It's easy to kick Nazis off your platform.

"People send you nice notes when you do," said Matthew Prince, CEO of Cloudflare. "But I really worry about the long term."

Prince's company was one of many that took action in the wake of the recent (and in one case, fatal) violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, spurred by far right groups.

Not many people know what Cloudflare is, so, just know this: It's a big part of the internet's infrastructure. It's significant—as was Prince's decision to kick The Daily Stormer off Cloudflare, which helped lead to the website going offline.

It's a decision that he's still not sure was the right one.

In an interview, Prince expressed doubt about his decision to remove The Daily Stormer from Cloudflare, and conveyed concern over companies like his own, and their ability to pull a lever, and knock a website offline. Portions of the interview are below, lightly edited for brevity and clarification.

The role of internet companies in policing their networks is, according to Prince, something that's been talked about at Cloudflare since the start.

"If you go back to [the] early days of Cloudflare, we've wrestled with: 'What is our role in term of controlling what content flows through our network?' And we believed that the right principle was to remain content neutral."

Prince said that The Daily Stormer had been on the company's radar in recent months due to complaints about harassment. Cloudflare hadn't taken action before—and might not have now—if not for the content on the The Daily Stormer, as well as claims on the site that Cloudflare supported Nazis.

Prince said the decision to remove the site was his. And no, he won't pretend it was made in a vacuum, away from the context of current events:

"Obviously, there was a lot of focus on the contents of [The Daily Stormer]—and other hate sites— that were online. At the time, we thought that the right thing for an infrastructure company like Cloudflare to do was to not be judging the content that flows through our network, based on whatever the content was, and not to be making moral decisions... It'd be naive for me to say that the fact that we found the content disgusting didn't color some portion of our perspective but really the final straw for me was Wednesday morning when I woke up to Twitter and the leaders of The Daily Stormer site on their bulletin boards were saying 'Cloudflare is a Nazi just like us.' At that point frankly, I'd just had enough and life is, not to use an impolite term, life's too short to deal with assholes."

Prince emphasized that he made the decision knowing that it would probably lead to Stormer being unable to operate. The internet is decentralized, but many major companies still play crucial roles.

"The nature of what Cloudflare is, which is we're not a host, we're something more akin to a network, means that technically the content doesn't disappear from the internet when we kick a customer off. And they still have a hosting provider. They're still connected to the internet, but the practical reality these days is that it's so easy to launch massive-scale cyberattacks that if you do anything which is at all controversial online you almost need a network like Cloudflare's in order to say online. And there just aren't that many companies that have that... There are a handful of other companies that have equivalent networks, you know Google and Facebook and Microsoft, and a handful of others, but you know that in the case of The Daily Stormer everyone that is part of a

network of that scale had said, 'You're not welcome here.' So effectively then cyberattackers were able to shut the site down."

Prince maintained throughout the interview that he still has doubts about his decision, not because of what Stormer represents, but because he's keen for continued discussion over whether companies like Cloudlare should make any such decisions in the future.

"I have still deep misgivings on whether or not something, which is as deep in the bowels of the internet as Cloudflare, should be making what are effectively editorial decisions. And I think that it's a really important conversation for us to have on where those decisions should be made and who should make them. But we couldn't have that conversation while that particular site was on our network. Having now kicked it off, I'm glad that we're having that conversation.

There are different rules that apply at different places in the tech stack, and we need to have a really nuanced conversation about even if it's right for Facebook to ban certain content. Would it be right for Level 3, the transit provider, which is still carrying the bits, to do that? … And is it right for your browser to start to make decisions on what sites you can go to, because it could? And at some point, because it's a potential choke point on the internet, there's going to be pressure there, so we need to have a conversation and we need to do it in a rational, sensible way that is hopefully not driven by the emotion of the time.

If you saw the leaked internal email, I said this decision was arbitrary. I believe that's true, and I don't say that because I think that's a good thing. I say that because I think that's a bad thing... We had to get this particular site off the network, but now we need to say, "OK now let's have a real debate about what the right policies are for us." And the right policies for us might be very different than the right policies for Facebook and Youtube. In fact, almost certainly they are. And hopefully what comes out the other end has more legitimacy because it has been forged through transparent and public debate."

Prince noted that freedom of speech is an important concept in this discussion, but shouldn't be the only consideration. He pointed to due process—making sure that people know how companies are making decisions on regulating content and that the decisions are based on set criteria—as being central to coming up with a workable solution to these situations.

"I really think [freedom of speech] is one of the things that makes the United States such a great country, but we operate in 70 countries around the world. Freedom of speech is actually a minority viewpoint in most of them. So when you come back to saying freedom of speech, it actually doesn't carry much weight in Germany, and we operate five or six data centers in Germany. I think we have to, as a tech industry and an internet society when we're having these conversations, reach for things that are more universal principles and I would point to due process. Freedom of speech is sacrosanct to the United States but not a lot of the rest of the world. Due process on the other hand is almost universal. And what due process means is there should be transparency to decisions. You should be able to know what a decision is going to be ahead of time. Decisions shouldn't be arbitrary. What I'm worried about right now is that the system that we have doesn't really align with due process."

Continuing that point, Prince suggested that tech companies that work out of the public eye shouldn't be making decisions based on content since it would be subject to little if any public scrutiny.

"The vasty majority of your readers have never hear of Cloudflare before... so it's really tough if we just start dropping bytes for content that we don't believe in. Is there any way that can align with the concept of due process? Because even if we try to be transparent, can that ever be transparent if behind the scenes the network is censoring you? And I worry that the answer is no. And if the answer is no, then maybe we're not the right place for content to be regulated and restricted. That doesn't mean Facebook isn't, because people know what Facebook is."

Prince said that though he still has reservation, don't expect to see Cloudflare working with The Daily Stormer again. Also, don't expect to see Cloudflare cracking down on other companies. At this point, he's looking for the tech industry to figure out how it plans to handle these issues so that everyone is aware of where the lines are.

"I think that we will always reserve our right to terminate people who are assholes. And so I think it's highly unlikely that The Daily Stormer ever is allowed back on. But will there be content which is equally repugnant and vile on our network? Maybe. There probably already is. What I tried to go through great lengths to say is we're not necessarily setting a precedent on this content. I think we need to have a conversation, and what I'm hopeful for is... whatever that policy is, whether that's neutrality or no hate speech under any circumstances or something somewhere in between, that that policy has much more legitimacy because we've been transparent about it." - *Mashable*