



## Twitter Block Function & Victim Blaming

I am really, really pleased that Twitter responded to the objections to their proposal for changes to the Block function by dropping them. I am. I'm happy that they listened to the mass reaction from their users, rather than persisting with a policy which appears to have been shaped around marketers who were frustrated by those who hit the block button for each and every promotional Tweet that shows up in their timeline.

I'm one of the people who do that. I hate seeing ads in my timeline. Even targeted ones. Especially targeted ones, because it makes me feel manipulated. I want to be able to block companies who insist on using my social environment to try and sell to me. And I want them to know I'm blocking them. I want them to understand that I don't like their methods (I do, for the record, accept that by allowing advertising on board, Twitter can remain a free service, and for the sake of the people who literally cannot afford to pay for the social connectivity that it provides – usually those for whom said social connectivity is most vital – I'm willing to put up with it; as long as I can ignore it).

But this isn't about me. The promoted-Tweet blocking is nowhere near being the point of the mass fury that erupted on my timeline last night. The same sentiment popped up repeatedly in the last couple of hours before I went to bed.

"Going private. Wish I didn't have to. Feel free to manually RT."

I saw this from people who were genuinely afraid. From people who had blocked ex partners to stop them spying on their behaviour. From people who had been abused online and in real life. They were afraid it would start all over again.

So, I reiterate, I am pleased that Twitter listened to them and retracted their plans. But in their statement they advised those people who had complained about the changes that by insisting that those you block should know you've blocked them, you open yourself up to retaliation.

Take this off the internet. Imagine a woman in a bar, or a club, or a supermarket, or a church, or a train station; a public space where she has every right to be. Imagine she's being continually insulted or threatened by someone - not necessarily to her face, but in the general space around her. Imagine they start following her. Imagine they watch where she goes, what she does, who she talks to, what she says. Imagine she reports this to the authorities, and their response is that she should just "ignore them" (if this worked, bullying in schools would be non-existent). When she tries to do this, it turns out that by "ignore them", what the authorities actually meant was "wear earplugs, but continue to smile sweetly at them, letting them think that you are hearing their every insulting, threatening word, because if you turn your back on them and they realise that you're ignoring them, they might retaliate".

Fuck. That. Noise.

And they will "retaliate" regardless.



The joke about the animal whose camouflage involves wearing a bag over its head because it thinks if it can't see you, you can't see it, is a joke for a reason. The new proposals were compared to replacing a lock with a curtain - but in all honesty, they weren't even that; more a two-way mirror that went the wrong way. And the "solution" of locking your account so that no one could see your interactions except those you'd pre-approved was no solution at all for those for whom Twitter is a source of vital networking, signal-boosting and information-gathering.

I have seen someone with a celebrity account suggesting that the now-abandoned proposals would actually have helped with the issues they were experiencing. To which I say - what's wrong with having both options? If an "invisible block" is going to prove useful to some people, include that too!

But for the people who use the block function to send a message that someone's behaviour has been unacceptable - it's the very retaliation that you're hoping to avoid that needs to be tackled, Twitter. You won't end it by trying to discourage people from sending that message.