

NOW UGC ME NOW YOU DON'T

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT

User-generated content (UGC) has long been an important content source for news and media outlets, and it's become vital to reporting events and breaking stories. But what's the trick to using UGC in productions and current affairs and what are the pitfalls?





1. UGC FOR NEWS

From stunts, fails and unscripted moments, to behind-the-scenes access, personal stories and on-the-ground reporting, user-generated content is a rich resource for brand storytellers. But it's also becoming a vital record for newsrooms, with core benefits that include:



SPEED OF ACCESS/ REAL-TIME REPORTING



CITIZEN JOURNALISM NEVER MISS A MOMENT



ABILITY TO TELL A STORY FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES

In a 2018 study^[1], **75% of respondents claimed that UGC makes content more authentic** and the ongoing use of UGC has changed journalism significantly. We've already seen some dramatic examples:



CITIZEN JOURNALISM

The power of UGC isn't just fuelled by our access to camera technology. It's been evident for some time. Within six hours of the 2005 London bombings, for example, the BBC newsroom had received more than 1,000 photos, 20 videos, 4,000 text messages and 20,000 emails.

Yet most of today's social platforms didn't even exist, while the first iPhone was still two years away.



ASTONISHING IMAGES

UGC is a core part of news reporting and fundamental to covering major events like the Port of Beirut tragedy in 2020. Videos shot by locals showed the moment a massive explosion rocked the Lebanese port, sending a blast wave hundreds of feet into the air.

These extraordinary videos shaped the story, were shared across social media and shown on news channels globally.



POWERFUL MESSAGES

When Dawn Bilbrough, an NHS critical care nurse, had finished her 48-hour hospital shift in York, she tried to go food shopping. But this was ahead of the UK's national Covid-19 lockdown and supermarket shelves had been stripped bare.

Her tearful plea for people to stop panic buying sent a powerful message that led to the introduction of priority shopping hours for key workers.

2. THE CASE FOR UGC

One good (and obvious) reason to use UGC is because it's there. With a massive, informal library of user photos and footage, news reporters can increasingly 'show' events, rather than just relying on eye-witness accounts.



THE BBC ESTABLISHED ITS UGC HUB IN 2005

UGC IS
50%
MORE TRUSTED
THAN OTHER
MEDIA CONTENT^[2]



AN IMAGE IS
35%
MORE
MEMORABLE
THAN OTHER
MEDIA
CONTENT^[2]

3. THE PITFALLS OF UGC

As anyone with experience of building UGC into a production will tell you, it's crucial to avoid the pitfalls. For newsrooms, there are additional pressures. Disinformation is rife on social media and this is particularly true around major events. Interested parties or state players often use channels to actively distort the narrative and so media outlets need to be aware of the potential problems UGC could pose. These include:

- **Fake news.** Photos and videos may not be what they seem, or they may be selectively edited to distort their meaning. Using a doctored photo or sharing a false tweet risks reputational damage for the organisation that uses it.
- **A lack of consistency.** Eyewitness accounts may not stand up, while armchair experts often do little but obscure what's going on.
- **Prioritising the need to be first?** Working against tight deadlines, journalists can't always verify the source or veracity of UGC. Ultimately, being right is better than being first.
- **Not thinking of the source.** By requesting or rewarding user submissions, news organisations could be encouraging people into danger.

4. DOING UGC RIGHT

GETTING THE MOST FROM UGC MEANS TAKING THE RIGHT APPROACH TO SOURCING, VERIFYING, DISTRIBUTING AND AMPLIFYING CONTENT.

1

VERIFY AUTHENTICITY

Check the EXIF data in photos or any embedded geodata to check it fits the story. Is it consistent with other accounts, and with images and footage from the same location? Examine images and footage for signs of manipulation.

