

You were most active in the OT community during the early years of its formation, and I'd say you are known for being the administrator of OTFans. I also happen to know you're very keen on designing and theorycrafting game features.

STiX: <interrupts> You know, it's funny that you say that. From my perspective when I joined the scene back in 2008 (though lurked for a couple of years prior), I was late to the scene. OTFans had already been around since 2004 and was ran by a different leadership team, many of the users there had emigrated from World of Tibia (WoT) after discussion of OpenTibia was banned, the OpenTibia project on SourceForge has been around since mid-2001, and I believe Snyder pretty much kickstarted the scene with Tibia Emulator back in 2001.

Many of us remember an avatar with a funky hairstyle and the sticky four letter pseudonym (no pun intended), but likely for most of us, the man behind all that is still a mystery. Please take a moment to introduce yourself, and tell us a little about yourself, your personality and occupation/skills.

STiX: My name is Nathan, but I've gone by STiX online for a very long time now. I used to play a lot of FPS games and won a few local tournaments for Quake 3. When I wasn't playing FPS games I was enjoying RPGs such as Morrowind - which has always had a very large modding community that in some ways is analogous to the OpenTibia community.

These days I manage a few software development teams for a large mining and resources organization.

I also run a very small modding site for Morrowind (<https://mw.moddinghall.com/>) to serve as an alternate host to Nexus, as Morrowind Modding History was having some issues and part of the community was worried some of the mods would be lost to time.

Can you tell us what your journey with Tibia looked like up to that point?
What drew you into the game? When and why did you first enter the OT scene?

STiX: I had some school friends that were playing Tibia, but the game didn't really draw me in - even after playing for a while.
One of them mentioned that there were 'tools to make your own', but he couldn't really figure it out - now that definitely caught my attention.

I honestly didn't care much for the game, but the ability to pick up something that is already partially done and put my own polish and customizations on it? Count me in.
So I spent some time trying to understand how to get a really basic server running, and create some truly obscene monsters and map changes. By the time I got there, they were onto the next game - but I stuck around and got sucked into the community and some (very novice) scripting.

What role did you play in the inception of OTFans?

Were you it's first administrator, or was the torch passed down to you by another?

How would you characterize your time spent on that position?

What would you say that experience taught you?

STiX: I was far from the first. I might be getting my wires crossed, but I believe Yorick, Peekay, and Nuker were the early administrators of the site.

I couldn't tell you how it happened - but the torch was passed down to GriZzm0 (Kristofer).

Around that time time, I was a moderator of the scripting boards, and then worked my way up to a global moderator.

I forget the exact circumstances (disc failure? more on that later though), but the site went offline. OTLand was thriving at the time, and I think Grizz had competing priorities with university - so wasn't able to afford time to get the site back online. I thought it would be a shame to lose the site to the sands of time (especially back then, as much of the content was still relevant).

He entrusted a copy of the database to me, and transferred the OpenTibia.net and OTFans.net domains, and I got the site back online - also moving it from vBulletin to IPBoard (which was a hell of a job). Not to mention the old database I inherited had the passwords all in salted md5 hashes, so they were crackable in seconds.... (if you're using the same password on services

these days as you were using 15 years ago, your password is safe with me - but PLEASE change it anyway!) - so that had to be addressed too.

Surprisingly, the only thing that was lost in the migration were user avatars.

As an administrator there, are there certain projects, changes or improvements you planned on making, that never came to fruition?

If yes, please describe them and the thought process behind them.

STiX: During my time as a moderator, I felt like our site was aging. It was starting to look dated, and lacked some features that were common with other forum software at the time.

On the community side, we were losing a lot of community to [OTLand](#) - most likely attributable to the fact their forum hosted more direct support and community around The Forgotten Server (TFS), which was steadily becoming the de facto distribution of choice among the community (though not without some healthy competition).

During my time as administrator, I saw a gap in the accessibility of content for new 'would be' server hosts and some security concerns in the community.

