

For example, a recent, widely shared story claimed that 300,000 pounds of rat meat were being sold as chicken wings across the U.S. That article is now tagged as false. In addition, a link directs users to a fact-check of the story by the nonpartisan site PolitiFact.com.

Facebook is launching its own fact-check tool, and the site is working to delete phony accounts run by “bots”—or web robots—that automatically “like” and share fake news. Facebook has also experimented with a more old-fashioned approach to stop misinformation: Before recent elections in Great Britain, the site placed ads in local newspapers about how to spot fake news.

### ‘Attracting Eyeballs’

Many experts, however, say the tech companies aren’t doing enough.

“[Tech companies] make money by attracting and keeping eyeballs,” says Matthew A. Baum, a public policy professor at Harvard University in Massachusetts. “They talk and talk and do very little. And the stuff they are doing is, at best, marginally effective.”

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Dig deeper.** Just because a story pops up first on Google doesn’t mean it’s trustworthy. Look at the descriptions of multiple results before deciding which one to click.

**Check the source.** If a story comes from an unfamiliar website, click on the “About” page to learn more. Searching a site’s name or its founder’s name on the web can help you decide if the site is credible.

**Don’t share.** Spotted a fake news story? Avoid sending it to your friends or reposting it. Sharing bogus stories only widens their audience—and helps them rise even higher in search results.

**Not every article at the top of your search results is reliable.**

One problem, he says, is that fact-checking individual articles takes too much time to slow fast-spreading fake news. Instead, internet platforms should evaluate the credibility of websites as a whole, he says. Any content from a site that consistently publishes false stories should rank low in results lists—and rise only if the entire site starts producing more reliable information, says Baum.

Making fake news sites harder to find is key, Baum says, because labeling stories as false doesn’t necessarily stop people from believing them.

“We tend to accept something as true the more we encounter it,” he says. So if you read a story that’s been labeled false, “you might forget it was declared bogus and just remember that you saw it.” If you see that story again later, you’re more likely to fall for it, Baum explains.

Tech companies should also be more aggressive about deleting fake accounts, according to Baum. Facebook recently deleted 30,000 such accounts, but in 2013, the company estimated that it had as many as 138 million phony accounts.

### Educating Readers

For now, the best tool for stopping fake news may be educating people to be more skeptical about what they read (see “What You Can Do”). Washington state passed a law last spring that would encourage public schools to offer media literacy classes. Several other states are considering similar legislation.

The classes teach students how to analyze information from websites, TV, and other forms of media. Anzalone, at the Center for News Literacy, says they also help students recognize their natural biases.

“We don’t like to receive information that may conflict with what we believe,” he says. So when we read something that affirms what we think—even if it’s wrong—we’re more likely to accept it. That’s why we need to think critically about what we’re reading, he says. The end goal is about more than being able to spot a made-up story, says Anzalone. “It’s about valuing and seeking truth—and knowing how to find it.” ●

## HOW TEENS GET THEIR NEWS

American teens were recently asked which sources they had used in the last 24 hours to keep up with current events.

