



# **The 10 Necessities of a Moderation Outsourcing Partner**

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The future of moderation might  
be about AI, but we are  
nowhere near that just yet.

If you've come across this paper, you're already deep into your work with moderating your user-generated content (UGC). While UGC has a marketing value proposition and many emphasize that side of it, the larger value proposition is to the product/platform. UGC, when done correctly, creates engaged communities that feel safe sharing content and ideas with each other. An engaged, safe community is a tremendous backbone for any growth-oriented platform. And it makes the value to advertisers much higher: They want to be in targeted locales with enthused members. Successful UGC also strengthens the brand of the product, makes it feel "organic" as opposed to "forced," and is tremendously helpful in scaling a platform. Honestly, the picture around UGC is pretty rosy, all-told. Are you ready for the "however?"

The biggest "however" around UGC is often scale required to keep up with moderation. You're already almost certainly moderating -- most organizations, even with a smaller community, are using some form of moderation. But as the user base grows, the scale of moderation can become immense. As the scale becomes that massive, you confront a major problem: how do you keep the community safe and in keeping with your community guidelines without sacrificing speed? If someone posts a comment or photo to your community, they want to see it show up immediately. This give-and-take between security and speed for large-scale communities can be very challenging to navigate but has a significant impact on users' engagement.

Additionally, moderation is not one-size-fits-all. There's a good deal of cultural nuance when moderating, so much so that the popular investigative journal Vice once even called it "the impossible job."

As the scale of your user-generated content becomes massive, how do you keep the community safe but also engaged?

Consider this distinction: in the United Kingdom, for example, irony is often the default style of humor. In the US, it's not. Hence, a comment such as "This is rubbish, we should do away with the poster" can take on a very different tone coming from someone in each country. In the US, a comment like that might be read as a direct threat; in the UK it might be dismissed as "ribbing" the poster.

# What have we been doing so far?

The de facto play on more effective moderation has been technology. The thinking is often: Get more tech to put towards these challenges of UGC. That definitely helps, but it's not the full picture. Remember: at its best, tech is a force multiplier. At worst, it can exacerbate existing blind spots in your content. Tech is necessary within UGC, but it's not sufficient enough to moderate at scale.

Consider the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in moderation. We've consistently thought AI will be the primary guiding force in UGC at scale, and AI is certainly helpful as a tool.

Again, though, it's helpful to revisit this idea of context and nuance — as well as how AI even works. For AI and machine learning to be successful, there needs to be large inputs of information. And sometimes, even if it has the information, AI still can't put together the right context. Consider: ask an AI assistant "How tall was the President of the United States when Barack Obama was born?" Most will tell you back how tall Barack Obama is.

There is much discussion now about AI for moderation of UGC. And while AI is helpful, it's not the sole answer because it lacks context and nuance.

But that's not the question. You'd have to add three steps: (1) knowing when Obama was born (1961), (2) knowing who the President was then (John F. Kennedy), and (3) knowing his height (six feet and zero inches). AI cannot make that contextual jump yet.

AI is a strong tool in the moderation arsenal, but it lacks a deeper nuance right now. In many ways, it's still very nascent. Basing your scaled moderation strategy almost completely on these types of technology won't work right now. Adapting AI to local cultures, language dynamics, customer demographic preferences, local jurisdiction requirements, and spontaneous events within the community is a long way from perfection. On top of that, imagine a product or community channel that broadcasts video live, has comments enabled – and images can be added to the comments. AI simply isn't ready to be the only moderator of a world such as that.

If the answer is not “Rely on technology only” for companies facing a massive scale of UGC moderation needs, what is the answer right now?

Many companies will initially perform human moderation with in-house employees. They start with a small number, using a PDACI (plan-do-act-check-improve) approach. This allows the company to improve its expertise in moderation. Internal employees gain knowledge. All good. But if the company is growing, and growing quickly, it's not going to be sustainable.

The opportunity to scale internationally, leverage best practice, and improve operating costs, though, comes from a different approach. You typically cannot achieve this solely through hiring, especially if your business -- or its communities -- are hyper-scaling.

At that time, many turn to outsourcing -- simply because companies lack the resources, experience, and expertise to moderate at speed and scale internally. And to be blunt, when moderation is done poorly, there are massive legal and brand repercussions, so it's often an area of the business best outsourced to experts in UGC and moderation.

But if you're going to consider outsourcing, what do you need to be looking for?

## Factors to consider for UGC moderation services

These would be the major factors to consider when evaluating partner options:

1. **Will the community remain engaged and safe?** Communities want to interact, share, and make their voices heard to each other, regardless of language and personality. You want to make sure that any outsourcing partner will help ensure both the engagement and safety of the community. Everything below in this list will help you determine whether a partner can do that, but keep coming back to this central question: Will my community feel engaged, feel willing to share, feel safe about sharing, and want to keep coming back into our videos, forums, text-based posts, etc? If you can answer “yes” to engaged and safe, you have a bedrock for your growth.
2. **Scale:** Can the potential partner match the growth of your company and the complexity of content? For example: Do they have multiple locations globally? Could they help you localize by opening new sites in areas you want to enter? If your business is growing, can the pricing structure and contracts be flexible? Can the contracts account for seasonal shifts in moderation needs or general capacity requirements? For an outsourcing partner to help you scale, the partner needs to be thinking of the relationship as long-term, as opposed to high-margin, short-term, and onto the next partnership.
3. **Flexibility:** Your business will change. Strategies will adjust. Key decision-makers might leave. The importance of UGC might fluctuate within the broader in-market approaches. You need a partner that can adjust as you adjust. Explore their customization options. What can they do that no one else can do, but that’s crucial for your business and current/future moderation needs?

