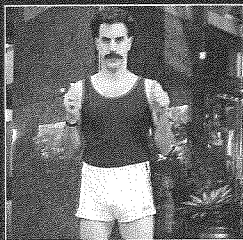
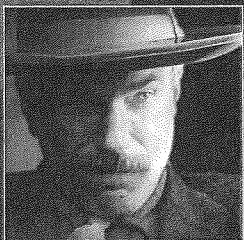


New Media special issue

MMedia Magazine

english and media center | Volume 10 | April 2008

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The Press Complaints Commission

Moving with the Times

The recent press coverage of cases such as the McCanns and Shannon Matthews has thrown into sharp relief the problems of press regulation, particularly those related to privacy and children, and the relationship between print publications and the contents of their websites. Here **Sue Roberts** of the Press Complaints Commission discusses new guidelines for audio-visual content on news and magazines websites.

It is clearly not professional footage – the images are a little blurred and the camera jumps from time to time. After a short while, however, it becomes clear that this is video footage of a classroom, probably taken on a mobile phone. A typical classroom scene, perhaps? Let's hope not! Students wander around chatting and laughing – they are clearly not working. The picture pans to a teacher who appears oblivious to the goings on.

What, you may ask, has all this got to do with the Press Complaints Commission (PCC)? After all, isn't the PCC the independent regulator of newspapers and magazines?

The answer lies in the fact that, in 2007, the PCC's remit was extended to cover **audio-visual material on newspaper and magazine websites**. The Commission, therefore, is **not solely a regulator of the printed word**. In fact, the PCC's remit has covered online versions of print publications for a number of years now. The first online versions were pretty much clones of what was appearing in the paper copies; but clearly websites have moved on since then, and many newspaper sites now contain videos, podcasts, mobile phone footage and so on. All of this material, provided that

an editorial decision has been made to upload it, now falls within the PCC's sphere of responsibility. Of course this only relates to **online versions of existing print publications** – the PCC does not regulate the whole of the internet!

Intrusion – in the public interest?

The footage described in the opening paragraph of this article was shot by a student, who was seeking to explain poor results to her parents. Her parents, shocked by what they had seen, sent the video to their local newspaper which published it – without any editing – on its website. The school, however, was not happy, and lodged a complaint with the PCC. The complaint was that no permission had been given from the school, the students or their parents for publication of the images either in print or on the paper's website. The Code of Practice, which it is the PCC's job to administer, requires that 'young people should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion'.

The newspaper's response to the complaint was that there was a **clear public interest** in knowing about the lack of supervision at the school given that it could have an **impact on student performance**. A student had taken the video,

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PCC makes first video ruling

Caitlin Fitzsimmons
MediaGuardian, Wednesday August 15 2007
Article history · Contact us

Advertiser
SECOND MAN ON MURDER CHARGE

Hamilton Advertiser uploaded the unedited footage on its website

A 16-year-old student at John Ogilvie High School in Hamilton, near Glasgow, used her mobile phone to film her fellow students dancing in class and playing games to explain her poor maths results to her parents.

The story appeared in the Scottish Sun and the Scottish Daily Mirror, which both ran stories about lax school discipline with an accompanying image.

The local paper, the Hamilton Advertiser, uploaded the unedited footage on its website as well as running the story in print.

not a reporter, and the newspaper did not believe it had intruded into the education of the 16-year-olds shown in the images. It agreed to remove the video from the website and offered to apologise to the students, but not to the school.

The PCC accepted that there was **considerable public interest** in presenting evidence in support of allegations that lax classroom discipline was affecting pupils' ability to do well. The Commission also concluded it was reasonable to use – at least in part – the information in the video. However, the students had not known they were to appear in the newspaper and on the website, yet they were

clearly identifiable. As far as the Commission was concerned, the newspaper should have **obscured their identity or it should have obtained consent for the pictures' use**. Since the newspaper had done neither, the PCC decided the **Code had been broken**.

Jobs on film – exposure or pixellation

In another complaint about a newspaper's website the PCC did not agree the rules had been broken. On this occasion, the site carried a video which had been uploaded onto YouTube and was headlined 'YOBBS ON FILM'. It showed youths, including the complainant's 15-year-

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

