

Urban Justice Center

Sex Workers' rights and Human Trafficking

<https://www.urbanjustice.org/2021/09/24/sex-workers-sick-of-onlyfans-are-building-their-own-websites/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

When OnlyFans [announced its plan](#) to scrap adult content in mid-August, only to [suspend the decision five days later](#), many online sex workers who use the site were once again forced to reckon with the unstable nature of their industry.

Like the closing of advertising site [Backpage.com in 2018](#), the event highlighted how centralized online platforms used by sex workers can be taken offline at a moment's notice, leaving thousands of workers without a critical source of income and forced into [more dangerous work on the streets](#). With fears of underage content, sex trafficking, and non-consensual porn driving increased censorship of online spaces, sex workers worry about what the future of sex work will hold if the option of online platforms is taken away.

The recent OnlyFans banning of adult content scare just highlighted to us online sex workers that we do not have job security, [Vixen Temple](#), an Aotearoa (New Zealand) sex worker who has worked in the industry since 2018, told Motherboard. In an instant, your means of income can be taken away from you.

Given the instability of large and small platforms for adult content, the conversation about how to move forward is gaining momentum amongst sex workers including making platforms of their own.

Many sex workers I know personally are building their own websites, making sure their content is available on multiple platforms, and focusing on securing their income in case one platform disappears, [Lena](#), an adult content maker, told Motherboard. It would be a freeing and fantastic feeling to have a spot on the internet that was my own where I could curate an audience, create my own content, and not have to worry about it being removed due to puritanical belief.

While the idea of setting up a website sounds ideal, the practicalities are difficult to navigate.

"The challenge is finding a site that will host adult content, said Lena. "Many mainstream sites that don't require intricate coding knowledge to use shy away from pornography.

Once a website has been established, the sex worker must work to get the word out about their website. Building a successful one requires marketing skills, said Lena. Luckily, sex workers are experts in marketing. We are adaptable, resilient, and find ways to continue to market ourselves and our products in innovative ways. But a website takes time and income to host. Someone just starting out might have to invest [time and money], which is a lot to ask for someone simply wanting to earn a living and is short on money already.

How to move forward is all we're talking about at the moment, says Temple. I would love to build my own website something quite similar to what OnlyFans has paid to access website where my services can be quick to access for a price I set. I want a place where I can choose my rates, be my own manager.

However, Temple is concerned about payment. VISA and PayPal are not sex work friendly," said Temple.. "If anything pops up on their radar that content is an exchange of sexual services, it'll be blocked. They don't want to be held responsible for that. We would have to find ways to get the money from the client to the sex worker.

Platforms are also cracking down on adult content because of the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA), [a law passed in 2018](#) that made platforms liable for hosting sex trafficking and created a chilling effect on all sexual speech online. As with anything that creates risk, this [made banks and payment platforms more hesitant](#) to do business with platforms that host adult content.

While the purported target of the law [FOSTA/SESTA] was trafficking in the sex trades, it has proven incredibly ineffective but is instead invoked regularly by tech companies when censoring and removing content shared by sex workers, or even just users sharing content of a sexual nature, Mariah Grant, Director of Research and Advocacy at [The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center](#), told Motherboard.

If I created my own website, it could be deplatformed under FOSTA because of my content, said Temple, noting that all of her work to create a website could be gone at the snap of someone's fingers.

Despite the hurdles, many sex workers are accelerating plans to move away from centralized platforms and regain some degree of independence in the process..

I hope to create my own website with an email newsletter in the next several months, [Kezia Slater](#), who has been a sex worker for over eight years, told Motherboard. This is the way to have the most stability, but it only really works if you already have traffic to bring people in. I'm hoping to make more SFW (Safe For Work) content on Twitch, TikTok, or YouTube to appeal to more people and get more traffic. I truly believe part of the future of sex work is having a SFW platform or network you can always fall back on.

For me, its all about diversification, [Allie Awesome](#), a sex worker who was been in the industry for nine years, said to Motherboard. If PornHub and OnlyFans taught us anything, its that our platforms are under attack and we have to be nimble in order to survive.

Im building my own website so fans can find me and I dont have to worry about losing my account, says Allie. But Im not looking forward to dealing with payment processors. Ive looked into it and it isnt cheap. Because the adult industry is considered high risk, payment processing is a lot more expensive. That being said, its clear I need my own website and Ill be working with a developer possibly ElevatedX or VXPAGES - to make my website and get me all set up with a payment processor. Im also going to make an email list so I can stay in touch with fans should I lose access to a platform. And I want to make my social media content more SFW. She suspects performers will increasingly accept cryptocurrency for payment out of necessity because Visa and MasterCard have such a stranglehold on the industry. Im a huge proponent and have been accepting it for years.

Even though there is a general distrust of large platforms, a majority of sex workers still choose to use them, carefully. Some workers have opted to join OnlyFans competitors like Fansly and ePlay as alternatives, citing better payout options and subscription features. But no matter the platform, they are all a means to the same end.

Were going to find ways to survive, said Allie.

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