

Illegal sales on the Dark Web using Bitcoin

The sheer diversity of sites on the Dark Web is only limited by people's imagination. I've heard the Dark Web called many things. One of them is *eBay on steroids* or *eBay for criminals*.

The truth is that you can buy just about anything on the Dark Web, such as drugs, weapons, counterfeit documentation, and various additional illegal substances and services. Alongside that, you can buy anything you might find in legal stores or websites. From carrots and vegetables to electronic equipment, some sites sell jokes and gags, such as underage fake IDs – you can even find animals for sale, some of which are illegal.

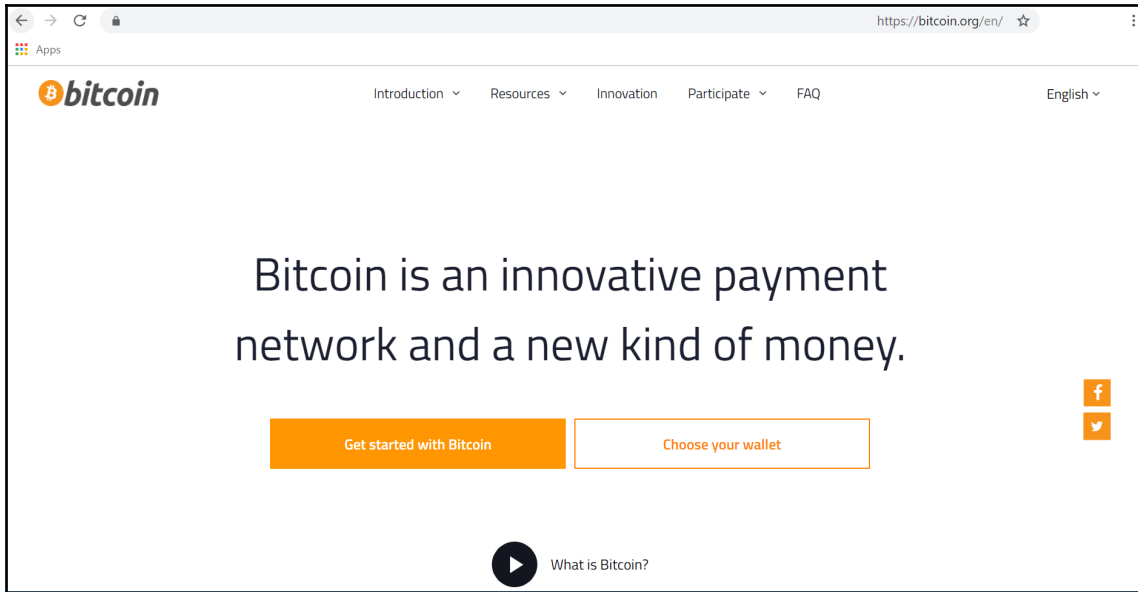
But never, ever buy anything on the Dark Web with your credit card. Purchases on the Dark Web are performed using cryptocurrency (or digital currency), such as Bitcoin (to name the most well-known one – there are quite a few out there).

To use Bitcoin, users need to create an account and a Bitcoin wallet. The buyer sends Bitcoin from their wallet to the wallet of the seller. The transaction is done securely, verified with a private code that allows the seller to verify that the Bitcoin is legitimate and that it has indeed been transferred to their wallet. This is verified by blockchain. A blockchain is a list of financial records (blocks) linked together, using cryptography. You can think of a blockchain as a public digital ledger, which has no centralized management, is distributed between many computers, and is encrypted.

Each block has irrefutable information (or so it is believed) of the block before it, and after it, and holds the information of the transaction. Attempting to change this information will lead to attempts to change the information in the rest of the blocks in the chain, making it impossible to do so without a consensus from the other members on the chain.

Personal information isn't revealed, which is one of the reasons that digital currency is so successful on the Dark Web. Bitcoin is also exchangeable with *normal* official currency in almost every country.

The following screenshot is of the Bitcoin Organization website:



On July 15, 2015, an online dating service, called Ashley Madison, was hacked. The hackers sent the owners of the website a demand to shut down the site immediately. The demand was refused, so the hackers dumped all the data they had stolen, both corporate data, and personal, user data, on the Dark Web. Ashley Madison is now in the middle of a \$576,000,000 class-action lawsuit.

All types of explicit content flourish on the Dark Web, from mundane to disgusting or horrifying.

A horrific site, called the Cruel Onion Wiki, has displayed the killing of animals. Although having been closed down multiple times, it keeps resurfacing.

A particularly well-known offer is of personal information (such as passwords, emails, IDs, and bank information). Some also offer to find specific information for you.