For the former, I wanted to make scripts and such accessible by download, rather than copy and paste (in retrospect, I don't think this is a good idea).

For the latter, password reuse at the time was really rampant. Players would register for an OT server and set the same password they would have on their PayPal, E-Mail, etc. accounts.

Naturally, these passwords would not necessarily be well protected by the server owners - and were prone to leaking.

Within the revamped site, we got an OAuth service off the ground - but never got to the point where we integrated it to OT server clients or nor web server software. Our thinking was we could provide a safe logon service for the community and hosted boards for the server owners (thus giving them access to a near-immediate player base and community visibility).

Besides being an OTFans administrator, which other OT related projects (servers, tools, websites, etc.) were you involved in and what was your role there? What do you do nowadays in the OT community and what would you say draws you back to engaging with it even after such a long time?

STiX: I ran the Tibia subreddit for a while. The bigger Tibia subreddit didn't permit OT discussion as well, so I took over [r/Tibia](#) to provide a shared space for all Tibia discussion, with tags to indicate if it was related to CipSoft Tibia or OpenTibia. Unfortunately, the community didn't really kick off. Most CipSoft Tibia only players naturally preferred the existing subreddit because it was more targeted and many don't care for OT, for OT players it was too broad - their specific OT server's forums were naturally a better place to discuss, and for developers the development communities such as OTLand are much more fit for purpose.

I had a few different moderator positions at different sites (otlist.net, that site of Dalkon's that hosted the OpenLua project (I don't recall the name), and a handful of others), but many of those sites came and went pretty quickly.

For some of them, I was able to archive them into OTFans. We migrated in the entire VAPus database as but one example.

These days I'm not active in the community. Sometimes I'll pull open Articy or OneNote and scribble down some creature ideas, or plug away at a map I've been working on for a bit of fun - but no projects I'm working on with intent to ever release.

A veteran like you might be able to recall, better than most, some of the projects and people who were active during this long stretch of time in the OT scene. Which of them made the greatest impression on you? Describe why they were so exceptional or memorable?

STiX: There have been a tonne of people I've gotten to know and who have influenced me in many ways.

For some, it's just been inspiration from their creativity or skills. For some others, I've had the benefit to meet in person and get to know them outside of the OpenTibia setting (I went on a trip through Scandinavia many years ago, and arranged to meet many prominent community members along the way and developing a tonne of fun memories).

I'm hesitant to name names at the risk of omitting people that might be a bit fainter in memory after some 15+ years - but they'll all know who they are.

One thing I will mention is that when I visited Kristofer, he showed me the broom closet he used to host OTFans out of which was a good laugh smile.

Do you happen to know who pioneered certain features or ideas that later became iconic in the community? Some, to the point that they were later included in Tibia itself!
For example - trainers.

STiX: As I didn't really follow CipSoft Tibia, I couldn't tell you what features were picked up from the OpenTibia community - though I do know of some early sprite artists from WoT were picked up to work for them. It was usually systems and tools that stood out to me - Gesior, Remere's RME, Jiddo's (John David) NPC system, SimOne's Map Editor, etc. There are so many it would be hard to pinpoint - for every 1 project that is still around and remembered, there are 5 others that are almost forgotten jOTServer, another one that was almost fully in Lua, Tibia flash clients, all sorts of cool things.

You've practically observed the evolution of OTs for 15~ years. How would you characterize people and projects in the OT space nowadays compared to the ones in the OTFans era? What are the biggest differences you see between those two, and what are some striking similarities? It will be interesting to hear your take on the evolution of the OT culture.

STiX: The community feels a lot smaller than it used to.

Back before, there was a flurry of activity and people at all different skill sets working on all sorts of projects: from money-grabbing servers spun up in an afternoon with pay-to-win options - all the way to monolithic projects that would never finish (any remember the project to create a community SPR that replaces EVERY sprite in the game?). There was so much going on there was also a bit of a splintering on the community too.

