

US Returns Jotform.com Domain; Still Refuses To Say What Happened

from the *not-cool* dept

Mike Masnick Fri, Feb 17th 2012 6:09 am

There's been a lot of interest in the story of the Secret Service completely shutting down Jotform.com through a request to GoDaddy. It appears that the suspension is now ending, though it hasn't fully propagated. What's amazing is that no one in the US government (or at GoDaddy) seems to be willing to explain what happened. When GoDaddy completely shut down JotForm.com with no notice, the folks at JotForm had to inquire as to what the hell happened to their entire website. They were merely told to contact a Secret Service agent. That agent then told JotForm she was *too busy* to respond to them and would get back to them within a week.

Think about that for a second. The US government completely takes down a small business' website and then is too busy to explain why.

JotForm noted that it was willing to cooperate fully if there were specific users that were a problem, but the Secret Service did not seem to care that it had almost destroyed an entire startup's business:

When I contacted the Secret Service, the agent told me she is busy and she asked for my phone number, and told me they will get back to me within this week. I told them we are a web service with hundreds of thousands of users, so this is a matter of urgency, and we are ready to cooperate fully. I was ready to shutdown any form they request and provide any information we have about the user. Unfortunately, she told me she needs to look at the case which she can do in a few days. I called her many times again to check about the case, but she seems to be getting irritated with me. At this point, we are waiting for them to look into our case.

So far, the Secret Service still isn't talking, returning a bland and meaningless statement to press requests:

"We are aware of the incident and we're reviewing it internally to make sure all the proper procedures and protocols were followed."

GoDaddy, similarly, appears to be staying almost entirely silent.

All of this is completely unacceptable. Almost everything about this sets off alarm bells about

over aggressive (and potentially illegal) censorship by the US government of protected free speech. We've been seeing a much more aggressive and overreaching effort by US officials against websites over the past 18 months or so, and at some point, they're going to get smacked down by a court who will explain to them the nature of the First Amendment and the fact that you can't unilaterally take down entire websites without recognizing the collateral damage on legitimate web businesses.