

Transparency on the recent freenode related issues

Setting the record straight on freenode

My name is Andrew Lee, and I'm a member of the FOSS community and the owner of freenode limited. I've been an IRC user for 25 years and have contributed from time to time both in the IRC FOSS movement as well as with servers.

History of FOSS Donations

I have directly or through a wholly owned company donated funds to many FOSS organizations out there. They all know who they are, and many of them are a part of the freenode community. Due to the fact that trolls are attacking organizations who received money, I will refrain from stating any names. I want to reiterate, this behavior harms the FOSS community.

To be clear, as many already know, the number exceeds many millions. I will leave it up to them if they wish to confirm this. I do think announcing donations and sponsorships, in general, is something we should encourage, as it helps build an ecosystem of financial support for FOSS projects, many of which struggle in this aspect.

Timeline

In 2013, I had begun sponsoring freenode through one of my companies. As part of this, logos for one of my companies were placed prominently on the website.



Tom Wesley <tom@tom... Sun, Apr 28, 2013, 2:49 AM
to Mimi, tomaw, me ▾



Hi,

I've spoken to christel over the last couple of days and we'll be making these changes as soon as possible. Please understand that for the webchat this requires actual development work as the entire UI is built using lots of JavaScript so it might take us a little while to create something that looks decent enough to make live.

Additionally, I was wondering how your company handles abuse complaints.

We've got a couple of users that jump around various VPN providers such as HideMyAss etc to evade network bans so I was wondering if you guys retain enough logging to identify abusers.

Thanks,
Tom.

Hey,

You've been nominated as my point of contact again. I'd like to refresh the PIA IP address list we have with what's current just in case we're missing some or have some extra. Our config can accept CIDR ranges so if you have those it's fine. If it's a load of single addresses that's fine too.

Also, some time ago we talked and you set up four VMs for our up and coming GMS system. Because we're all terrible slackers we've done little with them other than install security updates but I was hoping to start to get testing with this in the coming weeks. However, ight now all four boxes are unresponsive to ssh. They're addresses are 108.61.225.4-7. Did you give up on us due to excessive slacking? :(

Thanks,

--

Tom Wesley <tom@tomaw.net>

In 2016, Christel reaches out and asks to place the logo on the website.

PIA logo! ➤



Christel Dahlskjaer <c...> Sun, Feb 21, 2016, 3:11 PM



to me ▾

Hello Andrew,

The freenode.net website is having a bit of an overhaul to bring it out of the 1990s in terms of design! Is there any chance I could have a copy of your logo in vector (svg) format? Ideally both the banner and the little droid? :)

Cheers,
Christel

In 2017, Christel, the former owner of freenode, asked me for assistance with funding and asked me to acquire it. I oblige.



Andrew Lee <aalee@londontrustmedia.co... Sun, Jun 12, 2016, 5:00 PM
to Christel, Christel ▾



Hi Christel!

Hope all is well, I wanted to reach out and see if you would be available to chat any time and see how things were going. I also wanted to see if we could donate servers to Freenode! Our IRC servers networks are protected by Arbor Networks so they are pretty stable! :-)

Thanks in advance,
Andrew

--

Andrew Lee



Christel Dahlskaer <christel@freenode.... Tue, Mar 14, 2017, 5:55 PM
to me ▾



Hello Andrew,

Some time ago you expressed interest in purchasing freenode or entering into some form of partnership. Due to a change in personal circumstances I am currently in a position where I might be somewhat more open to negotiation (or desperate for a second job, though I am unsure whether you guys have anything suitable for me! Hehe).

Let me know if you are interested in further discussion.

Thank you.

Best,
Christel



Andrew Lee <aalee@londontrustmedia.co... Tue, Mar 14, 2017, 5:57 PM
to Christel ▾



We're open to all of those Christel. What were you thinking of in terms of each?



--

Andrew Lee
Chairman of the Board

In March of 2021, Christel resigns. freenode limited, under my direction, neglects to appoint a new Head of Staff. Thomas Wesley takes over as Head of Staff, with encouragement from the existing staff.

Thomas informs me.

Later that month, Thomas comes to me to confirm I'm not going to be involved in the day to day. I had no plans to be, so I confirmed.

In April of 2021, Thomas messages me and asks for ownership of the domain name. My response is that we need to decentralize.

Hey. Would you have any objection to me as freenode head of staff owning the freenode related domains? I want to ask christel to transfer them but don't want her to be concerned about you objecting. I intend to make something better than a person owning them going forward so this isn't a problem.

Apr 3 1:04pm

Hey hope all is well - initially this sounds like it makes sense - what were your plans with the domains? It would be pretty interesting to figure out a way to decentralize freenode as an organization not just the domains given all of the things we have been seeing in the FSF situation xx

Apr 3 1:08pm

I think between us if we can figure out a good plan for this that would be huge for freenode and also help set precedence for other open source and non profit orgs within our realm xx

Apr 3 1:09pm

The conversation ends up a monologue with me explaining decentralization to Thomas, who abruptly ends the conversation letting me know he'd like to speak later.

That's what I mean by one can't represent many. Many must represent many.

