

LIVE STREAMING MODERATION BEST PRACTICES FOR EVENT ORGANIZERS

At its best, the chat component of live streaming sites like Twitch can be an exciting part of the broadcast. At its worst, it can be a trash fire. For large esports streams, chat is where part of the “stadium” experience happens. Chat offers a place for a collective experience of fandom, for cheering and engagement. For small events it can be where fans and community members can find each other and connect, sometimes even with the streamer directly. Perhaps the most predictable aspect of chat is that good ones require active engagement by the broadcasters. Toxic chat can emerge without proper management.

While sometimes the refrain about this side of streaming is simply “hide the chat” we encourage you to think more ambitiously about it. Chat should be seen as an important, potentially valuable, component of live streaming.

If you are broadcasting content, the chat alongside it is **your** responsibility.

The quality of the chat reflects directly on you, your production, and your brand. You can either benefit from it and grow your community or you can neglect it and face serious costs.

This white paper will offer some basic best practices to help you think about your event stream in ways that foster it being an asset to both you and your audience. While not a complete guide (and primarily focused on Twitch), we hope to give you some basic understanding of functions you can use and provide some waypoints if you’d like to dive a bit deeper into moderation tools and techniques.¹

CHAT CAN BE AN ASSET

Chat reflects on your event, organization, & brand. Make the most of it.

For big events chat often serves as the online stadium space and can help generate enthusiasm and engagement.

Small event chats are often where the community builds itself and grows, bringing in new members.

Have a Plan

Live streamed events have plans that outline everything from scheduling to bracket structures. Making sure you have a moderation plan in place is also a critical component to broadcasting. Depending on the scale of your event and anticipated audience that plan may be larger or smaller. But no matter what, you should have one ahead of time. Once an event starts it’s often too late to find the labor needed, set up the tools, or try to retroactively put policies in place. For your plan we encourage you to think about the following components: codes of conduct, staffing, and tools.

Codes of Conduct: What do you want to foster in chat?

Codes of Conduct (CoC) are a guideline of values and behaviors that you expect from all participants and staff, including the online audience active in a chat channel. A CoC serves to outline the values behind an organization or community, and provides a guideline for positive behavior. They help frame who is welcome and what participation is encouraged. Keep in mind too that the absence of a Code of Conduct often alerts people that a space may not be safe for them. AnyKey has developed a Code of Conduct (“Keystone Code”)

¹ Huge thanks to Claudia Lo who significantly contributed to this document with her insight and expertise on community moderation.

which is included at the end of this document and you are welcome to adopt.

Codes of Conduct should be public, widely visible, and included for online spaces, such as a broadcast's chat. The content of a stream's chat can have impacts not only on the audience members who are present, but even viewers who may go back to re-watch an event (and, in the case of competitors, their performance). The section in the AnyKey code related to harassment addresses some of the most common and pernicious issues we see in chat.

You may also want to think about how to also convey positive values in your CoC, and what that might look like for chat. Spending time to think about what kind of chat you want to promote for your event, and then working on clearly communicating it to your participants and audience, is a critical part of broadcasting. The best community management is not simply reactive, but proactive. Thinking about what you want to foster, not just punish, is an important step in building a moderation plan.

Creating a CoC is the first component of a plan, but Codes of Conduct require the companion of enforcement to make them meaningful. In the case of chat, moderation is a central community management mechanism and thinking about staffing and tools are key to making sure CoC's are more than just words.

Staffing

If you're running an event and you want to livestream it, you will need someone to help you watch and manage that stream's chat. While Twitch staff may sometimes informally and invisibly help regulate event chats by issuing timeouts and bans, don't just count on that. Bringing on moderators will help manage the chat, proactively set the tone for the space, educate viewers about your Code of Conduct, and typically provide help with utilizing technical moderation tools. Have a moderation plan in place that formally designates and deputizes moderators you've thoughtfully recruited.

Twitch has a community of expert moderators who have the knowledge and skills to help event organizers better manage their streams. Many are part of a network of people who share information, techniques, tools, and insight and work across the platform managing chats. They often have experience in large-scale event moderation and use custom tools to better manage chat. They're the people who will make sure your chat runs smoothly, keeping everyone on track and making sure viewers are having a good time. They are also the ones who will keep your event free of spammers, trolls, and anyone trying to disrupt things.

