

Social Media Joins Forces To Help Put Nick Denton and Gawker Out of Business

The Public, the Courts and Morality agree: Gawker and Nick Denton are a blight on humanity and they serve no positive social function. Now it is official: "Gawker Media and Nick Denton are evil, sick and perverted abusers staffed by mentally deformed children."

So the world, multiple additional lawsuits, and all of the bloggers have set out to terminate Nick Denton.

[\\$115 million verdict in Hulk Hogan sex-tape lawsuit could wipe out Gawker](#)

Hogan's lawyer: Gawker editor was "playing God" with my client's privacy.

by [Joe Mullin](#) -

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A Florida jury today ordered Gawker Media to pay \$115 million for publishing a sex tape showing Terry Bollea, also known as Hulk Hogan, having sex with his friend's wife.

The stunning sum, which may have punitive damages added to it, is a life-threatening event for the New York-based network of news and gossip sites. Gawker Media was one of the first successful, large, digital-only news companies. The final sum is even more than the \$100 million Bollea was seeking. Bollea also sued Gawker founder Nick Denton and former editor Albert Daulerio, and the jury found those two men personally liable as well.

The sex tape was made about a decade ago, during a period in which the professional wrestler Hogan testified that he was going through a difficult phase with his then-wife. Todd Clem, a Florida radio personality who later legally changed his name to Bubba the Love Sponge, encouraged Hogan to sleep with his wife Heather.

In 2012, Bollea sued Clem, saying he didn't know Clem had filmed him. Clem has made conflicting

statements about whether Bollea knew about the taping. Clem settled the lawsuit, reportedly for \$5,000. That left Gawker, Denton, and Daulerio as the targets of Bollea's wrath. He sued them for \$100 million in damages, and the case went to trial in St. Petersburg, Florida, on March 7.

The case raises issues about the limits of the First Amendment in the digital age. Gawker argued that it had a legitimate news reason to publish the tape, since Bollea had talked about his sex life—specifically about sleeping with Clem's wife—in numerous venues.

Bollea's reputation took a huge hit last year, and he got fired from his job at World Wrestling Entertainment. That outcome wasn't fallout from the Gawker article, however. In a section of the sex tape that could be described as "pillow talk" (which wasn't published by Gawker), Bollea went on a racist diatribe. He repeatedly used the N-word and other racial insults, expressing disappointment that his daughter was in a relationship with a black man. The racial epithets were leaked by other news sites, including Radar Online and the [National Enquirer](#).

Other news sites posted stills from the tape, but only Gawker posted video. They showed one minute and 41 seconds of the tape, which included just nine seconds of sexual content. The company says it made about \$11,000 from the post, countering assertions by Bollea attorneys that it was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"What's disturbing about Gawker isn't what they do in a vacuum," Bollea lawyer Kenneth Turkel said during closing arguments. "It's how proud they are of it." Denton was "playing God over Bollea's right to privacy," he added.

Bollea says he still feels humiliated over the tape's publication. Gawker editors said the publication of the tape, and accompanying essay, was a commentary about celebrity sex tapes.

"He's talked about his sex life, how big his penis is, and when he talks about his penis it's to promote his daughter's singing career," said Gawker's attorney Michael Sullivan. "He's discussed his sexual encounters. Now he tells you this was the Hulk Hogan character."

Gawker has a right to publish news stories, even ones with objectionable content, Sullivan told the jury.

"If they can make a claim like this, the Internet as we know it will cease to exist," [Sullivan said](#).

As the case went to the jury, Gawker Media released a statement saying that they expect an appeals court will need to resolve the case. It reads in part:

We're disappointed the jury was unable to see key evidence and hear testimony from the most important witness... Hulk Hogan's best friend Bubba the Love Sponge—who made the tape and offered up his wife in the first place—originally told his radio listeners that Hulk Hogan knew he was being taped. The jury was only able to hear a questionable version of events. Bubba should have been required to appear in court and explain what really happened.

Gawker owns several other popular online news sites, including the gadget site Gizmodo, Lifehacker, Deadspin, Kotaku, Jezebel, and Jalopnik. The company employs about 250 people and has been majority-owned by Denton since it was founded. He [recently took outside investment for the first](#)

time to be able to pay for this litigation and possible damages.

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