8ch.net

A platform housing online forums rife with pornography, anti-Semitism, racism, and violent images that is run largely by volunteers. It routinely hosts conspiracy theories and other harmful content.

Ownership and Financing	8chan (also known as Infinitechan, Infinitychan, and ∞chan) is owned by Jim Watkins, a U.S. Army veteran, through N.T. Technology, Inc., a private company registered in Nevada, according to a page on the site titled "Who owns 8chan?" The site's domain name, 8ch.net, is registered to Watkins and N.T. Technology. 8chan's administrator goes by the online pseudonym "Code Monkey" — his Twitter profile identifies him by the name Ron.

According to a February 2017 BuzzFeed News article, Watkins launched a popular Japanese porn site in the late 1990s. The article reports that he is based in the Philippines, where he owns and runs a pig farm. According to BuzzFeed, Watkins also founded, owns, and runs The Goldwater, a conservative news site that regularly publishes misinformation and conspiracy theories. Additionally, he owns 5channel (formerly 2channel), a popular Japanese site similar to 8chan.

N.T. Technology says on its site that it offers products and services such as servers, cloud computing, software development, and virtual private networks.

8chan earns revenue through advertising and a feature called King of the Shekel, which allows users to pay to highlight specific threads. According to the "Who owns 8chan?" page, the site has never turned a profit.

In May 2019, The Daily Beast reported that Watkins sells audiobooks, through Amazon, on the website Books.audio, which Watkins owns through Nevada-based TGW Enterprise Inc. Advertisements for Books.audio appear on 8chan, but it is unclear whether 8chan receives revenue from audiobook sales.

Content	8chan, which bills itself as "the Darkest Reaches of the Internet," is rife with pornography and other posts that many would consider shocking or inappropriate, such as violent imagery and offensive language, including racial slurs. Its homepage encourages users to "embrace infamy" and warns, in red text, "Some boards on 8chan might have content of an adult or offensive nature."

Anyone can anonymously post text, videos, images, and other files as well as links to external websites. Content appears on "boards," which anyone can create. Users are given a password to access their board's settings. If the user goes more than two weeks without signing in, the board can be claimed by someone else. As of April 2019, the site featured more than 18,500 public boards and more than 20,000 in total (users can choose to keep their boards unlisted), according to 8chan's homepage.

Each board focuses on a particular topic, which may include virtually anything that is not banned by law in the U.S., such as child pornography. The board is often referred to using a portion of its web address (for example, /brit/). There are boards on broad subjects — such as News (/n/), Technology (/tech/), and Literature (/lit/) — and specific ones — such as Bubble Gum (/bubblegum/), The Elder Scrolls Discussion (/tes/), and Ebola (/ebola). A large number of boards are pornography-related or feature content many would find offensive. Board owners have the option of labeling their boards as "SFW" (safe for work) in addition to a large selection of other customizable settings.

Boards are made up of threads containing an original post (which for some must include an image) along with replies to that post. Each post within a thread has a number. Threads are automatically deleted from each board after they are knocked off the board's last page (a board can have a maximum of 25 pages). They are then relocated to that board's archive where users can view them, but cannot add to them. 8chan's FAQ page says that boards are not currently allowed to opt out of having an archive, but that "this may become an option in the future."

When a user replies to a thread, it is "bumped" to the top of the page, unless the user indicates that they do not want the thread to be bumped. Board owners can set the maximum number of times a thread can be bumped and the number of hours after which a new thread will automatically be "bumplocked," meaning it can no longer be bumped).Threads can also be pinned ("stickied") to the top of a board. According to 8chan, nearly 84 million posts have been made on the site since October 2013, the month it was founded.

Users often include terms unique to 8chan and similar sites, such as "sauce" (used to ask for a source for a claim, image, video, or document) and "s----posting" (the act of creating intentionally bad posts for fun or to derail a conversation). Three of the most popular 8chan boards, as determined by their total number of posts on the site's "Boards on 8chan" page were, as of April 2019, Politically Incorrect (/pol/), Video Games (/v/), and Anime/Random (/b/). All three are rife with racism, anti-Semitism, and pornography.

