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## Should anonymous commenting be a crime? (And a reader poll on the ATL comments system.)

Forget about prostitution -- which, it appears, most of you [support legalizing](#). What about the legality of anonymous commenting on the internet?

This story is from last week, but please indulge us -- we're taking it somewhere. From [WTVQ](#):

Kentucky Representative Tim Couch filed a bill this week to make anonymous posting online illegal.

The bill would require anyone who contributes to a website to register their real name, address and e-mail address with that site. Their full name would be used anytime a comment is posted.

If the bill becomes law, the website operator would have to pay if someone was allowed to post anonymously on their site. The fine would be five-hundred dollars (\$500) for a first offense and one-thousand dollars (\$1,000) for each offense after that.



While we understand the problems and headaches of anonymous commenting, which we deal with on a daily basis, this proposal strikes us as a bit draconian. If enacted, it would dramatically cut down on free speech on the web. If we faced such potential liability for hosting anonymous commenters, we'd probably just kill comments altogether.

More discussion -- plus a reader poll, soliciting your views on the best commenting regime for ATL -- after the jump.

Not surprisingly, given our line of work, we aren't super-keen on the Kentucky proposal. Others disagree. When we spoke at [Stanford Law School](#) on Monday, during the question-and-answer session, several students advocated requiring all commenters to disclose their true identities, which would appear along with each comment.

What do you think? Please take our poll. We're redesigning ATL later this year, and the redesign process may include some changes to the commenting system. We'd like to take the readership pulse on this (but reserve the right to settle on a comments system different from what prevails in the poll).

An explanation of the options:

1. **No registration required:** The status quo here at ATL.
2. **Registration / login required:** You'd register with your name and email address, pick a unique handle or moniker (e.g., "Loyola 2L"), and log in under that handle each time you'd want to comment. This is the system used, for example, at [Gawker Media](#) blogs like [Wonkette](#) (where we previously blogged).
3. **Registration / login permitted, but not required (can comment as 'guest'):** Self-explanatory; a modified option #2. If you want credit for your witty comment, you can log in, and your handle would appear with your comment. But if you don't want credit, you wouldn't have to log in, and could just comment as "guest." This is the system used at our Wall Street sibling site, [Dealbreaker](#).
4. **Advance approval required for comments:** A comment couldn't go up on the site until it gets the editorial greenlight from us. Given the sheer volume of comments on ATL, we doubt we'd adopt this -- we can't even read all the comments as it is. But it is the approach used by our style-obsessed little sibling, [Fashionista](#).
5. **No reader comments:** Some might say that a blog without comments is like judging without a robe, or working Biglaw without a bonus. What's the point?

We doubt we'd go down the comment-less path at ATL, since the comments here are, taken as a whole, insightful and/or funny enough to justify the headaches they cause. But a number of prominent blogs, such as [Instapundit](#) (Glenn Reynolds) and [The Daily Dish](#) (Andrew Sullivan), don't have comments. So we'll include it as an option.

Okay, enough discussion; please cast your vote. The poll, we should point out, is for informational purposes only. We will consider, but not be bound by, the poll's outcome. Thanks.

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