MODERATORS

Experienced moderators should be seen as a critical component of your event staff and put into your production plans.

They will help ensure that your broadcast's chat is what you want it to be.

If your event is growing out of an established community, you may be able to rely on existing community moderators or their contacts to recruit additional moderators. Depending on your setup, it may also be possible for you to put out calls on social media to look for moderators; another possibility is to look at other large events that take place within your scene, see who their moderators are, and contact them directly.

Some factors you may want to consider when picking your moderation team include:

- **Availability.** If you are hiring staff making sure you have full coverage is much easier than if you rely on volunteers. If you do go with a volunteer model especially consider: How much time will your

moderators be able to devote to your event? Will they be able to cover all of it, or just a portion? If just a portion, can they take shifts that might require more eyes (such as the beginning of the event, high profile segments, or portions likely to draw more harassment and trolling)?

- **Familiarity with moderation tools, including third-party systems.** Again, depending on your event, you may have different needs, but generally speaking it's a good idea to look for mods who are already familiar with Twitch's culture and some of the more common moderation tools available to them. (See Tools section for examples)
- **Timezone.** For a long, multi-day event where you expect to draw an international audience, having moderators who can cover different shifts at different points in their day can be invaluable.
- **Language abilities.** Consider what language you expect most of your audience to speak and if you need multi-lingual coverage.
- **Redundancy.** For a high-intensity, large-scale event, it makes sense to have more than one head moderator managing your team, since this is quite a taxing job that requires a different skillset to other moderating work.

Finally, there is a Discord server (The Moderation Station) that is a hub for many experienced, active moderators: <https://discord.gg/8uCRHsc>. It is a great place to both connect with those folks, learn about community and event moderation, and keep on top of the latest developments. Joining the server does have some minimum requirements that are auto checked when you link up with your Twitch account, but for those who will be doing regular event streaming, it's well worth checking out.

Communication

Communication between moderators and event organizers is critical to make sure things run smoothly. Designate at least one person on your events team to be a moderator liaison and make sure that this person has access to the broadcasting account. Ideally, this moderator liaison will also be able to contact your production team and your security team. This person should be responsive, and be easily accessible by mobile phone or online communication, such as via Twitter DMs or presence in a Discord channel or server.

Other useful information to pass on ahead of time includes event schedules, broadcast setups, and the identities of casters, competitors, guests, and others who will appear on-screen. Moderators may also monitor the stream during the event for production issues, such as stream quality issues, delays, or audio problems. As a group of people who are watching the stream with clear communications to your staff, they are also a great resources for verifying that production issues have been sorted out. In the case you also have Twitch staff helping out in your stream, do your best to have your own moderation staff (at minimum your moderator team lead) in contact with Twitch so they are working together.

Security

Simple security measures, such as requiring two-factor authentication for your moderators, will help prevent mishaps during your event (see <https://help.twitch.tv/customer/en/portal/articles/2186271-two-factor-authentication-with-authy> for more information on 2FA for Twitch and <https://support.discordapp.com/hc/en-us/articles/219576828-Setting-up-Two-Factor-Authentication> for 2FA for Discord). Generally speaking, experienced moderators are likely to already be aware of online security issues and have taken steps to protect accounts, but it doesn't hurt to require two-factor authentication and to keep the sharing of identifying information to a minimum.

Compensation

Think about whether or not you're going to compensate your mods. Up until now a lot of moderation on Twitch has relied on the good-will of volunteers. While relying on volunteer labor can be useful, especially for small streams or more community-focused broadcasts, we strongly encourage larger productions from companies generating revenue to build moderator compensation into their plans. Moderators are as critical to the broadcast as other members of your production team and you should think about their labor accordingly. Head moderators or team leads will likely bear an especially high workload at the event and should be seriously considered as working professionals in this new media industry.

If you can't fit paying moderators into your budget, make sure this is clear at the outset. Remember that compensation doesn't always have to be monetary. Free admission for future events, VIP status, free merchandise, and gift cards have all been used to support moderators. And before you offer it, make sure it's something your mods really want or would appreciate having. Consider also that some of your moderators (especially volunteers) may be wary of giving out potentially identifying information (PII), such as addresses or personal e-mails, so you may need to be creative in how you handle things. If you require PII—for example, if you intend to pay your moderators and therefore require details for tax or other book keeping reasons—make sure this information secure.