2

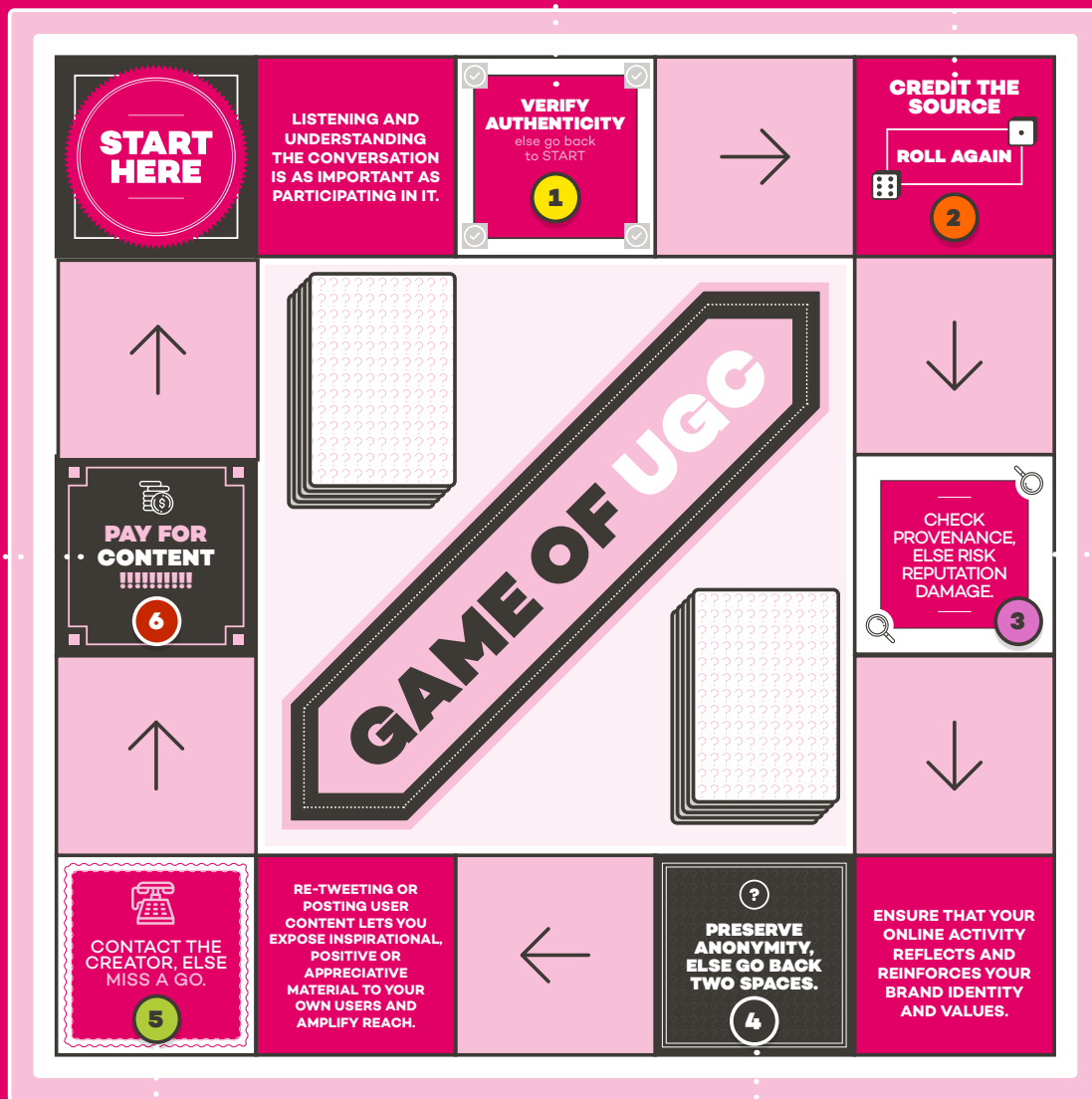
CREDIT THE SOURCE

Investigating the originating account, especially if you couldn't speak to the source. Look for suspicious past activity – or a lack of it – and their follower counts and any linked accounts.

3

CHECK PROVENANCE

Perform a reverse image search to check for earlier instances of a picture. Additionally, use text searches to check for plagiarism, or to find tweets that have been duplicated by bots.



6

PAY FOR CONTENT

Often sources are happy to share content, or may be motivated by exposure or by any prize you're offering in a campaign. Before paying, consider whether doing so might damage the authenticity of the content, or incentivise risk-taking among sources.

5

CONTACT THE CREATOR

Speak to the originator and ask about the creation of the content you want to use. When and where was it written, photographed or filmed? A conversation like this is essential and can reveal inconsistencies or quickly settle queries.

4

PRESERVE ANONYMITY

To protect news sources, you may need to keep the identity of contributors hidden. As the BBC points out^[3], the rationale for anonymity is "to protect the contributor from illegitimate retaliation, harassment or undesirable consequences."

