Blizzard drops plan to require real names on forums

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A visitor plays the computer game "World of Warcraft" at the world's biggest high-tech fair, the CeBIT on March 2010 in Germany. Amid a barrage of criticism, Activision Blizzard, maker of World of Warcraft and other popular videogames, dropped a plan Friday to require users of its forums to start posting their real names.

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"We've been constantly monitoring the feedback you've given us, as well as internally discussing your concerns about the use of real names on our forums," Blizzard Entertainment chief executive Mike Morhaime said in a blog post.

"As a result of those discussions, we've decided at this time that real names will not be required for posting on official Blizzard forums."

Blizzard's about-face came just three days after it announced it would begin introducing the "Real ID" feature to its official bulletin boards in a bid to cut down on "flame wars, trolling and other unpleasantness run wild."

The proposed change prompted hundreds of comments from forum users, most of them negative.

Morhaime said Blizzard was "committed" to improving its forums.

"Our efforts are driven 100 percent by the desire to find ways to make our community areas more welcoming for players and encourage more constructive conversations about our games," he said.

Blizzard is one of many online operations grappling with the question of anonymity on the Web.

US newspapers have also been debating the practice of allowing anonymous comments and The Buffalo News announced last month it will begin requiring real names from people who want to leave comments on its website.

World of Warcraft, which was launched in 1994, is the most popular multi-player online role-playing game with more than 11 million monthly subscribers.

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