Tools

Twitch moderators rely on a combination of platform features as well as a suite of third-party tools in order to effectively manage chat. As an event organizer, you should be broadly familiar with Twitch's built-in moderation functionality, as well as some of the most commonly-used third-party tools and bots.

Chat Rules

As we noted above, having a Code of Conduct and making it visible to both staff and your online participants is an important part of your production. CoC's are a vital component of community management. Provide yours to your moderation team well ahead of time, so that they can prepare to regulate chat appropriately.

At a basic level consider, for example, having your CoC (distilled) as a pop-up notification with required user agreement when a viewer first tries to chat in the channel. Twitch's "chat rules" tool allows you to specify channel rules of behavior and makes participants click an "I agree" button. Internal Twitch research has shown this simple function to have a "statistically significant reduction in timeouts and bans" (Twitch, 2017). Think of this as the kind of guidelines sports venues have where there is an expectation of a certain kind of behavior and violating it has consequences. In online spaces people need to be reminded that they are in a public space with a diverse set of participants and the chat rules tool is an easy first step in moderation.

TOOLS

Make sure you have basic familiarity with the technology you can use to help moderate your stream and bring on people who will leverage the range of tools available.

AutoMod

Twitch's own built-in chat filtering tool, AutoMod, catches and holds "risky messages" which stops them from appearing on chat (though these messages can then be individually approved by a moderator). At the minimum, the built-in feature can help you manage the chat.

By default, AutoMod is set to level 1 and has five levels, going from 0 to 4. The lower the number, the less strict it will be. Set it to at least "level 2" (which removes sexually explicit language, hate speech, and abusive language) or "level 3" to cast a broader net. Depending on your event and its specificities you may even end up setting it higher (for more on AutoMod see <https://help.twitch.tv/customer/portal/articles/2662186-how-to-use-automod>). The settings can be changed by moderators, so make sure your team is clear as to what settings should be used, and who is in charge of setting, and if needed, changing, them.

AutoMod is a good baseline mechanism, but it cannot be your only anti-harassment or anti-abuse tool. For one thing, AutoMod is set up to catch generally-risky messages; anything that is more specific or targeted will slip by it. Twitch users are also generally aware of AutoMod's existence, and understand how to fool the filter by employing simple letter substitution, ASCII or Unicode characters, or creative use of emotes in order to avoid detection. AutoMod will also not always catch malware links.

AutoMod, then, is best paired with other tools, as well as active and alert human moderators who will be watching your stream.

Timeouts, Bans, and Various Chat Settings

In addition to AutoMod, Twitch offers a variety of built-in features to regulate your chat beyond looking for specific terms. You can alter:

- the pace of your channel's chat (slow mode so chat is delayed)
- which type of participants can speak and in what ways (fully open, email verified, followers or subscribers only, emote regulation)
- if you allow links or repeated phrases (R9K feature)

The platform also provides basic tools to deal with individual users through the timeout and banning functions.

We strongly recommend that you familiarize yourself with the range of built-in functionality the site provides and have a plan for moderation that specifies what tools you want to be sure to have in place at the start of the event and which you may need to use as things develop. Twitch's "How to Manage Harassment in Chat" guide (<https://help.twitch.tv/customer/en/portal/articles/2329145-how-to-manage-harassment-in-chat>) is an excellent starting point.

Third-Party Bots

Third-party bots, which are available for free, can be very effective when paired with AutoMod and other built-in functionality. When operated by experienced moderators, all of these tools together form a powerful set of techniques for community management. The collection of tools is especially important for high volume chats. Third party bots can do more than filter your chat; some of them can also be programmed with custom commands. These custom commands allow viewers to trigger a preset message, which could be used to promote your event's schedule, social media links, hashtags, or other useful information.

These bots also have more fine-tuned chat filters. Common ones are punctuation filters, capitalization filters, and custom phrase blacklists. Because permission to change these settings can be granted to any user who is a moderator on your channel, third-party bots tend to be more flexible and responsive. For example, if a certain meme is currently disrupting your chat, your moderators can quickly copy-paste that particular meme into a third-party bot's blacklist, stopping it from dominating. Though AutoMod also has a blacklist, it can only be changed by one account-holder, which again limits its responsiveness.