Nowadays, I feel there are still money-grab servers and ambitious projects - but the volumes of the latter have dropped off. Even if I'm no longer 'active', I do still lurk and it feels like there are less community projects going on, with the exception of the usual distro build and maintenance. As many of the older prominent figures have dropped away, not as many new ones have come onboard to pick up the mantle. Tibia is an old game, and there are a lot more sexier games to extend and build tools for.

I think some people would be quick to say that the accessibility of things was what ruined the community - people have been saying that since RME was released with auto-bordering functionality.

I'm inclined to disagree with this. Whilst there is something to be said about the proportion of adjusted rate, pay-to-win servers ballooning ~2015 did disincentivize much of the player community to continue to try new servers, we still saw big projects like The Lost Lands (TLL) and Necronia pull in strong user numbers. I think the downturn of bigger, interesting servers was due to many people 'aging out' of playing the game, or building it.

I think ease of access to the community has increased now many of the community have moved in part or in full to Discord, though I worry about the long-term availability and surfacing of useful resources and conversations - I guess there is some irony in that though!

I don't think it's possible to define OT culture. Some might point to community collaboration, sharing, helping others (and certainly that is what I enjoyed from the community back when I was more involved; the help section in the scripting boards was always full of people lending a hand) - but there equally were other more closed off communities around focused on botting, paid products, and other such things. At it's peak, OTFans alone had >150k registered accounts, 1.3m posts, and 150k topics - that was just one community with people from all different cultures, speaking different languages, and holding all manner of skillsets. Simply put the OT community is diverse in thought, geography, engagement, and every other manner.

As an administrator of a community that was emulating CipSoft's game, ripping their assets and sharing their files, were you ever concerned that CipSoft would take some action against you? Were you ever contacted by a CipSoft representative in light of these circumstances?

If yes, can you describe what that interaction was about?

STiX: In my time as administrator, I was never contacted by CipSoft - nor did I host any of their files nor assets (to the best of my recollection and knowledge).

I know some prior members of the community have had interactions with them, but I'll let them tell their stories in their interviews *slight smile*

We can not make this interview without getting into the following topic a little. During the early years, OTFans was the main English speaking community for people active in the scene. After 2010, we've began to see a shift towards OTLand and OTFans eventually closing. OTLand, for a while, had even forbidden and censored a mention of the phrase OTFans. To the onlooker, there appears to be rivalry and bad blood here.

Let's treat this subject maturely and, if possible, give it detailed answers, but without disrespect to anyone. Could you elaborate on what exactly happened? Why this rivalry and animosity?

STiX: Much of the falling out occurred under the previous OTFans administration back when I was a junior moderator. It was all a bit hush-hush and there were plenty of rumors.

By the time I was administrator, we were years past that point and I never really went back around to some of the former team to ask what went on (though I have some suspicions).

The blacklist in 2015 was due to my decision at the time to provide users a safe marketplace to sell self-made content (e.g. sprites and scripts):

We had a system in place where for a small fee (I think it was ~\$5 p/month, which would go towards hosting costs), users could publish files on the site available to purchase by other users.

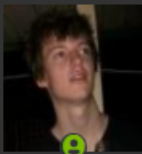
This was a safe system, as we manually vetted all files first to ensure they were of a suitable quality and as-advertised, and the transaction would be handled by our merchant service. (I think we had a small fee, maybe 5% to cover transaction costs). After a successful transaction, the seller's forum account would be credited the funds. After the seller's account hit a minimum withdraw limit (I think it was ~\$10), they could withdraw the funds to their personal PayPal account. The idea was that this would be mutually beneficial to all parties as no personal details are shared between parties, the files were vetted, and we're effectively ensuring chargeback protection for the seller.

We would not permit sale of datapacks, CipSoft map, 'edits' of maps created by other community members, etc.