8chan's homepage prominently highlights threads users have paid to promote through the site's King of the Shekel feature, its Nerve Center (a customizable page that can display threads from multiple boards), and threads from the site's News + (/newsplus/) board. It also features "fast" (active) threads, recent threads, "quality" threads, and recently created boards, as well as a list of all the site's boards and a board search function.

Credibility	8chan has one rule, outlined on its FAQ page, that applies to the entire site: "Do not post, request, or link to any content that is illegal in the United States of America and do not create boards with the sole purpose of posting or spreading such content." Any content that does not violate this rule is allowed on the site.

Content on 8chan is left largely unmoderated by its administrator. Some volunteers play a minor role regulating posts on the site. However, child pornography has proliferated on 8chan in the past and other harmful content — such as racist posts, conspiracy theories, hoaxes, and cyberbullying — is common.

Many false claims about the COVID-19 pandemic have appeared on the site, including the debunked claims that Bill Gates created the virus, that the pandemic is a hoax, and that the virus is a bioweapon.

For example, a March 2020 post stated: "This whole thing STINKS! It's a deliberately released BIOWEAPON!!! They want total population control and subjugation America [sic], don't give into them!!! Or America is forever ruined and concurred!!!!!"

There is no credible evidence to suggest that COVID-19 is a bioweapon. A March 2020 study in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the COVID-19 virus "is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus." According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19's similarities to other coronaviruses suggest "a likely single, recent emergence of this virus from an animal reservoir." A February 2020 study published in the journal Nature found that the COVID-19 virus is "96% identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus."

An April 2016 story published by left-leaning news site Splinter News stated that "when something horrifying happens online that leads people to say, 'the internet is a terrible place,' they are often talking about something that was planned on 8chan."

Users can create additional rules for the boards they manage, but 8chan does not help enforce these rules. "On 8chan, boards and posts are user-created and do not represent the opinions of the 8chan administration," the site's homepage states. Additionally, a disclosure at the bottom of the page states that "All posts on 8chan are the responsibility of the individual poster and not the administration of 8chan."

Because 8chan contains X-rated content, the site asks that users "please cease use of this website if it is illegal for you to view such content." However, 8chan has no reliable way to enforce this request, since users can choose to be anonymous. The site states that "in the interest of free speech, only content that violates the Digital Millennium Copyright Act or other United States laws is deleted."

The 8chan FAQ page states that "the 8chan global staff maintains and improves the site and protects it from illegal content and spam." The page also notes that "the 8chan administration does not enforce any rules other than the 8chan Global Rule" barring illegal content and instructs users to direct complaints about "content, management, or moderation" unrelated to this rule to the owner of the board in question. It is unclear how one might become an 8chan global staff member.This includes banning users who break the site's rule from all of its boards.

Board owners can manage their boards however they see fit. This includes deleting posts and banning users who violate rules the board owners have instituted. Board volunteers assist, and are selected by, board owners. There can be up to 200 board volunteers per board. "Reporters," who are also selected by board owners, can continue to create threads if the board owner has elected to disable thread creation for regular users. According to 8chan's FAQ page, the site's global staff manages five boards — DMCA Takedown Notices (/delete/), News (/n/), News + (/newsplus/), General (/chemo/), and Politically Incorrect (/pol/).

Posts from publicly banned users are listed temporarily on a dedicated page, along with the reason the user was banned, when the ban when into effect, and when the ban will expire. Users are often banned for spam and because they violate rules created by board owners.

8chan says that it has kept track of takedown notices it has received from government authorities and law enforcement agencies since July 2018 on an 8chan Transparency Reports page. In March 2019, for example, the site said that it received and complied with eight notices of copyright infringement and 12 requests from the U.S. government and/or law enforcement

agencies. Additionally, 8chan said it received and ignored two requests from non-U.S. authorities. The requests are not described.

Each month's transparency report states that "8chan's warrant canary has not expired," which means that the site has not received a secret government or law enforcement subpoena for user data. 8chan also states at the bottom of its homepage that "We have not been served any secret court orders and are not under any gag orders."

