

GoDaddy has shut down Richard Spencer's white supremacist site

Site called for "a bit of brutality and vengeance by our guys on the border."

TIMOTHY B. LEE - 5/7/2018, 4:36 PM



Enlarge / Demonstrators protest outside of a speech by white nationalist Richard Spencer, who popularized the term "alt-right," at Michigan State University on March 5, 2018.

Domain registrar GoDaddy has stopped providing domain-registration service to alright.com, knocking the hate site offline. The site was the brainchild of Richard Spencer, the white supremacist who coined the term "alt right" to describe white nationalist beliefs. GoDaddy made the decision last Thursday, days after the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights [sent GoDaddy a letter](#) asking for the site to be shut down.

"Alright.com is in clear violation of GoDaddy's terms of service as it includes content actively inciting violence, particularly against racial and ethnic minorities," [the group wrote](#) in a late April letter.

The group cited GoDaddy's [2017 decision](#) to blacklist the neo-Nazi site the Daily Stormer as a precedent. GoDaddy banned the Stormer after its editor wrote a vulgar post mocking Heather Heyer, a woman who was killed during last year's white supremacist protests in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In an email to Ars Technica, GoDaddy confirmed that alright.com had been taken down for violating rules against inciting violence.

"In instances where a site crosses over to promoting, encouraging, or otherwise engaging in specific acts of violence against any person, we will take action," said GoDaddy Policy Director Ben Butler in an emailed statement. "It is our determination that alright.com crossed the line and encouraged and promoted violence in a direct and threatening manner."

The site was given 48 hours to find a new home for its domain, Butler said.

The letter from the Lawyers' Committee focused on a January post about immigration. The post argued that border patrol agents should use live ammunition to make it more likely that immigrants crossing the border would "lose their life in the process."

"A little bit of lawlessness and savagery in the ranks of border patrol should be encouraged," the article argued. "Superiors would do well to turn their heads to a bit of brutality and vengeance by our guys on the border, perhaps even tolerating a massacre here or there."

The letter also **pointed out** that the site's comment section was full of violent, bigoted rhetoric that we won't reproduce here.

While this content is obviously offensive, it is worth thinking about the precedent GoDaddy is setting here. The Supreme Court has ruled that the First Amendment **has an exception** for incitement of imminent lawless action. But that's a much narrower standard than the one GoDaddy seems to be applying in recent months.

GoDaddy, of course, isn't bound by the First Amendment. But it's going to find itself facing the same basic question the courts have faced: how to draw the line between free speech and violent incitement.

Here, for example, is an article by *New York Times* reporter Scott Shane advocating violent drone strikes against terrorists in the Middle East. **Here** is a tweet by President Donald Trump threatening a violent nuclear attack against North Korea. **Here** is an article from Gawker arguing that "actually, riots are good." **Here** is a website that argues "it is **always** OK to punch a Nazi," featuring a video clip of someone punching Spencer in the face.

All of these advocate or threaten violence in some form. But GoDaddy would probably not take down most of these sites if they were GoDaddy customers. So what makes Richard Spencer's site different?

The obvious answer is that alright.com is a racist site. But notably, GoDaddy insists that's *not* why the company banned alright.com:

"GoDaddy does not condone content that advocates expressions of hate, racism, or bigotry," Butler wrote. "However, we generally do not take action on complaints that would constitute censorship of content and that represents the exercise of freedom of speech and expression on the Internet. While we detest the sentiment of such sites, we support a free and open Internet and, similar to the principles of free speech, that sometimes means allowing such tasteless, ignorant content."

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Richard Spencer's site, however, seems to have had just the right combination of tasteless, ignorant content and promotion of violence to merit a ban from GoDaddy's domain service.