Personally, I'd prefer no content is charged for - but the matter of the fact was that this was rampant on a number of other sites and it was very typically for people to not receive the goods, charge-backs, etc. - so I thought we could offer a safe haven for such things. Obviously this would also increase our community's profile too, which would be a boon.

Regardless, this was against the direction OTLand was heading (<https://otland.net/threads/moving-forward.198835/>) and our site was blacklisted.

When it became between providing the safe-haven, and being blacklisted - or continuing to host the 'archive' of the old OTFans site and permitting OTLand users to link and reference back to old threads and such, I chose the latter.



STiX

Intermediate OT User

Joined: Aug 22, 2007

Messages: 445

Reaction score: 133

Location:

Western Australia

Jan 3, 2015

Good evening,

Would you mind sharing the reason for adding my domains to the forum's blacklist?

I'd be interested in discussing it further and hopefully work towards mutually remediating both our problems.

Regards,

STiX

Report

+ Quote ↩ Reply



Mark

Administrator

Staff member

Administrator

Joined: May 27, 2007

Messages: 6,390

Solutions: 21

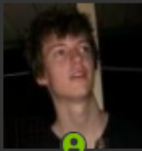
Reaction score: 1,462

Jan 3, 2015

Your domains are blacklisted because they allow users to buy/sell OpenTibia resources. See <http://otland.net/threads/moving-forward.198835/> for more information about that.

Report

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STiX

Intermediate OT User

Joined: Aug 22, 2007

Messages: 445

Reaction score: 133

Location:

Western Australia

Jan 3, 2015

So OpenTibia resources extends to entirely self-made scripts and sprites?

We currently do not have any clients, distributions or maps for sale; that is to say - nothing for sale that hasn't been entirely made by the individual selling it.

Report

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Mark

Administrator

Staff member

Administrator

Joined: May 27, 2007

Messages: 6,390

Solutions: 21

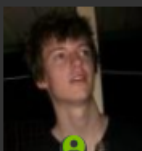
Reaction score: 1,462

Jan 3, 2015

It does. It's not about selling other peoples resources, but selling resources that could have been given back to the community to build OpenTibia together instead of destroying it because of greedy individuals.

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STiX

Intermediate OT User

Joined: Aug 22, 2007

Messages: 445

Reaction score: 133

Location:

Western Australia

Jan 3, 2015

I have some rules requiring users posting paid content to also offer free content.

10% of any member to member purchases goes into a small fund to pay for OpenTibiaDOTnet and the remainder will be channeled back into the community in various forms.

Understood if this doesn't meet your criterion, however.

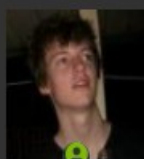
I'd just be glad to have the content out there, rather than privately distributed or lost in history after a server dies out.

Not that it seems up for debate, but naturally I'm not permitting people from posting a rehashed Evo map or CIPSOFT server map up for sale with minor changes.

I remember a time when a particular boat script was for sale at a modest price too 😊

Report

+ Quote ↩ Reply



STiX

Intermediate OT User

Joined: Aug 22, 2007

Messages: 445

Reaction score: 133

Location:

Western Australia

Jan 7, 2015

Hi Mark,

Is there any further correspondence to be had over this issue - or have you considered it addressed and done?

Report

+ Quote ↻ Reply



Mark

Administrator

Staff member

Administrator

Joined: May 27, 2007

Messages: 6,390

Solutions: 21

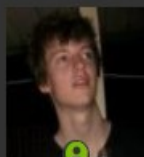
Reaction score: 1,462

Jan 8, 2015

If your website still allows users to sell OpenTibia resources and you don't plan on changing that, then it's addressed and done.

Report

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STiX

Intermediate OT User

Joined: Aug 22, 2007

Messages: 445

Reaction score: 133

Location:

Western Australia

Jan 9, 2015

Do you mind if I share our conversation, provided I don't omit nor rephrase anything?

