

Rushon, K. (2012, December 2). Rupert Murdoch to split News Corp early to limit fallout from hacking. *The Telegraph*.

Saunders, D. (2012, April 25). Rupert Murdoch says sorry, but takes no blame for scandal. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A3.

Wolff, M. (2012, November 26). Murdoch may not be out of the woods yet. *USA Today*, p. 1B.

Marquand, R. (2012, February 13). Murdoch media crisis deepens with five new arrests. *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Marquand, R. (2012, July 24). Phone hacking scandal: Two UK media leaders charged with conspiracy. *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Ryce, D. (2012, September 20). Ofcom delivers the final blow to James Murdoch's UK years. *The Telegraph*.

CASE STUDY 1.2

The Gun Owner Next Door

Shortly after the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, *The Journal News*, a suburban newspaper published in White Plains, New York, published the names and addresses of all handgun permit holders in its market. The paper provided an interactive online map that allowed readers to zoom in on dots providing information about individual gun holders. Some 44,000 individuals appeared on the map, approximately 1 in every 23 adults in two counties.

Publication of the firearms database unleashed a torrent of criticism as news of the map spread via social media and national media outlets. Gun owners complained that their privacy rights were being violated and that they were being stigmatized like sex offenders. They worried that thieves would use the information to target them for burglaries. (Editors at *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis generated a similar response in 2009 when that paper published the names

It is journalistic arrogance to abuse public record privilege, just as it is to air 911 calls for no reason or to publish the home addresses of police and judges without cause. Unwarranted publishing of the names of permitted owners just encourages gun owners to skip the permitting.¹

In its defense, the paper noted that the names and addresses of gun owners are public information available through county clerks' offices in New York. (The county clerk in one county refused to provide the names

and zip codes of everyone with a permit to carry a concealed weapon in Tennessee.) Some argued that such information could endanger abused women by revealing that they were not armed. One angry blogger retaliated by publishing an interactive map with the names and addresses of *Journal News* employees. Other critics complained that the newspaper had published the map to promote an antigun agenda. According to a faculty member at the Poynter Institute, a school for journalists:

and addresses to the paper.) In fact, the editors wanted to publish data on what kinds of weapons area residents possessed and how many guns they owned, but records of this information were not available under a Freedom of Information request. The online map included only those who applied to own handguns—they may not actually have purchased them—and did not have data on rifles or shotguns, which can be bought without a permit.

Janet Hasson, president of the Journal News Media Group, offered this defense of the company's decision to publish the firearms records:

One of our roles is to report publicly available information on timely issues, even when unpopular. We knew publication of the database (as well as the accompanying article providing context) would be controversial, but we felt sharing information about gun permits in our area was important in the aftermath of the Newtown shootings.²

Discussion Probes

1. As a gun owner, how would you respond if your name and address were included in a list of gun owners published in a newspaper or online? Would it make any difference to you if this information was already available to the public through some other source?
2. Did the publication of the database violate the privacy rights of gun owners?

Sources

1. Grossman, C. L. (2012, December 27). N.Y. gun owner database draws ire. *USA Today*, p. 3A.

Howerton, J. (2012, December 27). NY paper broke no laws with gun owner map—but is it ever ethical to publish personal info to push an agenda? *The Blaze*. Retrieved from <http://www.theblaze.com>

Surtico, J. (2012, December 27). The *Journal News* gun owner database debacle. *The Village Voice*, Guns blog.

Weiner, R. (2012, December 27). *Journal News* gun owner database draws criticism. *Lohud.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.lohud.com>

Notes

3. Does the public have the right to know who owns guns? Would you want to know if your neighbor owns a gun?
4. By publishing the database, did the newspaper cross the line from journalism to advocacy?
5. Are there certain types of personal information that should never be released to the public?
6. Was the publication of the database ethical? Why or why not?