Defer to your moderators when it comes to picking a bot, since it is important that they are familiar with its operation. Different bots have different functions and volunteer moderators may use more than one third-party bot, both to provide a range of functions, but also as backup in case one of them fails. Common bots are moobot (<http://twitch.moobot.tv/>) and Ohbot (<https://ohbot.3v.fi/>). Moobot has a graphical interface and is a very widely used bot for large events due to its ease of use and other useful features, such as custom commands. Ohbot has a regular expression (regex) filter function that is extremely powerful when carefully deployed, and also comes with regex presets which can be used even if your moderation team has no regex experience. If you must choose one, moobot is a solid choice. However, be aware that it (and some other bots) may require donations to unlock some more advanced features.

Moderation-focused UI and chat clients

Various plugins are available to further customize chat features. Since Twitch's updates in 2018, some older moderation chat clients are yet to be updated as of time of writing. However, one powerful option is modch.at, a custom client that allows one to drag-and-drop different chats, moderator logs, and streams and reposition them in the same window. This is useful for keeping an eye on multiple chats or streams at once. This is useful just for keeping an eye on multiple streams, in general.

After the Event

In the same way you will likely assess your broadcast in terms of audience reach or production quality, take a look at how your chat went. Was it the quality you wanted? What might you do better next time? Talking to your moderators after an event lets you get a sense of what works and what does not. For example, you may want to ask them what portions of your Code of Conduct worked, what did not, and what caused friction; or, you might want to assess how useful promotions, giveaways, or other audience engagement measures were during the event. Since the pool of expert moderators is rather small, it is in your best interests to cultivate a good relationship with them and rely on their insight; not only may they come back to work with you, they may well recommend your event to other moderators in the future. They will also be some of the most useful parts of your production staff to help improve the online participant experience.

Chat remains one of the most important components of live streaming and it holds tremendous potential to both engage, and disenfranchise, your viewers. Recognizing it as a core part of your broadcast over which you have responsibility is the first step in building a moderation plan for it. Think about what you want your chat to be, how you want it to reflect on your event, organization, or brand, and then formulate a plan that utilizes the fantastic range of tools, and experienced mods, to make it a meaningful exciting part of your broadcast.

BOTS & PLUG-INS

Third party tools such as specialized bots or chat clients are an incredibly important addition to your moderator toolkit, particularly for large, high-volume broadcasts. If you are running one of these make sure you bring on staff who are able to utilize them for full moderation coverage.

AnyKey “Keystone Code”

Compassion: Treat others as you would be treated; consider the perspectives of others.

You value the diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and opinions of others, even when different from your own. You appreciate that all viewpoints come from the life experiences of fellow human beings. You understand that online interactions impact real people in real ways, both offline and online.

Integrity: Be honest, be committed, play fair.

You behave honorably and honestly. You take responsibility for your words and actions. While playing games, you honor the rules and spirit of honest competition.

Respect: respect all other humans, teammates and competitors alike.

You respect everyone regardless of their background, identity, physical appearance, or beliefs. Even in competitive gaming where “trash-talk” is common, you are a good sport and respect opponents as fellow human beings, keeping the banter to the game, not ever making it personal.

Courage: be courageous in competition and in standing up for what is right.

You have the courage to moderate your own behavior, speak out against harassment, and report violations by others. You do not tolerate harassment or hate speech of any kind, even when you are not directly involved.

For reference, harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Hate speech, offensive behavior, or verbal abuse related to sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disability, physical appearance, body size, age, or religion.
- Stalking or intimidation (physically or online).
- Spamming, raiding, hijacking, or inciting disruption of streams or social media.
- Posting or threatening to post other people’s personally identifying information (“doxing”).
- Unwelcome sexual attention. This includes, unwelcome sexualized comments, jokes, and sexual advances.
- Advocating for, or encouraging, any of the above behavior.

We do not tolerate harassment or hate speech in any form. Anyone violating these rules in our related communities and spaces will be dealt with at the discretion of activity organizers and stream moderators, and may include being banned from online channels and/or removed from events. If you observe harassment against someone, say something!