

Gawker's Nick Denton Begins Counter-Attacks Against Peter Thiel

Gawker has already hired its proxy attack bloggers (John Cook, John Hermann, Adrian Covert, etc. -types) to destroy Peter Thiel yet again. Rob Price, a known Denton cabin boy, has unleashed the first salvo on Thiel. Will it abide? First reactions from the web have included:

[\[-\] Nlaitze](#) 5 points (+6|-1) ago

So it's totally ok for two liberal gays to sue a conservative bakery over their beliefs, but not ok for a conservative guy to sue a liberal news company over their beliefs?

- [permalink](#)

[\[-\] NedTaggart](#) 1 points (+1|-0) ago (edited ago)

Here's the thing about this, as I see it. Gawker is pretty sleazy. They have a right to be sleazy. I hate it, but whatever, I don't have to give them a click. Free Press, First Amendment, etc is specifically written to prevent the GOVERNMENT from punishing people for words or ideas, not the general public and private citizens. Gawker cannot reasonably have expected to behave as they did without pissing someone off. Turns out, they pissed of a guy with with a significant reserve of Fuck-You money and a track record of getting things done.

The first amendment, freedom of the press also doesn't mean that people have to like what you say or accept it. It doesn't guarantee an Audience, it only grants you a booth in the marketplace of ideas. The sheer schadenfreude against Gawker surrounding this case, the fact that the legal system, *in a civil trial*, (that's an important distinction with regard to the first amendment), and the fact that outrageous fines have been levied against them and all appeals denied demonstrates that the people categorically reject the ideas that Gawker has brought to the market place.

Play Stupid Games, Win Stupid Prizes

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[\[-\] Sev](#) 1 points (+1|-0) ago (edited ago)

I agree. Journalistic integrity in the US is at an all time low thanks to "news networks" like Gawker. They don't care about what they publish, so long as it gets page-views and generates income. For a while now, sites like these have not had an Achilles heel, as they have used the cloak of "the press" to protect them from harm.

But every beast has its weakness. Libel and Bad journalism were held in check by the truth. News organizations of the past relied on integrity for business, and did not want to be caught lying or publishing trash, so they made sure their editors, writers and contributors were on the up and up. These new sites don't care about truth or integrity. They are immune to someone calling them out on those points, and thanks to the civil court system being stacked in favor of those who can afford the most legal help, they effectively denied entry to those who would challenge them. As Gawker is finding out though, they have a weakness. All it takes is someone with big enough pockets to breach their defenses

and push them all they way through the civil court system, to get to the point where actual people can decide right or wrong (not legal or illegal)

This isn't about freedom of the press, because gawker isn't news. By slanting everything they do with such a visible bias, by abandoning any sense of principal and integrity, they distort the definition so far that they can't even convince 12 random people that they are in the right.

- [permalink](#)
- [parent](#)

[\[-\] Vvswiftv17](#) 1 points (+1|-0) ago (edited ago)

Hold the phone. So, it's ok when its discovered FB is artificially inflating left leaning news stories to turn them into trending topics, thereby hijacking the national narrative to match *Cuckerburghs* causes. But, if a *conservative* Facebook board member tries to hold accountable a news service for slander, *he* is the bad guy?!? Someone walk me through your mental gymnastics on that one.....because in my book one isn't more morally acceptable than the other.

- [permalink](#)

Here is the attack Article against Thiel:

A Facebook board member is launching 'weapons-grade attacks on America's free press,' and people are furious



- [Rob Price](#)

Chip Somodevilla/Getty ImagesPeter Thiel, the libertarian billionaire and Facebook board member.

A billionaire board member of the world's most powerful media company has been using a fraction of his enormous wealth to try to take down a news website critical of him, anonymously funding lawsuits targeting the site.

Peter Thiel, the influential Silicon Valley investor and cofounder of PayPal, [acknowledged this week](#) that he was the mystery financial backer funding wrestler Hulk Hogan's attempts to sue the snarky news and gossip blog Gawker into oblivion over a sex tape.

The fiercely libertarian, Donald Trump-supporting billionaire sits on the board of Facebook, the social-media platform where [more than a billion people](#) access and consume news on a daily basis.

People are now wondering whether this will have a chilling effect on the freedom of the press and the ability of journalists to speak (sometimes disrespectfully) truth to power.

Thiel's ire with Gawker stems from an article outing him as gay (titled "[Peter Thiel is totally gay, people](#)"), as well as others that [he says](#) "ruined people's lives for no reason." (Disclosure: The author of the article, Owen Thomas, worked for Business Insider from 2012 to 2013.)