Report

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Mark

Administrator

Staff member

Administrator

Joined: May 27, 2007

Messages: 6,390

Solutions: 21

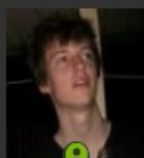
Reaction score: 1,462

Jan 9, 2015

I don't mind.

Report

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STiX

Intermediate OT User

Joined: Aug 22, 2007

Messages: 445

Reaction score: 133

Location:

Western Australia

Jan 23, 2015

Hi Mark,

I've now removed the ability to purchase a Merchant account from my store.

You'll also find that no OpenTibia items are currently posted for sale.

I'd appreciate it if you could respond in kind by removing the URL blacklisting in time and see this as a show of good faith on my end.

Report

+ Quote ↻ Reply



Mark

Administrator

Staff member

Administrator

Joined: May 27, 2007

Messages: 6,390

Solutions: 21

Reaction score: 1,462

Jan 25, 2015

Thank you. I've removed the domains from the blacklist, although it concerns me that you only may have done this as a response to the blacklisting of the domains.

Report

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STiX

Intermediate OT User

Joined: Aug 22, 2007

Messages: 445

Reaction score: 133

Location: Western Australia

Jan 25, 2015

I'll openly admit I've only removed this as a direct response to the blacklisting and due to the fact the functionality was never particularly actively used by our members anyway.

But I'm appreciative you've lifted the URL blacklisting anyway and will hold up my end by disallowing the sales of such things into the foreseeable future.

It somewhat saddens me that you've taken what I see to be a heavy handed approach, seemingly without taking into our concept for a balanced marketplace compared with a fully open and relatively unmoderated marketplace such as Vapus.

We were going to use the funds gathered from our commission to buy-out popular paid content, meaning that more content is produced by users looking to make money, but eventually we'd remove the pay gate to that content for users too - ideally resulting in more free content available to users as a whole.

If we ever get to a point where we decide to re-implement the functionality and predict it'll be used to a moderate extent, I'll advise you prior to re-implementing it so you can block us once more.

EDIT:

May I also share a transcript of this communication with others?

Report

+ Quote Reply



Mark

Administrator

Staff member

Administrator

Joined: May 27, 2007

Messages: 6,390

Solutions: 21

Reaction score: 1,462

Jan 26, 2015

I don't see how a balanced approach would make any difference, anyone who still develops free resources when other people charge for them is a fool. Without a market place, there won't be a pay gate in the first place. If an OpenTibia market place takes off, I would most likely stop developing The Forgotten Server.

I'm really disappointed to see what has happened with OTFans, and I think it's really irresponsible, from GriZm0 selling it, to you planning to turn it into a market. If I recall correctly, OTFans was handed over to GriZm0, and people donated to OTFans, thinking it was a non-profit; myself included. I even donated for three months of hosting when he couldn't afford it anymore. Turns out we were just donating to a sinking ship that was going to be sold to the highest bidder for profit.

I don't know what your contributions to OpenTibia are, so excuse my ignorance if you have actually made any significant contributions that I'm not aware of, but I think if you had you would understand my position on this. A market will kill OpenTibia, it will no longer be an educational playground. The content that should be freely available to people to use and learn from will be put behind paywalls, for people to make profit. The content will be more restricted (closed-source, byte-code compiled Lua scripts etc.). Creating a market is the first step in introducing proprietary OpenTibia resources. This isn't just speculation, I know this because we had a marketplace on OTLand and closed it for the greater good.

I would like a heads up if you plan on re-implementing the functionality, and yes, you may share this publicly.

Report

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Note - See 'yes, you may share this publicly.' from Mark in the last message.

Re-reading this now 8 years later, I find myself understanding Mark's position more - even if I thought I was doing the right thing at the time. I wouldn't say his approach was heavy-handed (even if it was little austere), if anything it was very fair. He was treating our community as he would any other that went against OTLand's owner's views - and despite my aspirations mentioned above, we hadn't had a proven track record yet to prove we were any different than other sites providing a marketplace anyway.

