

Anon+, the world's first anonymous social network

Written by luggyx

Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:46 - Last Updated Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:48

source: digitaltrends.com

Forget Google+ – the future of social networking shuns identities altogether. We got an exclusive look inside Anon+, the first-ever anonymous social network.

Earlier this week, Google banned pages related to loose-knit hacker group Anonymous from its hot new social network, Google+. Fed up with the apparent censorship, a group of like-minded hackers, programmers and other digital underground activists decided to take the realm of social networking into their own hands by creating the world's first-ever anonymous social network.

Still in its infancy (version 0.8 alpha, to be exact), the new network is currently called Anon+, but that name will soon change, according to "Higochoa," a self-professed hacker, Web developer and computer programmer from Galveston, Texas, who is leading a core team of 12 to 15 other developers, plus freelance specialists, to build Anon+. We had a chance to speak with Higochoa via IRC chat, and he gave us the low-down on what the team hopes Anon+ will become.

Contrary to many of the reports about Anon+, the project is not being built by members of Anonymous, said Higochoa during our interview, at least not in an official capacity. The Anon+ dev team does have ties to Anonymous, but they have distanced themselves from the group because they were "getting attacked by those who don't like Anonymous," said Higochoa. The Anon+ crew also wanted to differentiate themselves from certain negative connotations associated with the notorious hactivist collective.

"We just didn't want everyone to think we are a bunch of hackers sitting around trying to change the world," he said. "We are actually going to do it."

Anon+, the world's first anonymous social network

Written by luggyx

Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:46 - Last Updated Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:48

The guiding principal behind Anon+ is to give “the people what most corporations have taken away, and that is control,” said Higochoa. “[Anon+] will allow people to get both educated freely, and allow them to voice their opinion without having fear of any org or gov.”

Like traditional social networks, Anon+ will allow users to create profiles, add friends and communicate with one another. Higochoa says that users will have total control over their “circles” of friends (though it's unlikely they will use the word “circles” officially, as Google+ has already co-opted that word). Like Facebook, only people in a user's circles will be able to view their posts and other activities on the network.

Higochoa says it's likely that Anon+ will attract a lot of hackers and Anonymous members “because of the tech and what it provides,” but stipulates that the service is intended for a “wide audience” — anyone will be able to join.

One major difference from traditional social networks, of course, is that Anon+ will be entirely anonymous; members won't use their real names, a practice that is forbidden on both Facebook and Google+ for legal reasons.

“It is also secure and without a central server, so it can't be stopped once it's started,” says Higochoa. This ensures “that control stays in the hands of the people. That alone is pretty different from other social networks.”

The lack of a central server means that Anon+ users will have to download an application to use the network, which will be at least partially based on peer-to-peer technology. This type of system will serve as a key security mechanism for the network.

Anon+ will also differ from traditional social networks — and even other anonymous forums, like 4Chan.org — because users will have greater control over the discussions around their posts to the network, says Higochoa. Things like comment deletion are on the table, as well as the ability to have “parallel” conversation threads on the same topic. This will enable users to “go off on a tangent with one guy while continuing the conversation with another, without worrying about someone else interfering,” he says.

Anon+, the world's first anonymous social network

Written by luggyx

Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:46 - Last Updated Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:48

The goal of Anon+, says Higochoa, is to give a user “the tools to get his voice heard over the masses.” Higochoa refused to go into detail about what exactly those tools would be, but he says that the structure and built-in functionality of Anon+ will make such empowerment possible — users will have “the same tools as the big guys.”

In addition to enabling online activism, Higochoa says the team plans to build Anon+ in a way that will let users to more easily organize offline protests, without the risk of the corporate censorship Anonymous and other dissident political groups have experienced on other networks.

Anon+ will likely include “Skype-like” video chat functionality, and other real-time communication features, says Higochoa. The network will also incorporate ways for users to anonymously transfer money between each other, though Higochoa said that system is far from complete, and he could not say whether it would be based upon traditional currency (like dollars), or something more like Bitcoin.

In addition, Higochoa says the Anon+ crew hopes to create a sort of online university, that will incorporate “interactive teaching,” and give teachers the ability “to reach students 24/7, on any subject,” he says.

When asked whether Anon+ users would be setting themselves up to be targeted by law-enforcement agents — just yesterday, 16 members of Anonymous were arrested in the United States — Higochoa says that accounts will be essentially un-hackable, making it impossible for authorities to reveal a user's true identity.

“[Your] circle of friends will not only be the only ones that see your posts, but the only ones who ever handle any of your data, so there isn't one place to get hacked,” says Higochoa. “If you get your Anon+ account hacked, it was you or one of your friends.”

Obviously, the team still has a lot of work to do before Anon+ will be ready to start taking on users. Higochoa says the official release will be “sooner rather than later,” but couldn't give an exact launch date. Of course, the entire project could fall through the cracks at any moment — building a social network from scratch isn't easy. And besides, the Anon+ team has enough enemies to keep them on their toes.

Anon+, the world's first anonymous social network

Written by luggyx

Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:46 - Last Updated Thursday, 21 July 2011 19:48

There are “people who wanna stop us,” says Higochoa. “As long as they are there, we are going to have problems. But other than that, there are none.”