

Beware of censorship via algorithms

By Roger McKeague

As the country celebrates Free Speech Week, Oct. 18 through Oct. 24, I ask the members of this community what that right means to each of them.

As the president and CEO of 'Olelo Community Media, free speech is an issue that dominates my thoughts. As a father, censorship of speech and opinions — and the insidious ways that biased digital information is presented to our children — terrifies me.

I believe that a thriving society depends upon informed citizens engaged in the marketplace of ideas where each person has access to uncensored, timely, relevant information and has the ability to express their uncensored opinion in media.

We now live in a digital age. Common Sense Media has found that American teens spend more than seven hours per day on their screens outside of schoolwork. Pew Research Center found earlier this year that nearly one-third of adults report going online "almost constantly."

As a society, I do not believe that we comprehend just how much of that digital information is censored before we see it. There is an entire multibillion-dollar search-engine optimization (SEO) industry that steers each of us to information that does not reflect any diversity of thought.

Imagine doing what most of us do many times a day: You open up a search engine to surf the web. Based on that first article that you read online, the artificial intelligence will then suggest a similar article that the system believes you will also be interested in ... then another and another, leading the reader down a rabbit hole of singular thought. That information may not be the most relevant to someone who wants to learn about other views, but it is what the system will present to you.

This tends to lead to a singularity of thought that has helped create a great deal of division in our society. One group follows one path, while another group heads down another path — and it's as if they are living in different universes because they are living in different information worlds.

Using public-access media like 'Olelo, anyone can create a video that is aired on our TV stations, on our

website and on our mobile app — platforms for uncensored communication offering multiple sides of an issue. This is why we exist, and what makes public-access media foundational to our society thriving.

If that same message is put on a platform like YouTube, then it is immediately buried under other content that has been engineered by the billion-dollar SEO industry to be at the top of the viewers' pages — or it may be blocked entirely.

I consider this a modern form of censorship, and it terrifies me because I believe that free speech is absolutely integral to our community today. To live together, we must respect the opinions of others, even those we may disagree with.

ISLAND VOICES



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Just because you are unknown does not mean you should have no voice.

All diverse voices need a means of being heard. All opinions have value because considering other opinions strengthens our relationships and leads to better understanding of each other.

In honor of Free Speech Week, I would ask us to be mindful of the artificial intelligence that is censoring the digital information pre-

sented to you. I encourage everyone to seek out diverse opinions on issues, help debate ideas and not just follow the path down a rabbit hole of similar online voices.

Find ways to expose yourself to unpopular and underrepresented voices — which are also valuable — and celebrate free speech!