4. **Cost:** Cost should not be your deciding factor on an outsourcing partner, but it's obviously important. With moderation services, think of cost along these lines: First, if moderation is outsourced, you can spend more time on developing the core business, which has bottom-line value. Second: outsourcing decreases costs, although this is sometimes thought of in "labor arbitrage" terms, i.e. moving an operation to a cheaper global location. It's more than that. The right moderation partner is a consultancy too (more in one second), where they help you understand costs around management, technology, and optimized processes. It's not just "cheaper labor." It's a partnership. And finally, 100 percent successful moderation makes your platform much more attractive to advertisers because they know they're putting ads in front of an engaged, comfortable audience. If you have additional revenue streams around subscription or added features (ability to do more than "like" a post, for example), a safe, engaged community is more inclined to subscribe or purchase those features. That is what advertisers ultimately are seeking. When you look at a partner, then, think both of cost savings AND how much value they can add to you in terms of ad revenue.
5. **Consultancy:** Can the partner contribute value through policy, quality, performance scorecards development or assistance? You ideally want to find a partner in UGC and community moderation who is more than simply transactional -- you want advice and best practices from this business relationship too. If you're working with an expert, you should expect both strategy and execution. Look for a company that is present in different geographies and ideally works with at-home agents. That way, if you want to enter a new geography, they can walk you through best practices for that region based on their previous work with those located there. Would the partner offer broader training, such as soft skills?
6. **Employee care:** How can they mitigate the risk of your employees consistently dealing with harmful content? This has been a huge issue of late in moderation, with The New Yorker even calling it "an underworld." Protecting employees has been a paramount concern of executives we've spoken with -- a great development! -- so this is definitely an area to be asking potential partners about. Bonus: the more your employees feel cared for and not subjected to harmful content, the more engaged in their work they tend to become. (Same goes for your community.)

7. **Previous examples/case studies:** What types of brands and clients has the partner previously worked with? Do they have experience in your vertical? Have they moderated similar types of content as what's on your sites?
8. **SLAs:** Can the outsourcing partner deliver within Service-Level Agreements? These may be different in terms of live video vs. off-line moderation. In the latter, the focus is usually on video latency and the safety of the community. In live video, the goal is 100 percent moderation of content and removal of anything offensive or frightening. The vocabulary of the SLAs may vary, but make certain your outsourcing partner can deliver within your terms and needs.
9. **Multilingual vs. multicultural:** There is a difference here. Some partner options will trump up their multicultural nature, which is great -- that's a strong availability of languages to moderate within. But multilingual does not necessarily imply multicultural, which speaks more to the nuance of knowing how different cultures react to and perceive different types of content.
10. **Quality vs. speed:** We addressed this factor at the top of this paper. You absolutely need quality moderation, but if you sacrifice speed, you risk your community not returning to UGC content channels. Both quality and speed are thus important to building and sustaining the community. How capable is the partner at each?

These are some of the major buckets you should be considering when outsourcing moderation. If you start with these and walk every partner possibility through these criteria, you'll have a good base of information to guide your eventual decision.



# How does Conectys work?

At Conectys, we offer real-time comment moderation services, video moderation, image moderation services, and live streaming video moderation that cover social networks, blogs, apps, forums, chatrooms, proprietary customer channels, and more. Our outsourced teams of moderators identify and remove offensive content, and keep your website, social media channels, and communities safe and positive.

In the first six months of moderating videos for a rapidly-scaling social media site, we moderated 64 million videos -- that's about 355,333 per day, or 246 every minute.

The goal for us is to fill in all necessary gaps in your moderation approach and make the Internet a safer, better place for all.

Here's some of what we've actually done for brands (we stripped the actual brand name for confidentiality reasons):

- **A massive, and growing, social site:** we provided 24/7/365 coverage, with managers on every shift, and scaled up to 350 moderators total -- by onboarding 130 within 1.5 months. In the first six months, we moderated 64 million videos -- that's about 355,333 per day, or 246 every minute. We supported six languages (RU, PL, TR, DE, EN, AR) and actually helped the client open new sites per their recruitment needs.
- **One of the world's largest travel intelligence sites:** here we managed 20+ languages across videos, photos, text, and user profiles. We reached 100+ dedicated content moderators at peak, and our work with the client on UI -- including marking bugs and feature improvements in JIRA -- helped them grow. We worked in tandem to develop text and video training libraries in-house, as well as buffeting strategy for PR shock absorption including sweeps and escalations. We also provided live assignment reporting.

We're a global leader in moderation and customer experience services because of our success with these clients and lots more. We'd love to talk to you about what we can offer and how we can help you deal with the stress and complexity of scaling UGC. We're ready to walk through those bullet points we outlined above if you're ready to have a conversation!





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