Why some tech CEOs are rooting for Elon Musk

After a long weekend away, today let’s talk about the largely positive reception that Elon Musk’s radical remaking of Twitter is getting from tech CEOs — and whether those views are likely to change if the fight that Musk is picking with Apple erodes even more value from his $44 billion purchase.

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Can Musk succeed, though?

From his project to reinstate banned users to picking a fight with Apple, the billionaire seems to be making it harder on himself every day.

As with his decision to restore the account of Donald Trump, Musk put the question of “a general amnesty” to a Twitter poll. “Should Twitter offer a general amnesty to suspended accounts, provided that they have not broken the law or engaged in egregious spam?” he asked, the day before Thanksgiving. Some 72.4 percent of respondents — some of which were likely bots — said yes. “The people have spoken,” Musk proclaimed the next day. “Amnesty begins next week. Vox Populi, Vox Dei.”

Internally, the poll set off a now-familiar chain of events.

Employees learned of the amnesty as they read Musk's tweets, tried to interpret what they meant (which laws? What constitutes egregious spam?), and quickly started carrying out his commands. Just one week earlier, employees had scrambled to reinstate Trump after Musk conducted a similarly unscientific poll. Now, they would need to revive thousands more.

The project could cause more instability at Twitter

In fact, since Musk's poll, Twitter has begun the process of reinstating roughly 62,000 accounts with more than 10,000 followers, *Platformer* has learned, including one account that has over 5 million followers, and 75 accounts with over 1 million followers. (The identities of the accounts could not be learned before press time.) Internally, employees have referred to this event as "the Big Bang."

The project could cause more instability at Twitter at a time when the company is hemorrhaging engineering talent, according to current employees. Each reinstatement requires Twitter to rebuild a social graph, activating data on who the account follows and who follows the account. For large accounts like Trump's, with 88 million followers, that's millions of lists that Twitter has to update and maintain.

The move also comes the same week that Musk plans to relaunch Twitter Blue, allowing anyone to buy a verified badge for $8 a month. An internal document about the launch, designed for employees in sales, says that impersonations have been "extremely rare," despite all evidence to the contrary.

"We anticipated early efforts like this from bad actors, and we are adapting dynamically to prevent and detect them," the document reads. What about "large scale coordinated misinformation attacks funded by wealthy organizations or governments?" the document asks. "Large-scale bad actors would also require a huge supply of unique credit card numbers and

mobile phones," the document says. "As we detect and suspend these, the logistical hurdles to re-offend at scale become insurmountable."

Between the coming Big Bang and the remaining potential for brand impersonation, though, advertisers remain deeply skeptical. As they pull their spending from Twitter, Musk has called several CEOs to "berate" them for abandoning the platform, according to the *Financial Times*.

Musk has also continued to antagonize his own engineers with late-night emails

The latest betrayal, by Apple, appears to have cut Musk particularly deep. (Apple was Twitter's single largest brand advertiser, according to the *Washington Post*, responsible for $48 million in spending in the first quarter alone.)

On Monday, Musk tweeted that Apple had "mostly" stopped advertising on Twitter. "Do they hate free speech in America?" he asked. He followed up by asking Apple CEO Tim Cook to explain himself.

The chances that the even-keeled Cook would respond to a drive-by assault from Musk on Twitter seem vanishingly small. Amid Cook's silence, Musk posted follow-up tweets alleging that Apple has threatened to remove Twitter from the App Store, and criticizing the 30 percent fee the iPhone maker charges app developers on some of their revenues.

Behind the scenes, Musk has also continued to antagonize his own engineers. In an email late Sunday night, the CEO said employees should prepare for another round of "code reviews" this week. (Last week's "code reviews" served as a pretext to lay off yet more engineering talent, particularly on machine-learning teams.)

"As a reminder, all managers are expected to write a meaningful amount of software themselves," he added. "Being

unable to do so is like a cavalry captain who can’t ride a horse.”

Current employees say Musk is planning to lay off most of the remaining engineering managers this week, though nothing has been shared in writing so far.

From a far enough distance, it’s easy to understand why some of Musk’s peers might look at his scorched-earth approach to human resources with admiration. But go even an inch deep on Twitter 2.0, and it’s clear that the person in most need of a late-night performance review is Musk himself.

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