

NewsGuard Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does NewsGuard decide what sites to rate, and how broad is its coverage?

NewsGuard rates the more than 4,500 websites responsible for approximately 95% of all the news and information consumed and shared online in the U.S., the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy. NewsGuard derives this list of sites from data services that track online activity.

We supplement that list with some sites that are well known and influential but that might not have enough of an audience to be in the top 95%. Although we rate all sites in the top 96% even if they might not want to be rated, we also gladly respond to requests from smaller sites or newly launched sites that want to be rated. Finally, our Rapid Response Team (see below) supplements all of this with coverage of suddenly trending news from websites that we have not yet rated because they have only suddenly published stories that have become popular. In many cases, these websites are created in order to publish misinformation or disinformation.

Across the UK, France, Germany, and Italy, NewsGuard has rated approximately 1,000 sites responsible for 92% of the news and information consumed and shared online in those countries.

2. How often does NewsGuard update its ratings and Labels, and how does NewsGuard handle sites that are suddenly trending with questionable reports that it has not yet rated?

As a matter of practice NewsGuard aims to review and refresh most sites every three to six months. However, more frequent updates will occur if circumstances warrant it—such as a change in ownership, a change in practices, or if the site wins an award or becomes embroiled in a controversy. Moreover, NewsGuard has a Rapid Response Team on call on a 24-hour basis. It receives alerts from a software system NewsGuard has created that informs the team about a site that seems about to trend online that NewsGuard has not yet reviewed (perhaps because it is a false news site that went up in Russia during the night). NewsGuard will review and rate that site within hours, so that it has a NewsGuard Red or Green and a Nutrition Label before it goes viral.

When there are stories trending in this way, it often turns out that these are websites that were just launched in order to spread misinformation or disinformation. We have found that this is especially true in the run-up to elections, when false stories can be used to undermine electoral integrity. We accelerated our launch in Europe so that our ratings and write ups would be available in key markets in advance of the European Parliament elections in May, 2019.

3. Is NewsGuard just another group of journalists trying to attack and stifle conservative media? Or left-wing media? Or protect established media against new competitors?

NewsGuard operates with full transparency and disclosure, with an identical approach to all news websites. We use the same nine criteria for rating all news websites. These criteria are all established basic principles of reliable journalism, whether for news-based sites or for opinion-based sites. All criteria are applied equally to all publishers regardless of political orientation, if any, and in the same way for an established newspaper or broadcaster as for a new digital website or popular blogger. In addition, if our reporting determines that a site fails any one of the

nine criteria, our analysts contact the site for comment, whereupon we quote publishers in the write-up explaining their practice and making their point of view known – or we change our minds (before publishing) because they give us information that we might have missed.

NewsGuard has been credited as apolitical and fair in news reports by a variety of news organizations of all points of view.

Our goal is to teach news literacy—and we hope all websites will earn green ratings and be generally reliable to consumers. That is why librarians across the U.S. began partnering with us as soon as we launched in the U.S. last year, and the same thing is happening now that we have launched in the UK, Germany, France and Italy. Librarians have been in the vanguard of addressing news literacy. Those that already know about NewsGuard view it as a practical tool that they can provide their patrons who use library computers in order to supplement the work that librarians have been doing since the invention of libraries: give readers the tools they need to make informed reading decisions.

4. Why should anyone trust NewsGuard?

- Because the leadership and staff of NewsGuard use apolitical, basic criteria of journalistic practice for the ratings and because they are a group of trained journalists who have spent their careers dedicated to the profession. Steven Brill is one of America's most respected magazine writers and non-fiction book authors. Gordon Crovitz was a highly regarded columnist for the Wall Street Journal editorial page—and The Wall Street Journal's publisher. Our senior advisors in each country have similar backgrounds, such as our UK senior advisor who was a journalist at the BBC for 30 years, including as global news editor, and our Italian senior advisor who spent 30 years at ANSA (the Italian version of the AP), including as editor in chief. They and the journalists they have recruited care deeply about reliable journalism's pivotal role in democracy.
- These experienced journalists come from diverse backgrounds and have no political axes to grind. In fact, you can see the credentials and backgrounds of everyone responsible for every NewsGuard reliability rating and Nutrition Label that you read.
- NewsGuard has an ethics and conflicts of interest policy that every analyst and editor has to agree to. (See below.)
- NewsGuard is totally transparent about how all decisions are made. It discloses and explains in detail the nine criteria NewsGuard examines in order to rate each news site on its journalistic practices. The Nutrition Label write-ups explain what's behind each decision. NewsGuard is not a black box algorithm.
- NewsGuard makes concerted attempts to get comment from every website's editor or manager before NewsGuard writes anything negative about the site, and always include the comments in the Nutrition Labels (or make changes after weighing the comment and realizing NewsGuard's initial conclusion was wrong). Algorithms don't call for comment.
- NewsGuard posts any complaints from website proprietors about anything that is written about them. And NewsGuard's leaders answer them publicly – and when warranted will make corrections, publicly, after they consider the complaint.
- NewsGuard accepts no fees from the news websites it rates. (NewsGuard's revenue comes from the fees that technology companies such as access providers, platforms and search engines pay for licensing ratings. Many websites cite their green rating in their About sections and run advertising explaining their NewsGuard ratings.