Thiel frames himself as a defender of free speech and journalists. He gave \$250,000 to the Committee to Protect Journalists in 2008. [At the time, he said that](#) "as a true believer in the critical importance of free speech, I am delighted to support CPJ's fight for the rights of journalists around the world."

[In an interview with The New York Times](#) published Wednesday, he denied that his actions were contradictory. "I refuse to believe that journalism means massive privacy violations," he told Andrew Ross Sorkin. "I think much more highly of journalists than that. It's precisely because I respect journalists that I do not believe they are endangered by fighting back against Gawker."

Plenty of journalists think otherwise.

Peter Thiel is going 'thermonuclear'

[Over at Fusion](#), Felix Salmon pulls no punches, accusing Thiel of "reinventing the concept of philanthropy so as to include weapons-grade attacks on America's free press." ([Speaking with The Times](#), Thiel, who suggested he had funded other cases against Gawker, framed his legal assault on Gawker as a form of philanthropy. He said it was "one of my greater philanthropic things that I've done," adding, "I think of it in those terms.")

Thiel, by funding multiple lawsuits he has no real connection to, has dangerously changed the game, Salmon argues (emphasis ours):

If Thiel's strategy works against Gawker, it could be used by *any* billionaire against *any* media organization. Sheldon Adelson, Donald Trump, the list goes on and on. Up until now, they've mostly been content suing news organizations as plaintiffs, over stories which name them. But **Thiel has shown them how to go thermonuclear: bankroll other lawsuits, as many as it takes, and bankrupt the news organization that way.** Very few companies have the legal wherewithal to withstand such a barrage.

Josh Marshall, the publisher of Talking Points Memo, [argues](#): "You may not like Gawker. They've published stories I would have been ashamed to publish. But if the extremely wealthy, under a veil of secrecy, can destroy publications they want to silence, that's a far bigger threat to freedom of the press than most of the things we commonly worry about on that front."

Clara Jeffery, the editor-in-chief at Mother Jones (a nonprofit news outlet [that has also been sued by a billionaire](#)), is more succinct — labelling Thiel a "thin-skinned billionaire trying to bully press."

Peter Thiel really embracing his destiny as the villain to Elon Musk's hero, huh?

— David Weiner (@daweiner) [May 24, 2016](#)

The Facebook angle



Justin Sullivan/Getty

ImagesFacebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

Facebook is, unquestionably, the world's most powerful media company. [It makes decisions](#) about what 1.09 billion people see and how they access news on a daily basis. It is responsible for well over half of many news organisations' traffic.

It was recently accused of shutting out conservative stories and news outlets from its Trending Topics section. The social network has denied it was biased [and says its investigation found no evidence](#) for the claims, arguing that it strives to be politically "neutral."

"Facebook already has absurd economic influence on press," [Jeffery tweeted](#).

And now one of the key mentors to Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, is waging war on a single website to deliberately stop certain types of coverage: "It's less about revenge and more about specific deterrence," [Thiel told The Times](#).

So far, Zuckerberg has stayed quiet on the issue. A Facebook representative declined to comment when reached by Business Insider. But it looks as if others on Facebook's board are sympathetic to Thiel: Marc Andreessen, a fellow board member, has retweeted [multiple messages](#) in support of the PayPal cofounder.

One of Andreessen's colleagues, Benedict Evans, who is a partner at Andreessen's venture-capital group, Andreessen Horowitz, retweeted a tweet [praising](#) Thiel as a "hero, truly admirable work."

If Facebook keeps Thiel on its board we'll know a lot more about Zuckerberg's beliefs regarding freedom of the press.

— Dan Gillmor (@dangillmor) [May 26, 2016](#)

Thiel is within his legal rights to act as he does. But it sets a precedent: Will journalists dare scrutinise those who can hire high-powered lawyers to scrutinise a publication's entire history for infractions to hang them? [Billionaires already routinely — and successfully — use the law to censor the press](#), but their activities are usually limited to specific stories about them. Thiel's war on Gawker is an attempted takedown of the entire company.

A man once removed from the controls of the most powerful publishing platform on the planet is exerting his enormous wealth to crush a news outlet he dislikes for personal reasons — while saying he supports the freedom of the press. And his colleagues are praising him for it.

He is also creating a blueprint for anyone with sufficient resources do likewise — for whatever reasons they desire.

If you give me \$10m per case against the most honest of publications, I will find enough infringements to shut them down

— Alex Hern (@alexhern) [May 26, 2016](#)