5. UGC AND IMAGEN

If you're gathering, publishing or licensing large amounts of UGC, it's important to have the right technical systems in place. Investing in a digital asset management (DAM) platform such as Imagen provides the ingest, storage and search capabilities to help you simplify the submission and management of UGC, and build a working library of content.

- ✓ **STORAGE AND EASY SUBMISSION**
- ✓ **TIMELINE AND CLIPPING**
- ✓ **METADATA TOOLS, EASY SEARCHING**
- ✓ **SECURITY, WATERMARKING AND SUNSET LINKS**
- ✓ **BRANDED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH OUR CUSTOMISATION TOOLS**
- ✓ **REVIEW AND APPROVAL**

Imagen's customisation tools offer a branded customer experience, making it easy to embed UGC within the page or even create fully branded content portals. Additionally, the platform helps clip licensing businesses streamline and automate their content sales, with ecommerce features that include baskets and automatic licence calculation.

[1] <https://www.tintup.com/blog/9-things-learned-2018-user-generated-content-report/>

[2] <https://www.inc.com/adam-heitzman/user-generated-content-101-steps-to-success.html>

[3] <https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/anonymity>



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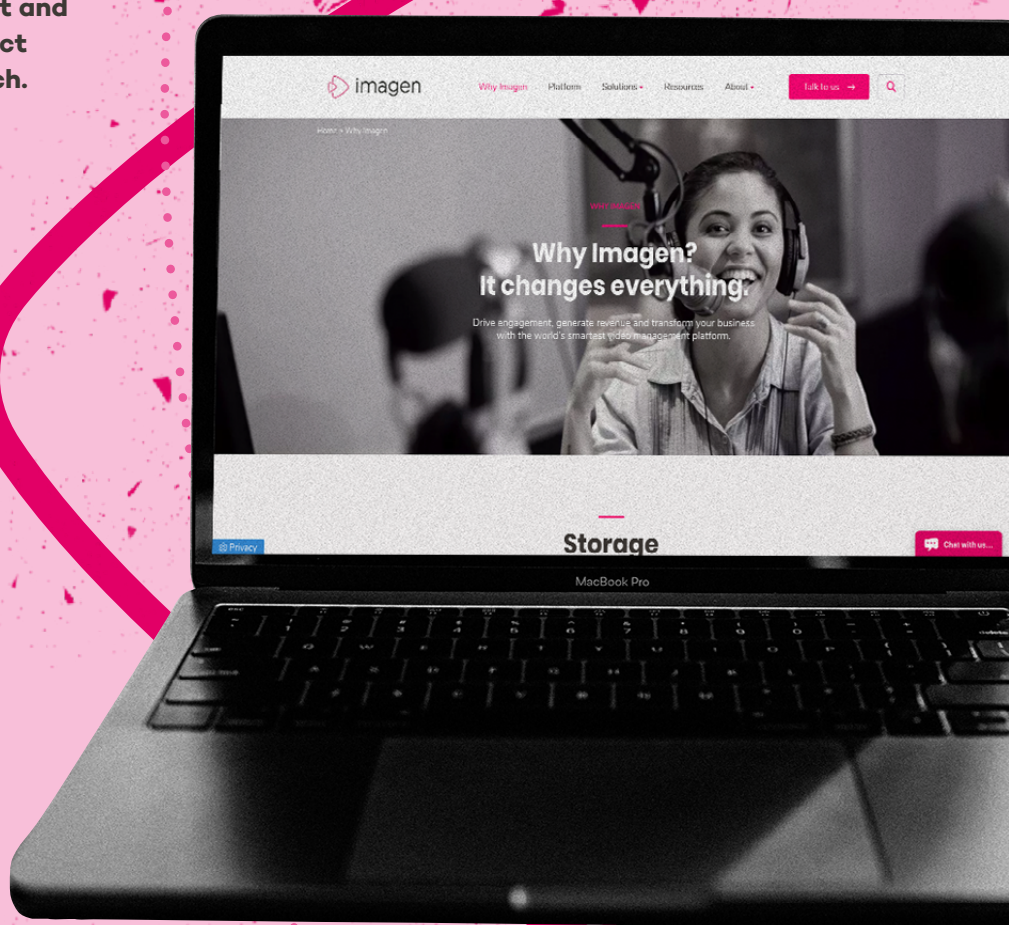
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**Or to discuss your video management and
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