

---

**From:** Alan White  
**To:** Craig Silverman  
**CC:** Heidi Blake; Robert Colvile; Tom Phillips  
**Sent:** 3/25/2015 3:30:33 PM  
**Subject:** Re: CEN piece

Thanks so much for this Robert.

Just on the general points....

- The issue of CEN supplying copy, including the initial story on the Argentine sex tape. This is the real issue and I don't entirely know how to resolve, because there's no easy way to get the raw copy. Of course we can be 99% sure that all these dodgy quotes that appear on most of the stories from China etc come from CEN. As Rob says, if we can track them back to Austrian Times, that gives us something. We can also point out that the same quotes appears here, here and here, etc, so where else could they originate?

I know they gave us copy on two stories - sashimi tapeworm and pavement swastika (which we didn't write up). I don't have the emails any more as it was 2013, but Matt Tucker may. On the Argentine Sex Tape scandal, we may have to go one of the hacks who wrote it up to verify as part of our approaching phase.

- On the coverage of the teacher - craig has some contacts and can dig.

- Screenshotting stories - no, I'll do that this week.

- Hannes Urban and Lucy Tipler et al - sent through in a second doc. Once legal are happy we'll be approaching them and other ex-employees, and Leidig.

- Size of CEN - this is tricky as based in Austria, not sure we could find Companies House records. Our suspicion is it's just Leidig plus some people working remotely looking at Weibo etc. Heidi might have some ideas.

On Wed, Mar 25, 2015 at 6:31 PM, Craig Silverman <<mailto:silvermancraig@gmail.com>> wrote:

Hi all,

Thank you Robert for the edits and feedback. I'll go through the new version soon.

I will look at that lead anecdote to nail down the CEN involvement. I also now have a connection to a correspondent for La Nacion who works in the region of Argentina where the woman is from. I'm hoping we can get a quote from her about the impact of the false claim about her.

I'll get back into the story in about two hours from now and will add in that info and respond to any comments etc. I also have a new quote from Farhad Manjoo to insert re: CEN.

Best regards,  
Craig

On Wednesday, March 25, 2015, Heidi Blake <<mailto:heidi.blake@buzzfeed.com>> wrote:

I will read and get back with comments by the morrow!

**Heidi Blake**  
| UK Investigations Editor

**BuzzFeed News**  
40 Argyll Street,

London, W1F 7EB

@HeidiBlake

On Wed, Mar 25, 2015 at 6:06 PM, Robert Colvile <robert.colvile@buzzfeed.com> wrote:  
Hi guys,

Have now been through with as fine a tooth comb as I can manage, though would still appreciate Heidi taking a look. Have also restructured, including losing the scene-setting summary of findings as think it underplays total conclusion - see what you think (pasted below for reference).

Have marked various places where more work needed, or have queries, or others did. Some big points on that...

- As per Tom 's mark, am galactically unhappy leading this off with a story where we can 't actually verify that CEN supplied the words as well as the images - undermines us from the start. Can we move heaven and earth to find out, even if it means appealing to friendly souls at the publications who ended up using it? Otherwise we need to go in with Bieber and the bear then put that lower down.

- More generally, how are we sure that these stories are by CEN? What evidence do we have? Subscription to their feed, or just the similarity of the text? Need to state clearly and explicitly in each case.

- On the coverage of the teacher, we need to see the examples of use and link to them. Would also be great to make an effort to find her and to clear up the chronology - have tried to do so but need it to be watertight.

- Have we got all the stories/sites being linked to snapshotted and saved? Assume so but need to do if not in case they change/are moved.

- There 's a mention of Hannes Urban and Lucy Tipler quotes, plus some more to come - would be great to include. More generally, any quotes from former staffers are absolute gold. Can we identify anyone who might be willing to talk? Assume you 've done but thought I should flag...

- Similarly, how big is CEN? How many employees, how much revenue? We don 't need to get forensic but we should be at least able to get the rough statements from 192 or similar, otherwise we 're relying on their own account of their business trajectory from the Press Gazette piece. Same with Journalism Without Borders - is it registered with the Charities Commission or Austrian equivalent?

- Also felt it needed a slightly wider conclusion - wrote one in but up for negotiation.

Hope that all makes sense. This is so close to being a fantastic piece, but we absolutely need to stick the landing...

Rob

PS Shortened version of the summary below for collective record

Since the summer of 2014, CEN has been the source, or a key distributor, of stories about:

- A Russian bear being scared off by a Justin Bieber ringtone.
- A Chinese backpacker offering sex in return for helping to fund her vacation.
- \*A woman who inadvertently caused a car crash while sunbathing.
- A Chinese man who got a tapeworm after eating sashimi.
- A two-headed goat born in China.

These were respectively false; a marketing stunt; unprovable, and accompanied by a picture that was three years old; circulated alongside completely unrelated images that appear to have originated in the British Medical Journal, and based on a picture that a forensics expert appears to have been altered, and for which a CEN-affiliated website supplied quotes that are most likely fabricated.

--

**Robert Colvile**  
| News Director

**BuzzFeed: The Social News and Entertainment Company**  
19-21 Hatton Garden,  
London, EC1N 8BA



**Are Quizzes The New Lists?**  
**BuzzFeed Is About To Take Branded Cat Videos To A Whole New Level**

--

**Craig Silverman**  
Founder, Emergent  
Fellow, Tow Center For Digital Journalism, Columbia University  
Twitter | Facebook  
514.808.0548

*Read the free Verification Handbook:*  
<http://verificationhandbook.com/>

--

**Alan White**  
Breaking News Reporter, BuzzFeed UK  
@ aljwhite

2nd Floor, 40 Argyll Street,  
London, W1F 7EB