On a side note, I did ask to meet Mark in person during my trip - but he had a very tight schedule and could only afford a very specific date and time to meet, so it never eventuated.

Have you ever reflected back on those times of turmoil in the community, and given the benefit of a decade+ of hindsight, would you have done any actions or engagements with certain situations differently? Have you perhaps rectified the issues and buried the hatchet with the main subjects of this rivalry?

STiX: A lot of the way I communicated back when was representative of my age and the times.

It wasn't as easy as just picking up your headset and just talking things out directly (if you could catch the person on MSN Messenger, Skype, Mumble, Ventrilo, QuakeNet IRC #opentibia chat, or whatever we were using that particular year). But a lot of the gripes between the communities were long established before my time.

I think personally I would have done well to 'jump ship' and be more active on OTLand; or sink more time and effort into growing OpenTibia.net (previously OTFans.net).

What would you say was the definitive reason(s) for the retirement of the OTFans platform?

As yet again, the website is no longer available, could you describe what happened with this second attempt?

What was your goal or thought process going back into it, and why is it no longer available?

STiX: I'll answer these together:

We had no 'crowd draw' other than nostalgia for a few long-standing members, at least not a large enough one like OTLand had in TFS and an already active community.

The relaunch came too late, the community had moved on.

Do you think you will ever publish some version of OTFans again, even if purely for archival purposes?

STiX: OTFans has played a monumental part in shaping this community, and I'm sure some people would be interested to be able to access such a vast network of memories and old resources.

I've had people express interest in obtaining the database (account info. and PMs obviously redacted). But the content isn't of great value any more. Keep in mind that during it's most prominent years, OTFans never hosted any files directly. It was all SpeedyShare, RapidShare, Mega Upload, etc. links that are long since dead - even most of the images were hosted on 3rd party sites back in the 2000's and early 2010's.

As a curator of that data and long time member of the community, are there any interesting files, pictures or stories that are somehow exceptional, which you think the current community could find interesting or beneficial having access to? Would you share that with us?

STiX: My personal favorites where the mapping show-off threads and creative ideas topic.

Sadly, most of these are lost to time due to the site not hosting images back under the old administration (this was the standard at the time, so please don't take me as being critical).

What do you think of Tibia nowadays and do you still play it, or some OT in its place?

STiX: I was more interested in the periphery of the game - the community, the world building, turning concepts into realized content.

I never really played Tibia, or at least not at level people might expect - and there hasn't been an OT I've discovered that has changed enough of the core game to draw me in.

I think I also enjoy more itemization and action than a typical Tibia-like game has to offer. That is probably a large part in why I've been playing Path of Exile for close to a decade!

Are there any projects you are working on right now that you would like to promote or share? (Details, pictures, links, etc.)

STiX: I'm not sure how great the overlapping areas of a Venn diagram of OpenTibia community members who will read this and people who still play Morrowind or make mods for it area - but if that's you, please come and check out Morrowind Modding Hall (<https://mw.moddinghall.com/>).

Do you have any sage advice to lay down to the new wave of developers that are active in today's OT space?

STiX: If you're making a server and have ambitious plans, start at the beginning. Get the start of the game built, make it unique, and push it out of the door as a shippable product, then build on the rest.

Most projects lose steam because they start at the mid-game or end-game, and without a community playing it - you don't have an external motivator to keep you invested once your own interests start to wander. Be resourceful. There are a tonne of tools out there that can make your planning and your workflow more efficient - try them.

For developers - maintain a personal site and keep a track of your contributions and projects you've worked on. If you're young, you might overlook the relevancy of this experience to a professional role, but between you and someone with equal formal training, but not professional experience - you have a leg up.

Interviewed by Cwiras, Alpha & Shiva Shadowsong.

Thank you STiX on behalf of the entire community for your time and comprehensive answers. We thank you for all you've done for the community in your time and we hope that you will stay with us as long as possible.