Cloudflare has had enough, cutting off 8chan

Enlarge / Matthew Prince, co-founder and chief executive officer of CloudFlare Inc.
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In the wake of Saturday's mass shooting in El Paso, in which 20 people lost their lives, it was discovered that the shooter had posted a racist manifesto on the imageboard site 8chan. That was the third time this year alone that a mass shooting has involved the notorious site, and network operator Cloudflare decided that was finally enough. As of midnight on the US West Coast, Cloudflare will cut off 8chan.

This isn't the first time that the popular service provider has severed its ties to one of its customers over offensive content. In 2017, the company dropped the white supremacist website the Daily Stormer. The Daily Stormer was able to get back online after a brief outage by switching to another service.

Matthew Prince, the company's co-founder and CEO, has always spoken with apprehension about whether to stop providing network services to specific websites. He called his own company's decision regarding the Daily Stormer "arbitrary" and "dangerous," and intended that this would be the last action of the sort Cloudflare would take. Earlier on Sunday, CNN

reported that the company had no intention of acting against 8chan.

Cloudflare is not a website hosting provider. The company operates a global network that improves performance of websites and protects them from DDoS attacks and other security threats.

But the El Paso mass shooting comes in the wake of two similar manifestos posted to 8chan prior to similar events in California and New Zealand, all apparently prompted by racism. Prince cited both of those events in announcing that he's changed his mind. "The rationale is simple," he wrote. "They have proven themselves to be lawless, and that lawlessness has caused multiple tragic deaths." He went on to state that the company's guiding principle on this issue will be to disassociate itself from websites that "directly inspire tragic events and are lawless by design."

He also addressed the fact that many view this as a free speech issue:

> *Some have wrongly speculated this is due to some conception of the United States' First Amendment. That is incorrect. First, we are a private company and not bound by the First Amendment. Second, the vast majority of our customers, and more than 50% of our revenue, comes from outside the United States where the First Amendment and similarly libertarian freedom of speech protections do not apply.*

Prince acknowledged that 8chan will be able to find another service provider to take over from Cloudflare. While he called on policymakers to clarify what network services can do in response to sites that he views as lawless, that's going to be a long-term process. For now, Prince acknowledged, "We've solved our own problem, but we haven't solved the Internet's."

This article was corrected to clarify that Cloudflare is not a

hosting service.

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