

Revealed: Confessions of a Kremlin Troll

Being paid by the Russian government to troll the internet just isn't what it used to be.

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Russia's paid government trolls have been blamed for everything from the fall of Hillary Clinton to the conflict in Ukraine — They have dominated headlines and sparked political intrigue. But is clocking in as a professional troll really everything it seems?

Following in the footsteps of other former employees, Lyudmila Savchuk and Olga Maltseva, more of the Kremlin's online army are now coming forward to tell their stories of working 12-hour shifts in Russia's most controversial office.

[Russia's Bumaga news outlet](#) spoke to one former troll about his life in "the factory" - and why the industry just isn't what it used to be.

Yes, Russian trolls did target the U.S. elections.

We wrote about 200 comments and 20 news posts for various fake pages each day. At the "factory," there were many different teams writing on different topics and targeting different websites. At the end of 2016, I know for sure that there were departments dedicated to the Ukrainian crisis and the U.S. elections. Due to my disclosure agreement, I can't really talk about which department I worked for.

Trolling is tough (but the money makes it all worthwhile).

I graduated with a degree in philosophy in 2014 and didn't know where to turn. I had large debts which needed to be paid off quickly. Then I read an article about "the factory" and realized that it was a place where I could make some quick money. Many of my colleagues found out about jobs there in the same way.

When I arrived at the interview, I already knew that I would be there to write pro-government propaganda on the Internet. I wasn't surprised when the interviewer asked me to write a test comment on "fascist elements in the United States." I was a little ashamed, but it was funny too.

Related article: [Russia's Infamous 'Troll Factory' Is Now Posing as a Media Empire](#)

I earned enough. Even Russia's economic crisis didn't affect us. If you work there for long enough, then with all the bonuses you get for hitting your quotas and turning out good work, you can get 80,000 to 90,000 rubles a month. I really only stayed in the job for that. I bought myself a Mazda Six during my time there.

It was difficult to get used to at first. Why was I sitting in a stuffy office for eight hours a day, doing what I did? But I was tempted by easy work and good money. I resigned myself to working there and just started enjoying the fact that I was being paid well for doing very little.

Russia's politicians are expert trolls.

A professional troll should have a good sense of the people they are communicating with, and should fully realize what reactions they will get. And, most importantly, trolls shouldn't lose their creativity: inventing something new to write every day is incredibly difficult.

I think the ideal Internet troll would be [State Duma deputy Vitaly] Milonov. Everything he says and does is almost dreamlike in its insanity. Take his recent bill punishing anyone who attends opposition rallies. Madness. And it's all just fluff, because no one took it seriously.

But our patriots do not like anything related to [opposition politician Alexei Navalny, including his rally [on March 26 against corruption]]. So Milonov agitated Russia's liberals public and raised the authority of the government among his fans. He practically used the logic and methods of a troll.

Trolling isn't as effective as you want to believe.

I can't name any benefits that society would gain from this kind of work, to be honest. I was always ashamed to work there, so I even tried not to tell anyone. "Troll factories" aren't benefiting society. It seems that everyone understands this but it's just like the tabloid press: everyone just carries out their own orders in an attempt to cash in.

But really, our work doesn't bring great harm on to everyone. Personally, I believe our work doesn't bring results at all, and especially not the results which our backers hope for. No one believes in our posts: not us, and not our readers. Trolls argue with trolls. It seems to me that the overwhelming majority of people simply do not pay any attention to these kinds of comments.

Related article: [The Secrets of Russia's Propaganda War, Revealed](#)

The trolling industry is changing.

People who work as trolls don't really like their profession. But now things are changing: with "the factory" appearing so much in the media, the management is starting to scale down their workforce: I was fired. Now they are recruiting people who really believe what they are writing. You need to prove that you are a patriot in order to write comments for money.

Managers also hope this policy will minimize the risk of moles, as happened with Maltseva and Savchuk [former employees who sued the company and discussed their work with the press].

This interview was first carried out by Russian news site Bumaga. You can read their [original post \(in Russian\) here.](#)

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