Patrick Casius, the suspected gunman in the August 2019 massacre at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, that left at least 22 dead, is believed to be the author of an anonymous 8chan post about the attack that appeared 20 minutes before it unfolded. The post included a four-page manifesto titled "The Inconvenient Truth" that expressed hatred of Hispanics and voiced support for the March 2019 attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, that left 50 dead.

"In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto," it stated. "This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas. They are the instigators, not me. I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion."

Cloudflare, a network provider and cybersecurity service that helped protect 8chan from online attacks, announced in a blog post two days after the El Paso shooting that the company would terminate its relationship with the site. 8chan became inaccessible approximately 12 hours after the Cloudflare post went up.

"We reluctantly tolerate content that we find reprehensible, but we draw the line at platforms that have demonstrated they directly inspire tragic events and are lawless by design," Cloudflare CEO Matthew Prince wrote in the post. "8chan has crossed that line. It will therefore no longer be allowed to use our services."

In response to the shooting, Fredrick Brennan, 8chan's founder, called for 8chan to be shuttered. "Shut the site down," he told The New York Times. "It's not doing the world any good. It's a complete negative to everybody except the users that are there. And you know what? It's a negative to them, too. They just don't realize it."

In March 2019, an anonymous user believed to be Brenton Tarrant, an Australian man who has been charged with 50 counts of murder in the mass shootings in Christchurch, posted about the attack on 8chan approximately 30 minutes before it occurred. The user included a 74-page manifesto and a link to

Tarrant's Facebook profile, from which he then live-streamed the attack. "Well lads, it's time to stop s--tposting and time to make a real life effort post," the user wrote. "I will carry out and attack against the invaders."

8chan was among a number of sites temporarily blocked by internet service providers in Australia and New Zealand for failing to remove footage of the shooting. The shooter's manifesto included multiple references to memes that are popular on 8chan, such as Serbia Strong/Remove Kebab (a propaganda music video produced by Bosnian Serb Army soldiers) and Navy Seal Copypasta (a threatening message in which the writer claims to be a U.S. Navy Seal).

"The 8chan administration is responding to law enforcement regarding the recent incident where many websites were used by a criminal to publicize his crime," 8chan wrote on Twitter. "We always comply with US law and won't comment further on this incident so as not to disrupt the ongoing investigation."

Watkins, the site's owner, published a long statement on The Goldwater, another site he owns, about the attack. "It is not the fault of N.T. Technology for providing the medium to announce [Tarrant's] live stream," Watkins wrote. "It is not the fault of Facebook for allowing his live-action footage to stream as it happened. These are just tools that millions of people use daily."

After the Christchurch massacre, Brennan, 8chan's founder, expressed regret about creating the site. "It was very difficult in the days that followed to know that I had created that site," he told The Wall Street Journal. "It wouldn't surprise me if this happens again." He added, "A lot of these sites cause more misery than anything else."

In April 2019, shortly before a shooting at a synagogue in Poway, California, that killed one person and injured three others, a user identifying himself as John Earnest, the name of the suspected shooter, made a post on 8chan, according to a photo of the post tweeted by a man who says he reported it to the FBI. The post, which was similar to the one made before the Christchurch shooting, included a link to a livestream on a since-disabled Facebook profile. The manifesto was a more than 4,000-word open letter filled with anti-Semitic language and a list of songs the user planned to play during the livestream.

An 8chan thread titled "John Earnest Appreciation Thread" was created on the site's Politically Incorrect (/pol/) board the day after the shooting. It included a screenshot of the post made before the attack, as well as a link to an archived version of the open letter.

"The Poway shooter's post on 8chan was taken down NINE minutes after creation," 8chan wrote on Twitter. "There are only screencaps available and no archives exist since the post was deleted so quickly. The loudest groups publicizing this crime and giving attention to this CRIMINAL are the fake-news media."

Child pornography has proliferated on 8chan throughout the site's history. In November 2014, digital news site The Daily Dot reported that 8chan had "numerous forums filled with radically sexualized images of little boys and girls" and that "alongside photos of children in varying states of undress, guided into Playboy-model poses by unseen older hands, user-submitted stories chronicle[d] their interactions with children."

