to anywhere online users interact – like blog sites, social networks, multiplayer games, discussion forums, hobby sites and so on. They are found on sites that primarily target adults like news sites, company sites and forums, and they thrive on sites with lots of kids and teens who may be particularly vulnerable to attack – unless there is a strong moderator that can control their behavior or kick them off a site.

## Tackling trolls

While you can’t control whether you will become a troll’s target, you can decide if you will make yourself a troll’s victim. Knowing that the troll’s goal is to embarrass, humiliate, ridicule, demean and shame you, you have a choice about how you are going to react.

You can either be devastated, angry, or whatever emotion they want you to feel, or you can look at the attack for what it is – a mean person being mean. It isn’t personal if you refuse to take it personally. Recognize that the troll is the one with the problem. If the attack is directed at you exclusively, via email or as a comment on your site, document it so you can report the abuse, then delete and forget it.

If the attack is directed at you on a public site, understand that the troll’s “audience” – other participants in the conversation such as forum members, social network contacts or other gamers – can see the troll’s behavior as the vicious attack it is. We all learned at an early age how to identify mean, nasty people.

Call out their behavior. Many people recommend you simply ignore trolls and don’t respond in any way, but this gives the trolls even more power as it gives them the power to silence you. Instead,

*ignore the troll but address the problem with the “audience” in a matter of fact way.*

Do NOT respond in a manner that stoops to the troll's level or you risk two outcomes: 1) Feeding the troll and engaging in an unwinnable argument that will escalate, or 2) having the "audience" see you as another irritant/troll rather than as the balanced, decent and aggrieved party.

Frame your comment to the group along the lines of "Wow. Looks like we've got a troll trying to attack people on this site, derail meaningful dialog and control our conversation. I suggest that this forum doesn't give them that power by ignoring their unproductive comments and continuing our discussion, or even take a moment to create a guideline for how we want to deal with trolls."

Understand that where there's one troll, there may be many more waiting to pounce once the first troll has started. All too frequently, you see cases where others pile on with additional nasty comments. This just means there may be more than one troll that needs ignoring.

Alert the site moderator if there is one, but even on unmediated sites there is usually a "report abuse" feature. Sometimes this is found directly on the discussion page, other times – like with Facebook – you first go to the help center using the help link at the bottom of the page, then select "report abuse," and file a bullying report.

## Take time for self-care

It is fairly easy to understand that the troll is the person with the problem, but that doesn't mean it's easy to let vicious comments roll off if your "Teflon" layer isn't thick enough. Even journalists, politicians and movie stars who have had years in the media spotlight where troll-attacks are everyday events sometimes feel the sting of a particularly nasty interaction.

So take time for self-care and reach out in ways that the troll cannot influence the people who love and support you. People who will tell you – repeatedly if needed – that the comments aren't true, that you're wonderful and that the troll is just a troll, not a reflection of you.

## Find the right cybersecurity solution for you.

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## **RESOURCES**

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## COMPANY

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