Apr 3 1:29pm

You get what I'm saying - happy to get on a call too btw

Apr 3 1:31pm

I do, but I need to duck out of this conversation a bit to handle some stuff. Can we pick it up in around 18 hours?

Apr 3 1:32pm



for sure I'm here anytime on signal feel free to ping as long as I'm up I'll be here!

Apr 3 1:32pm

Hehe thanks

Apr 3 1:33pm

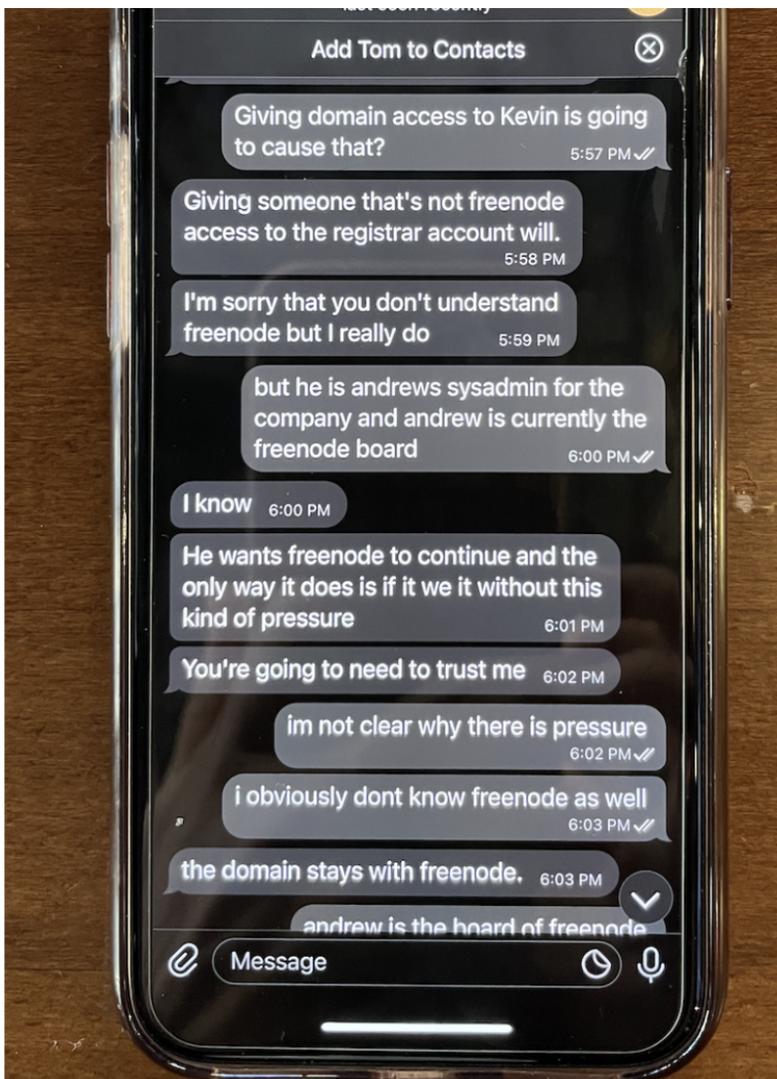


My next contact with Thomas is on April 4, the next day:

I just asked Alex to clarify the domain stuff, but perhaps I should have asked you

Apr 4 1:51pm

A few days later, I learn that my access to freenode's DNS has been terminated as 2FA has been enabled. I attempt to get it back to no avail. To be clear, during this process, tomaw makes several threats on a phone call to my brother Alex and me, to make the staff to leave and destroy the network in the process. He appears to reference this in these messages to Alex below:



Add Tom to Contacts



it stays with freenode 6:03 PM ✓✓

its merely adding kevin as a person on the acct 6:04 PM ✓✓

the only way i can keep freenode a thing is if the ownership of the domain stays where it is 6:04 PM

so are you saying you own the domain? 6:04 PM ✓✓

not at all 6:05 PM

because andrew is part of freenode 6:05 PM ✓✓

so im not clear why you are saying something is changing 6:05 PM ✓✓

I need you to back off on the domain change stui 6:06 PM

stuff 6:06 PM

you arent giving me any reasons though other than "you have to trust me, people will leave, and we need to back off". it seems like you are speaking to me like I am not with you



Message



Add Tom to Contacts



you arent giving me any reasons though other than "you have to trust me, people will leave, and we need to back off". it seems like you are speaking to me like I am not with you either

6:07 PM ✓✓

it's annoying that there's no trust between us

6:11 PM

tomaw this has nothing to do with trust. andrew is the board of freenode so he wants to make sure the company has access to the domain. so we just wanted to add kevin as a user to the account. that is it.

6:13 PM ✓✓

Can we park this? I think I'm really pissed off about other stuff

6:13 PM

I really don't wanna take that out on you as it'd be unfair

6:15 PM

The domain stuff isn't going away but it's also not going to change overnight.

6:15 PM

Can we set up a call with Andrew please?

6:30 PM



Message



Add Tom to Contacts



help" is what andrew promised me.

7:27 PM

to be clear though, asking for someone to have access is not interfering with operations.

