NewsGuard Misinfo Watchdog: Contracts with DoD, WHO, Pfizer, Microsoft and AFT

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name (desktop version)

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), click here.

Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

***

NewsGuard is a self-appointed misinformation watchdog. It seems to be just one more way Americans are not allowed to think for themselves. Co-CEOs Steven Brill and Gordon Crovitz claim it is the "librarian for the internet." Set up specifically to rate online journalistic integrity, Brill states NewsGuard provides services that "explain to people something about the reliability and trustworthiness and background of those who are feeding them the news." Eric Effron is the organization's Editorial Director.

Brill is a Yale graduate and lawyer who has authored multiple best-selling books and was, among other things, CEO of Verified Identity Pass, Inc., the first U.S. biometric Voluntary Credentialing Program that went bankrupt in 2009. It was the parent company of CLEAR which went back online in 2010 and then went public in 2021.

According to MintPressNews, "Crovitz held a number of positions at Dow Jones and the *Wall Street Journal*, eventually becoming executive vice president of the former and the publisher of the latter before both were sold to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp in 2007. He is also a board member of *Business Insider*, which has received over $30 million from *Washington Post* owner Jeff Bezos in recent years."

Crovitz's alliances might account for the organization's favorable 100 ratings for WSJ and the Washington Post. He is also a contributor "to books published by the American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation," which are also favorably rated by NewsGuard.

Notable NewsGuard Partnerships

NewsGuard has partnered with Microsoft, Pfizer, the Department of Defense with a 2021 $749,387 one-year contract, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the WHO using NewsGuard's trademark "new Misinformation Fingerprints" analyst and AI cataloging tool. NewsGuard's other products include NewsGuard, HealthGuard, and BrandGuard—which help

marketers concerned about their brand safety.

> Leftist "NewsGuard" is Microsoft partner. https://t.co/qfPwJNy69E
>
> — Tom Fitton (@TomFitton) February 14, 2023

NewsGuard mentions its partnership with the WHO in August 2020 and discusses its Misinformation Fingerprints cataloging tool. The tool is essentially a database with a "unique identifier for each hoax that, when combined with the platforms' machine learning tools, will allow platforms to identify each hoax across the entirety of their platforms." NewsGuard describes Misinformation Fingerprints as an "extraction and cataloging" tool. It provides "data seeds for existing AI/Social Listening tools to trace false claims across the internet and social media or can be used by human analysts to understand mis- and disinformation risks."

NewsGuard was also a signatory in 2021 to the Code of Practice on Disinformation for the European Commission. Commissioner statements from the May 2021 announcement are below:

European Commission Statements

Microsoft was the first signatory to "provide NewsGuard ratings and labels to its users as a "middleware solution" for empowering consumers." Microsoft licensed NewsGuard ratings and labels. They are "free of charge" to users of the Edge browser.

> Search Coach is a powerful new tool that can help students learn to form effective search queries and make sense of information online. 🔍📚
>
> Read what educators have to say about the impact it's making in the classroom: https://t.co/kUcoLPgoeb#MicrosoftEDU pic.twitter.com/sV5zMUZ40a
>
> — Microsoft Education (@MicrosoftEDU) February 9, 2023

NewsGuard Wins Contest Run by Pentagon and DoD in 2020

NewsGuard won a 2020 contest run by the "Pentagon and Department of State to offer solutions to hoaxes related to the COVID-19 pandemic." The contest focused specifically on the "pre-bunking" of internet hoaxes. NewsGuard was also "a winner of the Countering Disinformation Challenge, a contest offered jointly by the State Department and the Department of Defense (DoD) as a part of the DoD's National Security Innovation Network (NSIN)." NSIN is a "government program office within the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (OSD (R&E)) that collaborates with major universities and the venture community to develop solutions that drive national security innovation."

NewsGuard equips "defense and military personnel" with the tools to fight disinformation from foreign and domestic adversaries "in real-time."

Per the NewsGuard press release:

> "As a winner, NewsGuard will receive $25,000 to conduct a pilot and will work with the State Department's Global Engagement Center to scope and develop a test in support of the DoD's Cyber National Mission Force. Two other companies, PeakMetrics, which offers a dashboard for tracking mentions of a topic across multiple media channels, and Omelas, which offers a product for visually mapping online information, were also named winners of the contest."

