

Facebook

MARK ZUCKERBERG HAS NEVER CARED ABOUT YOUR PRIVACY, AND HE IS NOT GOING TO CHANGE

From Facebook's earliest days, Zuckerberg has followed the same pattern: take two steps forward, only to be pushed one step backward and land exactly where he wanted to be.

 BY NICK BILTON



...berg attends the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2007.
...r/Bloomberg/Getty Images.

In May 2010, not for the first time, people were in an uproar about Facebook. The social network had recently revised its privacy policy to require users to opt out of features that tracked them on the site, suddenly making private information public by default. Making matters worse, that personal data was being shared with third-party partners, and a lot of users were extremely worried about the ramifications. If you think people aren't very technically minded today, back in 2010, it was worse, and people who used Facebook (more than 400 million at the time) were frantically trying to force the company to switch back to the private-by-default setting.

At the time, I was a reporter at *The New York Times*, and my editor asked me to write a short blog post explaining how to switch your settings on Facebook to private. I remember sitting in my cubicle in the newsroom, clicking around while I took notes about the privacy settings. Several hours later, I was still clicking.

The piece I **ended up writing** pointed out that to truly opt out of sharing all your personal information, you had to click through more than 50 privacy buttons, and then choose between more than 170 total options. There were some options that you couldn't even opt out of at all. I also noted that Facebook's Privacy Policy at the time was 5,830 words long; the original United States Constitution, meanwhile, is a concise 4,543 words. In other words, the

illegible mumbo jumbo you had to read through on a social-network Web site was so complex, it was longer than the rules that govern the entire United States.

The story at the time had a happy ending. Facebook succumbed to pressure, fixed its privacy settings, apologized, and the story went away. But it didn't take long for Facebook to try and screw over its users again. And again and again and again. Year after year, I—along with countless other outlets—wrote articles about Facebook **changing its privacy policy** to benefit the company, then fixing it **just enough** to appease the masses, then **doing it all over again**. And year after year, writing about Zuckerberg, I started to learn something interesting about him and the company: the entire strategy was to take two steps forward, only to be pushed one step backward and land exactly where Zuckerberg and Facebook wanted to be.

Now, on the heels of the latest scandal, people are rightly asking if it's time for Zuckerberg himself to take one step back and **resign** as Facebook chairman. But anyone I've spoken to who knows Zuckerberg says it's beyond unlikely that he's going anywhere. Zuckerberg fought tooth and nail to win the control he has over Facebook—a two-class stock structure that practically ensures he can't be ousted—and he's certainly not going to give it up anytime soon, unless either the board or the government force him to. As the entrepreneur and author **Scott Galloway**, who wrote the book *The Four: The Hidden DNA of*

Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google, recently told me, “An African dictator has more job insecurity than **Mark Zuckerberg**.”

Sure, the government could break up the company—which many, myself included, believe it should. But it didn’t do it when Zuckerberg and Facebook repeatedly harmed people with the platform in the past, and I’m not sure what it will take for someone to finally bring down the hammer where it deserves to land. As for the board, from a numbers standpoint, Zuckerberg (and the board) likely don’t believe there should be a change at the company. While there are clearly some people who are using the platform less, most people apparently don’t care what happens on Facebook. Just **look at the numbers** to see how evident that is.

Facebook still has over 2.27 billion monthly active users who collectively spend more than 100 million years—yes, years—of time on the site each and every day. They upload 300 million photos per day, leave 750 million comments a day, and share billions upon billions of pieces of content each day. It doesn’t matter to most of them that Facebook is a haven for fake news, or that their personal information is being sold to advertisers, or that their C.E.O. and C.O.O. have done things that should get them both fired, without even the blink of an eye. For most people, they’re just happy that someone “liked” the photo they took of that sunset on the beach last weekend. And I truly don’t believe, as much as I wish, that Zuckerberg is going to change his stripes to be a good guy with a good conscience. As **Jim Rutenberg** wrote in the *Times* last weekend, we’ve known exactly who Zuckerberg is for a long time. Referring to the movie *The Social Network*, Rutenberg noted that, “[Zuckerberg’s] journey to

moguldom began ignobly, with Facemash.com, a mean-spirited site that encouraged his fellow male students at Harvard College to rate women on campus by their looks.”

The seeds of Zuckerberg’s corporate strategy—act first, apologize later—were also evident in those early days. Back in 2003, after a massive backlash to Facemash, a sophomore Zuck explained in an **e-mail** to *The Crimson* why he was taking down the site. “I understood that some parts were still a little sketchy and I wanted some more time to think about whether or not this was really appropriate to release to the Harvard community,” he wrote, shortly before he was called before Harvard’s administrative board and accused of violating data security, copyrights, and individual privacy. “Issues about violating people’s privacy don’t seem to be surmountable,” he continued. “I’m not willing to risk insulting anyone.” At around the same time, according to **chat logs** that have since surfaced, Zuckerberg told a friend over instant messenger that he had over 4,000 e-mails, pictures, and addresses of people who had signed up for an early version of thefacebook.com. When the friend asked how Zuckerberg got that information, he replied: “people just submitted it; i don’t know why; they ‘trust me’; dumb fucks.”

Seven years later, Zuckerberg was C.E.O. of a data-mining platform millions of times larger than the one he first tested at Harvard—but still equally evasive on the issue of user privacy. Shortly after I had written my piece about Facebook’s privacy policy in May 2010, the company apologized for its mistakes, changed its policy, and made it easier—albeit not much—to opt out of always being opted in. In April of that year, I reached out

to a senior level employee at the company, and I asked them how Zuckerberg truly felt about privacy. The employee laughed out loud with a roaring cackle and said, "He doesn't believe in it."

For years, we expected Zuckerberg to evolve. To grow up and become a good guy. But what the latest scandal reveals is what he has been showing us for more than a decade: Zuckerberg is who he is, and that's not going to change.