

Position paper – adjudicating third party content

Board request:

3. How to adjudicate cases involving third party content (e.g. Canadian Press, Getty images, BBC, or franchise content); where does responsibility for copy lie

Response: We have knowledge of two OPC experiences with complaints involving third party agencies. One involved CP and the other concerned a photo from Getty Images. In those cases, the OPC's view was that the paper bore editorial responsibility for the published material.

In the case of the CP story, the copy was viewed as the paper's responsibility and the complaint, which was dismissed, was handled in the usual manner. In the case of the Getty Image, Council arrived at a finding that the paper was justified in relying on a known and well-established third party wire photo service. There was a minority dissent in that decision.

The NNC has had two complaints involving American newspaper copy in a member paper. In both cases the member stated it would not amend the copy without approval from the originating news agency.

This stance allows opportunity for the member to consult with the originating news agency about the complaint and corrective action that may be necessary. It should not be viewed as a change in the accepted journalistic practice that the news media is responsible for the content it publishes, be willing to investigate complaints and work toward a remedy. It is worth noting that CP wire service handles frequent queries from its client news media about corrections and questions, and has a record of making and posting prompt corrections and clarifications.

Typically, the NNC considers a complaint to be against the news media, not against the journalist. This is in line with the view and practice of many members of the Association of Independent Press Councils of Europe. It flows from the principle that a news organization is responsible for the content it publishes. A logical extension of that principle is that a news organization is responsible for the third party material it chooses to publish, and that a complaint about such material is a complaint against the news organization.

If a complaint about third party or wire copy is registered, it is expected that editors investigate the issue. They cannot reasonably be expected to make unilateral changes, but should consult with the editor in question and find a remedy if needed, as they would with a journalist in their own newsroom.

As content sharing grows, lines of editorial responsibility will have to be clarified. The NNC view is that from a reader's perspective, the paper or website is responsible for its content. Arrangements that news media make with content providers are a business matter, similar to the lines of authority within a news room.

The NNC is engaged in approaching third party, wire and syndicated news organizations as members. The addition of those members may require revisiting this position in future.