Notably, the tech company Omelas focuses on the "actions of overt state and nonstate actors" who exert "malicious influence on the web." Omelas regularly contributes with speeches and written submissions to influential global organizations and domestic institutions like UChicago's Data and Democracy initiative and the UChicago Center for Effective Government, attended by the likes of Tiana Epps-Johnson with CTCL.

Teachers' Union Signs Contract with NewsGuard in 2022

The American Federation of Teachers, with its 1.7 million members, announced its "pathbreaking" partnership with NewsGuard in January 2022 with the rollout of the "free, real-time traffic light news ratings," a "crucial news literacy tool" for students nationwide. The announcement coincided with National News Literacy Week. They released this video on the dangers of misinformation at the time of the announcement:

Touted as a "game-changer for teachers and families drowning in an ocean of online dishonesty," a "licensed copy of NewsGuard's browser extension" would help students "separate fact from fiction, as we help them develop their critical-thinking and analytical skills." AFT President Randi Weingarten gave NewsGuard glowing reviews:

> "NewsGuard is a great tool in this regard. It is a beacon of clarity to expose the dark depths of the internet and uplift those outlets committed to truth and honesty rather than falsehoods and fabrications. This historic deal will not only help us steer clear of increasingly fetid waters—it will provide a valuable lesson in media literacy and a discussion point for teachers in class on what can and can't be trusted."

NewsGuard's 2022 Social Impact Report

NewsGuard issued its first "social impact report" in 2022. The report championed NewsGuard's provision of tools that would promote "online safety for readers, brands, and democracies." Its CEOs proudly state a mission to fight false claims of "Nazis running Ukraine's government and Americans running bioweapons labs in Ukraine," COVID-19 misinformation, and misinformation surrounding the mid-term elections.

According to the report, "more than 938,200 people were exposed to COVID-19 vaccine myths between Oct. 2021-Feb. 2022 on social media." The report also reveals NewsGuard's exposure of "pink slime sites pushing Democratic propaganda in battleground states ahead of the midterm elections."

What are NewsGuard's Stated Standards and Procedures?

The [NewsGuard Dashboard](#) "helps clients access NewsGuard's database of [News Reliability Ratings](#) and [Misinformation Fingerprints](#) through a powerful, searchable web interface purpose-built for use by businesses seeking to identify and [mitigate risks](#) from misinformation and disinformation. Users can browse NewsGuard's ratings, get alerts about changes in the news and information environment, and stay on top of emerging false narratives and trends."

The site issues "stoplight red/green journalistic ratings" for news sources. Influence watch describes NewsGuard as a "web browser extension that rates the trustworthiness of online news sites based on nine criteria, providing a trust score between 0 and 100." Nine basic "apolitical criteria" for journalistic practice are outlined on the NewsGuard website. The [criteria](#) are listed in order of importance and weighted accordingly. Satire sites, platforms, and news aggregators "are given separate designations and are not scored using the nine criteria." The nine criteria and standards for credibility are as follows:

- Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 Points)
- Gathers and presents information responsibly (18 Points)
- Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5 Points)
- Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5 Points)
- Avoids deceptive headlines (10 Points)
- Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5 Points)
- Clearly labels advertising (7.5 Points)
- Reveals who's in charge, including possible conflicts of interest (5 Points)
- The site provides the names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5 Points)

NewsGuard Ratings/0-100

According to the website, NewsGuard substantiates the basis for its ratings with "evidence and examples to back up its assessments, includ[ing] any relevant comments from the publisher, and indicat[ing] the history of the sites' ratings." NewsGuard employs "a team of journalists and experienced editors" who make an effort to contact publishers who might "fail" specific criteria before a rating or an updated rating is published, "ensuring a publisher['s] ability to reply." NewsGuard has recently [dropped](#) its stoplight rating system and now uses its ["nutrition label" exclusively](#).

Are Conservatives Being Targeted by NewsGuard?

According to a series of [email exchanges](#) made public by the Conservative organization PragerU, Newsguard targets conservative organizations unfairly. NewsMax, Dave Rubin, and [Harmeet Dhillon](#) also allege having been targeted by NewsGuard. Rubin says the service sums up *"so much of what is wrong right now in American culture relative to big tech and government."*

NewsGuard claimed PragerU was spreading "misleading content" on its website. Sites with

scores below 60 are labeled "unreliable."

