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## The Pickton Circus – and two new media performers

By Kendyl Salcito  
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Orato.com's Pickton trial correspondents – two former sex workers – have posted their first stories at <http://www.orato.com/node/1537> and <http://www.orato.com/node/1538>. Though the citizen journalism news site announced its plans to hire the two women weeks ago, buzz has yet to die down. Editor-in-chief Paul Sullivan posts regularly about the decision, lauding the women's first articles as testaments to the "real" Pickton trial story about the "senseless loss of so many beautiful souls."

Sullivan's most recent post, filed Monday, defends the decision for giving a "voice to the voiceless" and advancing free speech while maintaining a degree of "accuracy and clarity" through fact-checking processes with editors.

But not all journalism ethicists agree that hiring former sex workers to speak for the murdered victims in the trial demonstrates the legitimacy of citizen journalism as a news source.

Former journalism ethics professor and author Nick Russell questions the move's sincerity. Noting Sullivan's media relations background, Russell sees the move as a possible publicity stunt. "[Sullivan] understands better than most people the need to promote any medium, to build audience," he explains. "Sending former street workers to cover the trial will certainly do that."

Sullivan counters that Orato.com has been soliciting stories from non-journalists for six months now. "That's our point: to get people who are involved in stories to tell their story." If there were a subway bombing, Orato.com would seek a subway passenger.

Russell and Sullivan are both unwilling to call the unaccredited correspondents to the Pickton trial "journalists," but Sullivan is confident that he is filling a need.

"You've got 300 people accredited to this trial. There's going to be a surfeit of coverage. Every dimension of the trial is going to be covered. We have to think about it in the context of that fact, that we're a dimension of coverage."

Russell reminds that there are as many as 34 million bloggers in the world now, most of them writing first-person accounts of their own experiences. In an over-covered trial, Russell doubts that one more news source, even written in first-person, will add anything substantively different or useful.

"In terms of providing grist for the mills of human knowledge, [orato.com's correspondents] may not add much," he says. "Meanwhile, adding to the media circus will just make it more difficult for the citizens to keep an open mind on the Pickton trial, judging the defendant on the evidence submitted to the jury."