

---

**PUBLISHING AND THE LAW**

## **Watch Those Letters To the Editor**

Although feedback from readers is always important to a fair and balanced magazine, says Lawrence Savell, an attorney with Chadbourne & Parke LLP, letters can present a variety of legal issues for a title. "A publisher could face potential liability if, for example, the letter were obscene, libeled someone or invaded another's privacy—assuming that all of the elements of the claims were established," he explains. In order to avoid a sticky legal situation, an editor can, of course, choose not to print any feedback at all. But for those who do decide to run reader input, Savell offers a few tips.

First, editors should exercise discretion—and common sense—when selecting which letters to run. Second, says Savell, "the staff should verify that letters received truly are from those whom they purport to be; obviously, don't run those that cannot be so verified." Third, editors should publish a set of conditions under which the title accepts letters for consideration, and indicate that submission of a letter constitutes agreement to those terms. Such terms might establish that the magazine is under no obligation to print letters, that the staff has the right to edit them, and that anything submitted will not be returned. And, adds Savell: "A disclaimer advising readers that the letters represent the opinions and views of their writers—and not necessarily those of the magazine—might also be useful."