7:30 PM ✓

Maybe, staff just found this so I wanted to share it

7:31 PM

okay but its not relevant here

7:32 PM ✓

If you make me do this I'll lose half of staff.

7:32 PM

for a pointless dns change you'll probably never do anything with

7:34 PM

can we still book that call with andrew?

7:41 PM

i will get back to you after i talk to him

7:42 PM ✓

hes been busy all day

7:42 PM ✓

yeah sure

7:42 PM

I don't want to come off as a dick but I've been working on freenode for a lot of years

7:43 PM



Message



At this point, I reach out to prawnsalad, a known person in the IRC space who has relationships with many people. He has nothing but good to say about tomaw and sets up a meeting. Tomaw messages me.

Hey. Darren says we need to talk?
Apr 19 1:55pm

Hey sounds good
Apr 19 1:57pm

Prawnsalad, Thomas and I speak. Thomas agrees not to change anything on the website or domain.

A week later, after I spent considerable time developing a plan forward, Thomas changes the website, announcing a new ircd and a partnership with OFTC. This move upsets prawnsalad, and he gives up attempting to mediate

D Darren



I tried, my bad I couldn't get both sides working heh
Apr 19 2:03pm

Lol but you saw I tried. Lol
Apr 19 2:03pm

It's Tomaw as I said from the start.
Apr 19 2:03pm

For the record, I still don't believe it's an OFTC takeover, but I do strongly believe tomaw is not capable with working with people in a suitable way.
Apr 19 2:04pm

But, do your thing. However you see fit heh
Apr 19 2:04pm

I green lit the lawyers.
Apr 19 2:05pm

I reach out to Thomas with an attorney asking him to maintain confidentiality as we work through this.

Former freenode staff prepare resignation letters. They are published (for example, kline.sh published on his website directly). The topic in their letters is that a 'hostile takeover' is taking place. This is the opposite of what happened, as I am the owner and custodian of freenode, and I was simply attempting to secure freenode. The resignation letters urge everyone to join another network.

<https://archive.is/AWs17>

(the twitter link in the above document links to another Andrew that is not me)

I catch wind of this through one of the participants of the other network and publicly attempt to protect freenode by letting the public know what was happening. I cannot let IRC and the FOSS community fracture further.

I then receive a letter from Thomas' attorney preventing me from speaking further.

Former freenode staff are the only ones left speaking authoritatively on the matter, subsequently leading to the spread of misinformation like a snowball effect.

Thomas gives freenode back to freenode limited.

The former staff leave, destroying the network and its community in the process.

A meeting agenda on git is found and looks very different from what is being portrayed by former staff to the public. In it, it's clear that there were huge structural and operational changes taking place, including a far from democratic appointment of positions.

Outline

- How should we organise ourselves going forward?
- How do we make decisions on these meetings and what type of decisions belong to this type of meeting
- How will we store meeting documentation for these meetings
- How do we gather proposals and thoughts in advance from people who can't be present on these meetings
- How do we communicate change after a decision has been made
- We need a better way for infra to keep staff updated with operational changes

Meeting notes

Meeting took place on mumble at 2021-04-03 17:00 UTC, notes were written in an etherpad

Participants: amdj, dho, edk, Freso, Fuchs, glguy, grumble, ilbelkyr, jess, jose, kline, Md, mniip, mquin, tomaw

Introduction

- christel left
- tomaw talked to a lot of staffers and it became clear that some are unhappy

discussion that didn't strictly follow the agenda

- Consensus and Votes
 - Votes are very objective but have downsides
 - A pure consensus-based approach has the danger of getting stuck
- Is some sort of management structure needed?
- one suggestion
 - teams and heads of teams is a sensible structure
 - heads of teams should be picked by the team and focus on organizational and strategic issues

This meeting coincides with the time when I was messaged and asked for the domain.

Meeting notes

Meeting took place on mumble at 2021-05-08 17:00 UTC, notes were written in an etherpad

Participants: edk Fuchs glguy grumble ilbelkyr jess JonathanD kline mquin niko Swant tomaw

Follow-up on new team structure

- Been assigned and announced in bikeshed emails
 - PaC team lead is Fuchs
 - dev team lead is ed
 - infra team lead is glguy
- We're happy with the structure

I know the community could have used this information sooner, but I was unable to release it as I was unable to speak further.

Thank you for your patience, and now that the facts are straight, I hope we can move forward.

Moving forward

Freenode is FOSS, and FOSS is for the people. IRC has always been a world of federated networks. We're beginning of a process of revisiting how Freenode's ownership is organized so that there's a clear democratic process and outlined relationship between freenode limited and the volunteer staff who keep the network alive. The goal is to make sure that these kinds of problems will not happen again. I hope that existing communities, communities who may have accidentally left on falsehoods, former staffers in the same boat, and the greater FOSS community, will all engage with us to help make this happen. We're determined to keep Freenode the terrific place for FOSS development that it's always been, and are happy to work hand in hand with the community to figure out how to ensure a safe and secure future foundation for Freenode.

Truly yours,

Andrew Lee
Chairman of freenode