

Cloud Provider Considers Terminating White Supremacist Account

Case Study

You are a network engineer for a regional Tier 1 Internet Service Provider (ISP). Given concerns resulting from recent violent protests in the region, your team is debating whether to take action against local white supremacist organizations that are explicitly advocating a violence as a means to enforce segregation in society.

Case narrative

You are a member of the lead network engineering team for a regional Tier 1 ISP. Your company is responsible for connecting this region to the rest of the Internet. Given this authority, your company has both the technical and legal capability to block Internet access for content providers in the region. Your team is considering whether to take action against a regional provider that serves violent white supremacist organizations.

One example of your company's ability to remove content providers from the Internet occurred nearly a decade ago. A content provider in the region was providing "bullet-proof" hosting for anyone. As a result, botnet operators and malware servers used this provider, knowing that their malicious software would not be taken down. Due to political pressure from both inside and outside the region, your company took action against the content provider, blocking all access to and from the Internet. As a result, the amount of spam and denial-of-service attacks dropped by 90% almost overnight.

More recently, another regional content provider has begun offering bullet-proof hosting for ideological extremists. While this provider stops short of providing hosting services for government-designated terrorist organizations, many of their clients explicitly advocate violence of some form.

One client recently coordinated a series of white supremacist protests calling for a return to state-enforced segregation. Among their proposals, they called for using local police to forcibly remove black and Jewish families from designated protected neighborhoods. The protests have increased from tense confrontations to violent clashes, including one recent event that left multiple counter-protestors injured or dead.

The content provider has argued that they maintain a devotion to content neutrality and free expression. While they denounce the messages of their clientele, they argue that censorship of unpopular ideas is not acceptable. Moreover, they note that the violence at the protests occur between supporting groups and counter-protestors. The members of their client organizations, despite their rhetoric, take steps to avoid direct conflict and have not been tied to specific violent acts.

Historical context and additional discussion

Shortly after a far-right rally in Charlottesville, VA ended in violence, Cloudflare terminated the account of the Daily Stormer, a well-known neo-Nazi and white supremacist web site. This action included ceasing to serve as a proxy server or to answer DNS queries for the site, effectively taking the site offline. This action violated Cloudflare's long-standing policy of remaining content neutral, as explained in their blog post (<https://blog.cloudflare.com/why-we-terminated-daily-stormer/>).