PragerU/NewsGuard Ratings

PragerU and NewsGuard Exchange Emails

The emails from 2021 between PragerU's Chief of Staff Adrienne Johnson and the NewsGuard Co-CEOs seem to indicate PragerU was reputationally and financially damaged by a NewsGuard red rating of 57.

Notably, officials from PragerU clarified in its emails that it is not a news website, but a "nonprofit focused on producing and marketing well-researched, issue-driven educational content" featuring healthy debate from experts. As such, PragerU discloses its donations with the required IRS 990 form and does not disclose that information on its website as "required by NewsGuard." NewsGuard disregarded the disclosure because of *its standards*, not because the information was unavailable.

> Ep. 266 — Exposing NewsGuard with Marissa Streit | PragerU
> https://t.co/q4F2kN9xx4
>
> — bill jergins (@BillJergins) February 19, 2023

NewsGuard penalized PragerU for never having "corrected one-sided claims related to COVID or hydroxy," all of which were objectively and verifiably true. Specifically, NewsGuard challenged PragerU's sharing of videos featuring America's Frontline Doctors "that promoted false claims about the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine" as a "proven cure for COVID-19." Hydroxychloroquine and Ivermectin have been well-known as effective early treatments for COVID-19 since early in the pandemic but were suppressed by the government and its overly helpful legacy media partners. NewsGuard challenged PragerU's removal of the videos because PragerU failed to publish a correction once the videos were removed.

Sadly, PragerU had removed the videos not because they were incorrect but "due to overall social media censorship on the topic." One of the emails shows CEO Marissa Streit writing that PragerU "created an ROI analysis on our end, and we removed it rather than face the penalties of censorship."

NewsGuards also reprimanded PragerU influencer Will Witt who stated in a video that "children aren't actually dying from the virus." Witt allegedly cited without attribution a "study with the statistics of children ages 0-18 who had died from COVID-19, "none of whom died." Witt's statement was not far from the mark because CDC data shows that almost no healthy children have died from COVID-19.

It appears that NewsGuard may have held Witt accountable for inexact wording, not for the spirit of the claim. It is not clear from the emails whether NewsGuard upheld its promise to "ensure" Witt or PragerU had a chance to be more exact in its language or supply "feedback" for the "failed" information on its website.

At one point in the exchange, Streit asks for confirmation from NewsGuard to certify that the "removal of certain content" will "remove any negative marks on our ratings and provide us with "Green" status—a stamp of approval that should be unnecessary in America as a prerequisite to the exchange of ideas.

Streit ultimately revealed that NewsGuard held PragerU to account for "less than 0.001% of its overall content." Even though Streit made specific good-faith efforts to reply directly to the ratings and even removed truthful content to avoid censorship, NewsGuard doubled down and persisted with its bias. Streit wrote:

PragerU Email/NewsGuard/Streit

Directors, Advisors, and Investors

NewsGuard's directors, advisors, and investors are an interesting cast of characters. One of the investors, Publicis Groupe, is "the third largest communications group in the world." Publicic allegedly has "shadowy ties to Saudi Arabia." Pfizer and Bayer/Monsanto are two of its top clients. Ironically, many of the advisors/directors are former U.S. government officials, entertainment moguls, and journalists "associated with agencies known for producing false news."

Among the advisors is Michael Hayden, former Director of the NSA and CIA, who was "the architect of George W. Bush's secret domestic spying program." Tom Ridge was the first Office of Homeland Security Director following 9/11. Richard Stengel "is a former senior official in Obama's state department who once described his role as being that of 'chief propagandist.'"

Below are two videos with Stengel discussing his thoughts on free speech and NewsGuard's role in the information landscape. He says he used to be a "free-speech absolutist" but has changed his point of view as he has traveled the world. Stengel states that his travels have taught him that "*Our notion of free speech is an outlier to people. The First Amendment is no longer working.*" He shares he has become more sympathetic to legislation for hate speech. "*There is a design flaw in the First Amendment in the age of social media. We need to start thinking about hate speech laws.*"

*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

Featured image is from UncoverDC

Articles by: [Wendi Strauch Mahoney](#)