

Don't just 'log in' - 'cop on'



We all have an important decision to make when we upload or share something online.

Everyone was shocked to hear of the horrific incident which occurred on Manor Street last week.

The tragic death of two-year-old Daenerys Crosbie, who was hit by a truck while on her way to Montessori, highlighted how whole lives can be changed in an instant.

But there was further shock later in the week when Waterford City Fire Service, which had attended at the scene of the tragedy, posted an astonishing on its Facebook page.

"The crew at the scene were astounded by the number of people trying to capture the incident on their phones," the statement read.

The issue prompted a huge discussion online and was reported on by our national newspapers as well as the BBC.

The incident certainly says a lot about human behaviour.

Anyone of us could at anytime, anywhere stumble upon an incident such as that which unfortunately occurred on Manor Street last week.

It's hard to comprehend that your initial reaction could be to grab your mobile and try to take a photo or record a video.

Waterford City Fire Service explored this question on their page: "Why do people do this? It's ghoulish, thoughtless and extremely distasteful," the message said.

"We could fill this page with photos of the injured and dead that we see. But we don't. Sometimes it's enough to know that horrible things happen without having to see them. Most obviously there's the matter of respect for the dignity of the people involved and the desire of paramount importance to not add to the grief and anguish felt by their families and friends."

It seems everyone now hopes that they can capture footage which will go 'viral' and earn them a quick quid.

Andy Warhol famously said "in the future everyone will have their fifteen minutes of fame" and it is becoming increasingly likely that he is going to be proved right.

Many media organisations are willing to pay handsomely for amateur footage from high profile incidents.

As a result of cuts to resources in traditional media organisations, so-called 'citizen journalists' are becoming more common.

But most professional journalists operate by ethical guidelines and know, for instance, when it is appropriate to approach a scene such as that which occurred on Manor Street last week.

While emergency services are still going about their work is obviously not an appropriate time.

A professional photographer operating by correct guidelines will also be aware of when he or she should approach a scene and will be conscious of what type of photographs are deemed acceptable.

These days, everyone seems to be operating as an amateur photographer or journalist – but without the guidelines.

Point number six on the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of Conduct states that a journalist "does nothing to intrude into anybody's private life, grief or distress unless justified by overriding consideration of the public interest".

Is the scene of a horrific incident such as that which occurred on Manor Street in the "public interest"? It's in the public interest to know of the event, but not to see graphic images.

Traditionally, newspaper editors decided which photos were suitable for printing and which were not.

TV news reports are often accompanied with warnings about gruesome images which may be contained in reports, particularly from war zones.

But the online world is a free for all where there are no such parameters and very little consideration for morals.

In the rush to be the first with breaking news online, and to gain as many Facebook 'likes' or Twitter 'retweets', all considerations for morality are unfortunately lost along the way.

Somewhere deep within the human psyche, a gratuitous, perverse pleasure for viewing horrific images and videos must still

exist.

After all, our forefathers flocked in their droves to view public executions and hangings, while the violent battles between gladiators were a highlight of the Ancient Roman social calendar.

But we proclaim to be much more advanced than our forefathers, so surely we know when to suppress this desire if it still exists?

The spread of the violent online videos showing beheadings carried out by ISIL shows that unfortunately there are still those who want to view such violence.

As the fire service correctly said, they could fill their own Facebook page with gruesome photos from the various incidents they attend but they chose not to.

We all have an important decision to make when we upload or share something online.

A mobile phone is a powerful weapon, and what we choose to do with it can have a profound impact.

Interestingly, the craze of capturing inappropriate photos and videos can't be attributed to teenagers or young adults.

In their Facebook post, Waterford City Fire Service specifically mentioned a man in his thirties who attempted to record a video of a recent road traffic accident: "This has been an ongoing trend for a number of years now, never better illustrated than at an RTA not too long ago where a man (In his thirties, not a teenager) crept up, phone poised and recording, to within ten feet or so of a car where we were trying to extricate the driver while the ambulance crew were treating him. The driver died en route to hospital."

The paparazzi have often been blamed for contributing to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.

If she was still alive, it's possible that she would have been hounded even more than she was given the fact that so many people now seems to act as a budding 'paparazzo'.

So, what will it take to call a halt to the craze of capturing photos and videos of all types of events at all cost?

We will surely reach a point where stringent regulation will be required in relation to the material which is uploaded online.

Social media is a fantastic medium through which to communicate - just look at how quickly the post on the Waterford City Fire Service page spread.

There are indisputable benefits to social media such as renewing connections with old friends, maintaining connections with family who have moved abroad etc.

But perhaps we all need to exercise a little more common sense in relation to social media usage.

So the next time you 'log in, don't forget to 'cop on'.