- NewsGuard does not collect any personal information of any kind from those who download and use the NewsGuard browser plug-ins. None.
- Bringing more information to people about the news sources they encounter online is NewsGuard's only business. The success of this venture depends entirely on being trustworthy and reliable.

5. Isn't restricting speech bad?

Yes it is! And that's the best thing about NewsGuard. It presents an alternative to the binary choice of blocking people from reading/seeing something or letting the status quo prevail – in which misinformation spreads indiscriminately and can look like real information. NewsGuard offers a way to block nothing. Instead, NewsGuard provides solid information about the thousands of news sources available online.

One of the ideas underlying democracies across the world is that a free press is required for an informed citizenry. Under this approach, it's understood that citizens need reliable information on which to base their views and ultimately their civic activities, including voting. So, the approach of providing more information about sources of news online is in a long democratic tradition of giving people more information so that they can make their own informed judgments.

In fact, that's why librarians partner with NewsGuard. Librarians have always fought for the right of people to have access to everything at the same time that they have rightly seen their role as giving their library patrons information about what's on their shelves.

6. NewsGuard is a for-profit business. Why?

When we set out to rate all the news and information websites that account for 96%-plus of online engagement in every country in which we operate, we realized we would have to build a large, well-funded enterprise. We have hired some 50 journalists to serve as our analysts, for example. To support this work on a sustainable basis, we determined that we could do this best as a for-profit business. So, we're also asking some of the largest companies in the world — internet access providers, social media and search companies — to work with us to bring information to their users. They should want to know that we will be a good and sustainable business partner.

7. Why do you have an advisory board?

We saw early on that there are important national security issues involved with addressing false news, misinformation, propaganda and disinformation, so we wanted advice on national security ramifications. In addition, we wanted advice on communicating journalistic practices to Silicon Valley companies, so we are well represented in this area as well. These advisors include former CIA and NSA Director Gen. Michael Hayden; Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who is former prime minister of Denmark and former Secretary General of NATO and is the founder of the Alliance of Democracies Foundation; former U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan; and Jimmy Wales, who is a co-founder of Wikipedia.

8. Where do you expect to get the revenue you need?

We're in licensing discussions with access companies such as internet providers and mobile phone companies and with the digital platform companies, including the social media and other

search companies, and look forward to working with them all to make NewsGuard ratings and reviews ubiquitous on the internet. We hope NewsGuard ratings and reviews will be integrated into all social media news feeds and search results. Microsoft has licensed NewsGuard, including for its Edge Mobile browser and for use in its Bing Search engine. And education provider Turnitin has licensed NewsGuard as a news literacy tool for 30 million students around the world.

9. Why is trust so important?

Gallup conducted independent research, entitled, “Assessing the Effect of News Source Ratings on News Content.” This used the NewsGuard Red and Green ratings and write-ups as the model for the research. The results were highly encouraging, including on the topic trust. Respondents said they would trust ratings and reviews if they were done by “experienced journalists with diverse backgrounds.” The research found that even the most partisan people would trust Red-rated sites less and Green-rated sites more and be less likely to share or like news from generally unreliable sites.

Appendix

Editorial Employee Statement of Understanding and Commitment

By signing below, I confirm my understanding and commitment to the following policies and procedures of NewsGuard Technologies, Inc. (the “Company”).

1. I understand that my identity and biographical information about me may be made publicly available when the editorial material on which I am working is published by the Company.
2. I will supply an accurate and complete biography to facilitate that process and to further NewsGuard’s goals of transparency.
3. I represent and warrant that I will not have any conflicts of interest associated with the subject of the editorial material that I review, edit, or fact check, including having been employed or retained for freelance assignments or turned down for employment or freelance assignments by the subject of the material, or that if I do have such conflicts I will disclose them to my supervisor prior to my work on that material, so that the Company, in its sole discretion, can reassign me or allow me to proceed with the work and disclose the conflict when the material is published.
4. I represent and warrant that no members of my immediate family have any such conflicts that have not been disclosed to my supervisor so that the Company can make a determination, in its sole discretion, about whether to reassign me or allow me to proceed with the work and disclose the conflict when the material is published.