Most of us immediately think of hackers when we think of the Dark Web. There are many hackers on the Dark Web, not all of them are there to do bad. Some are merely learning and sharing information. But others are indeed there to offer their malevolent services. Many develop and sell cyber-weapons (such as general or specific exploits, malware kits, and botnets). Others provide cyber-attack services (such as DDoS attacks, hacking and defacement, and spam and malware distribution).

Nowadays, with easy access to information on how to perform exploits and to comparatively, easy to use malware (such as Trojans or ransomware), how to perform social-engineering attacks (such as spear-phishing). You can even rent a botnet for a specific amount of time. Unscrupulous people, under the cover of the Dark Web, can purchase or rent any of these and more, with almost no technical knowledge required (mainly if they purchase a service).

Drugs, is a topic that will have no end, if discussed, regarding the Dark Web. Any and every drug known to man is available for purchase there. Even very new, synthetic drugs are sold, but here the danger is even greater. Most of these drugs have never been properly tested and the Dark Web customers are, more often than not, the test subjects of these drugs.

Another industry that flourishes on the Dark Web is killers for hire. Many offer their services online, with the advertised, minimum fee of \$20,000. It's said that the majority of these killers are actually law-enforcement officers, or scam artists.

Human and human-organ trafficking is also something you can find there, it's actually a very prolific topic, sadly, and many of the stories you may have heard, of people waking up in ice baths, with stitches in their sides, are based on this, with slavery not too far behind.

The Silk Road

Previously, I mentioned illegal sales on the Dark Web. You may have heard about a site called the Silk Road, which literally sold anything and everything, even things you would never want to think about. Launched in February 2011, it was shut down by the FBI in October 2013, who arrested its operator, Ross Ulbricht, also known as the *Dreaded Pirate Roberts*. Ulbricht was convicted and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Silk Road was relaunched on November 2013, operated by former administrators of the original Silk Road. It was shut down a year later, in a project called **Operation Onymous**, which was a 6-month-long international law-enforcement operation, including the police forces of 17 countries. It allegedly shut down over 400 sites participating in illegal activity, mainly the arbitration of sales of illegal products, including weapons, drugs, counterfeit currency, forged identity documents, stolen credit cards, and even murderers for hire. Among these sites were Agora, Evolution, and Andromeda, markets reputed to be even more nefarious than the Silk Road.

Terrorism

Sadly, the anonymous nature of the Dark Web allows terrorists to act undetected.

The Dark Web enables terrorists to recruit new members, disseminate propaganda, communicate with them on a regular basis, deliver orders, and organize the transfer of contraband – all with a low risk of being detected.

It's been found that white supremacy groups and even ISIS use the Dark Web for all of these activities, while ISIS even uses Dark Web sites to post videos of executions that they didn't publish publicly.

Summary

Like any technology, from coffeemakers to cellphones, the Dark Web can be used both for good and for evil. The fact that anonymity is held practically sacred there has many effects. The Tor project is based on the belief that anonymity is a requirement for a free and functional society.

Also, according to the Tor Project website, the majority of Dark Web activity is not centered on illegal activity. Only about 1.5% of traffic on the Dark Web is related to illegal activity (such as sales and services).

And due to the illegal activity, there are a lot of undercover law-enforcement agents all over the Dark Web. The anonymity that criminals enjoy on the Dark Web makes it equally easy for the police to find and stop them. Due to the nature of the Dark Web, it's nearly impossible to know who you're communicating with. The police can and go undercover, posing as a member of any number of professions, such as drug dealers or killers for hire.

Online stings occur, after people looking for a fix or someone to murder someone for them, get caught by the undercover agents.

The FBI, CIA, and NSA have all been confirmed to have a presence on the Dark Web.

Also, there are whitehat hackers that provide tech support, and assist in preventing crimes and locating perpetrators.

Questions

1. What is the name of the infamous Dark Web market that was led by the Dread Pirate Roberts?
 - A. The Copper Road
 - B. The Silver Road
 - C. The Silk Road
 - D. The Silk Street
2. What is the EU's Privacy Protection regulation called?
 - A. General Data Protection Regulation
 - B. Global Data Protection Rule
 - C. General Direct Protection Regulation
 - D. Global Data Protection Rule
3. What is Dr.X's real name?
 - A. Dr. Felix Halfonella
 - B. Dr. Fernando Caudevilla
 - C. Dr. Figaro Cauvelli
 - D. Dr. Fernando Caudwell
4. What prize did ProPublica win?
 - A. Nobel
 - B. Erasmus
 - C. Pulitzer
 - D. Oscar

Further reading

The following resources might be of interest if you'd like to dive deeper into the subjects covered in this chapter:

- <https://sapas.sk/en/doctorx/>
- https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/ypwxwj/doctorx-is-the-darknets-most-reliable-drug-counselor
- <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/china0806/>
- <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679from=EN>
- https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection_en
- <https://bitcoin.org/>