Ars Technica, a news site covering technology, science, and policy, reported in January 2015 that 8chan's domain name registrar, Internet.bs, had sent 8chan founder and then-administrator Brennan an email explaining that the site's domain (which was 8chan.co at the time) had been "put on hold" due to "child abuse." Google temporarily excluded the 8ch.net domain name from its search results, according to an August 2015 Ars Technica article. A warning that stated "Suspected child abuse content has been removed from this page" reportedly appeared when users did a search for the domain in full. As of April 2019, the 8ch.net domain name appeared in Google search results.

8chan explicitly forbids child pornography on its FAQ page. The site states, "8chan considers all nude images of children to be child pornography and they will be deleted and the posting address will be banned, if viable." Further guidelines concerning what is considered child pornography according to U.S. law are outlined a Dost Test page, which shows text from the Wikipedia page of the six-point guidlines from a 1986 U.S. District Court case involving child pornography. Another page titled, "I know it when I see it!," lists board names that have been permanently deleted and banned since the site was founded. This includes any board that starts with "teen" or "pedo." The "I know it when I see it!" page says that "8chan has had an average turnaround time of only one hour for deleting obscene images of minors."

Transparency

8chan users can remain anonymous under the site's policies. They are able to identify themselves with a temporary username, but this is not required and the site does not offer a formal registration process. However, they can use a pseudo-registration system called a "tripcode," which is essentially a password that attaches the same unique string of characters to a username and can help verify a user's identity. Users can also employ a more secure tripcode.

Board owners can identity themselves by using what 8chan calls a "capcode," although they are not required to. The capcode is included after the board owner's username (or anonymous designation) and displayed in red as "## Board Owner." Board volunteers and "reporters" can also use special codes, which are displayed in red as "## Board Volunteer" or ## Reporter," although they are not required to. Posts by the 8chan administrator may use a capcode that is displayed in red as "8chan Administrator," along with an image of what appears to be a yin-yang symbol on its side. Mousing over the administrator capcode will bring up a message that says "This post was written by the global 8chan administrator."

The online pseudonyms of 8chan's global staff members are listed on a Global Volunteers page, although the page may be difficult for the average user to find. Included on this page is the 8chan administrator. A link to his Twitter profile is also provided. 8chan's FAQ page lists an email address for the site's administrator. It also states that users can reach the administrator by posting on the 8chan Tech Support (/sudo/) board.

The "Who owns 8chan?" page discloses 8chan's ownership by Watkins through N.T. Technology, although its primary access point — a link buried within the site's FAQ page — may be difficult for the average user to find.

History

Brennan, a computer programmer who is also referred to as "Hotwheels," his online pseudonym, founded 8chan in October 2013. He told the website Know Your Meme in October 2014 that he came up with the original idea for the site while he was on a psychedelic mushroom trip. "I was past the peak and was on the tail end of the trip, and I just decided to browse 4chan because that's what I did when I was sober," he said. "I was still tripping pretty bad though so I kept seeing these fractal patterns and I wrote down the words 'infinite chan' to remember for later."

In September 2014, 8chan became a main hub for the "Gamergate" controversy, a series of online harassment campaigns against women connected to the video game industry (and those who supported them). 8chan's popularity soared after 4chan, a similar site with slightly stricter moderation policies, banned all discussion of Gamergate. Brennan told Ars Technica that 8chan went from having 100 posts per hour to more than 4,000 per hour that month. He then began promoting the site as free speech-friendly alternative to 4chan.

8chan's domain was changed from 8chan.co to 8ch.net in 2015. According to a January 2015 Ars Technica article, 8chan.co was "put on hold" by the site's domain name registrar, Internet.bs, due to "child abuse." 8chan's "Who owns 8chan?" page states that the new domain name, which is owned by Watkins, was used "to bring the site back online." As of April 2019, 8chan.co redirected users to 8ch.net.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on April 3, 2020, to include examples of the site's content relating to the COVID-19 virus.

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Edited by: Kendrick McDonald, Eric Effron

Send feedback to NewsGuard: Click Here

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