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Thousands of bloggers silenced

The Internet is usually synonymous to Free Speech, but each and every one of it's users (and publishers) are dependant on a myriad of organisations and companies. A failure, or abuse, at any one point can have severe implications for free speech.

Such is the case with Blogetry.com, a site that hosted many thousands of personal and business blogs. Not long ago, the site was taken completely offline following "*a notice of a critical nature from law enforcement officials*". The site had been home to over 70,000 blogs, but went dark as the company hosting the site - BurstNet - was informed that terrorist related materials had been found on the server. This allegedly included an Al-Qaeda "hit list", bomb making instructions, messages from Bin Laden and links to other sites containing extreme material.

As a result, the site was "*terminated without any notification or explanation*". So in effect, inappropriate content on a few blogs was responsible for the sudden removal of around 70,000 innocent blogs.

What's even more concerning about this episode, is the fact that the site was shut down, not by order of a court, but at the decision of BurstNet. CNet are reporting that BurstNet were notified of the material by the FBI, but the FBI **does not** have the power to shut down websites. Only a court can order that a site be shut down. In fact, the FBI have even confirmed that they did not request the removal of any sites.

So why exactly were all these sites taken offline? Speculation is currently running wild, with suggestions that the Patriot Act may have been used to force the removal. Some are also querying whether child pornography had also been found on the server. It seems far more likely, however, that BurstNet made the decision to

switch off.

Rather than notifying their users that the system would be shut down, and so allowing them to back up their data, the company remained quiet about the plans and simply switched the service off.

The effect upon freedom of speech is immediately obvious, over 70,000 blogs have been taken offline. Some may have hosted inappropriate material, but it seems unlikely that 77,000 sites would all be hosting material of a dubious nature.

That a single company can choose to enforce censorship on such a grand scale is very concerning. Yes, the servers belong to that company, but the content did not. Had the company allowed its users to back up their data, it would have been an inconvenience, but would have protected the work that those users have created over a long period of time.

Sadly, in todays age, freedom of speech is something that's taken very lightly. Corporations and Governments need to start taking our rights seriously, and factoring it into their decision.

BBC News has more on the story [here](#).

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