

*Internet society, expansion of Internet, social life  
in the Internet, society managers, community  
crackers*

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## **BUILDING AN INTERNET SOCIETY: PREVENTING FROM COMMUNITY CRACKERS.**

Internet societies mean to people more and more every day. Some of people are already hooked on them. In this case, the probability of increasing the number of people called 'community crackers' is quite high. This paper shows a short history of growing the societies, explains where the problem exists, discuss the problem of availability of the society, shows one case study and an example way of attempt to destroy the community. It contains as well some thoughts about the role of the society managers in community's life.

### **1. GROWTH OF SOCIETIES.**

Global trends are obvious. Societies are starting to be everywhere. Wherever you look at - blogs, websites, even usual software - everything is becoming more and more social. Though many of us can think that it is a new tendency (and of course in some cases it is), one of the first ideas of computers and their users cooperating each other was stated in 1945. A machine named memex meant to be "a device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility." [7] Society was created by using same resources, which were even commented by users (!).

Through years, various names and definitions were described, just like "groupware" [5], "office automation" or "Computer-Supported Collaborative (Cooperative) Work (CSCW)". Though they were quite similar, there were arguments about the exact meaning of them (example is described in [1], you can find the timeline in [2]). Nowadays, the most used word for such activities is "social software".

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However will we call it, the purpose is one: do the job with others. Make everything social. Even number of definitions shows clearly that whole process is becoming more and more important in our life. And that's the point of this work.

## 2. WHO IS A CRACKER? AND SHOULD WE CARE?

Cracker in the meaning of this article is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a black hat: "(b) Computing slang a person who engages in illegal or malicious hacking, creates or distributes computer viruses, etc." [10]. So basically it's the person who is abusing the rights of availability of a resource having one, proper aim, which does not corresponds with overall rules or aims of it at all. One of best known examples is a person who is trying to break the security of bank accounts through internet, to steal the money.

Community cracker is another example. I am defining that person as one who intentionally or not is attempting to divide or destroy the society, using various methods.

Should we care about community crackers? (In my opinion) Yes! Especially if some people are writing that "Social software is all around us now" [3], or (maybe more important) if I see young people using the Internet for almost every activity of their life, including dating or spending free time. Information they are sharing in the societies, is something what many people desire. Those things must be prevented while projecting such a society. In fact, too many times while setting up the communities, people forget about ones who will try to break major rules in many ways, beginning on stealing the data, through role-playing other people, ending at destroying a whole community.

If we should care... how then? There are many ways. At the beginning the problem did not exist at all. The first Internet societies were created long time ago - BBS, UseNet, etc. Netiquette that time was probably the only way to educate and punish people who were obeying it.

Each next opening for more people was paid by (usually) decreasing the level of discussion. In the history of Polish web this trend can be seen clearly - "fripolboks" in 1997 [8] (from the host of first Polish free e-mail box - free.polbox.pl), and later "kids of neostrada" [9] (from the name of Polish most accessible cheap Internet link) are synonyms of trolling all communities across the whole Internet.

So, the real expansion of the Internet societies is happening now, thanks to the invention of World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee. Internet is pretty easy to use by everyone, including those trolls, community crackers and such.

Facing that, simple netiquette and bans seems to be simply too little.

### 3. TWO POLES OF SOCIETY AVAILABILITY.

If you look closer through all of the societies, you will see that one of main things which they differ in is the availability. In fact, you can find two poles of possibilities: extremely open society and extremely closed society. I'll focus on them for a while, showing the main point of both.

The main point of the extremely open society is none of any simple control influx or outflux. Society is toward new people, and does not care at all about those who are already in. No system of promoting is usually present. You can think about extremely open society as about the train. Anyone can enter it, and if someone is already in, the society doesn't care about him, even in case of leaving it.

On the other side we have extremely closed society. It's well formed group of people, and no one can join it in any way. It usually has proper aim to fulfill. You can think about extremely closed society as about a project group. Each project group has determined people who are in and no one can join or leave it.



Pic. 1. Where the golden mean of Internet society availability is?

### 4. AIM OF SOCIETY AND ITS STRUCTURE.

Both poles are all in all unreachable in real life. Even if they would be, there wouldn't be any proper usage of it at all. What we want is to find is kind of "golden mean" of structure of Internet society. First of all, we need to state our aims, and then place them somewhere between both poles. So, we want our community to be moderate open for new members, more important than they for us are current fellows. We want to eliminate the danger of having in our society the community crackers. Quite often that problem is solved by society controlled by invitations. In a few words, a group of people is creating a community, and they are getting rights to invite others.

There are few pros and cons of this solution. Each new member has someone who is responsible for him. In that way no one is anonymous. Especially when it's a community connected with definite branch or product, everyone knows each other and you can show them as a society controlled by invitations. On the other hand, the society expands slowly. It's closed for new members not connected with those who are already in, even if they would be valuable ones. As well, invited people, even if they are behaving well at the moment of joining, can change it in the future.

But, exact structure of society depends on its main aim. Let's look at case study.

## 5. CASE STUDY: GODFATHER ROLEPLAY COMMUNITY.

GodFather RolePlay is the Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas - Multi Player server. The main idea of the game is to behave like in real life. As soon as the server became popular, the community has been created around it, and was stuck to it for quite long time. Though creators were not concerned about the structure of community and were letting everyone in, it turned out that this way was probably the best possible. For almost one year, it was expanding even though the boundaries of 100 slots of SA-MP servers. There were almost none of attempts of destroying that society, probably because there were none of other servers like that around.

As the society was raising, administration team needed more people to keep everything in good condition, so it was expanding. Some people were promoted, some demoted, some left, and at one time team of lead administrators started to have not only ones who designed and created the community, but as well people who joined it and had other mind about it. So, everything started to fall down.

In this case, the killer was one of these "new" lead administrators. In one moment, he started removing the players as well as administrators with very small or without any reason. Through several months number of active members of the community falled down from around 10 000 to 0. We can say, that community cracker was a lead admin – someone asked to keep the society in order, alive.

## 6. ROLE OF SOCIETY MANAGERS.

This case study shows clearly that not only structure of it is something what designers should think about. Solution of the problem is as well connected with mature way of managing of the society.

GodFather Community seemed to be very good prospering and nothing was on its way to destroy it. However, it falled down. Obvious rule to be sure that people who are you taking to the administration team have to be mature, polite and know what they are doing was forgotten, smashed down like nothing. New style of managing the community simply did not fit to what people were expecting, what members were like and how the structure was working. I know (hope), that it might be isolated example of the structure falling down, however, it shows the other point of view from those about which we are learning. All not properly controlled admin actions have far-reaching consequences, especially if they happen many times in a row.

In this case we can see as well one more thing which is worth to be shown. In each society exists a turning point, where people can think that society will be alive forever, regardless of which of the admin actions will be made. This point is probably the most dangerous for the community. There are several examples of situations when it can pop up. One of them is (like in GodFather Community) following: free spots from old members of community who left to the other one were fast filled with new, young

members (in the meaning of less experienced). Though the amount of members was roughly same, overall level of knowledge and experience was lower. It's small change locally, but if you will look back to the illustration of society availability, it reveals that the structure of the community has changed definitely.

## 7. PROPER IDENTIFYING OF COMMUNITY CRACKERS.

Proper identifying of community crackers and preventing them from joining and taking role in society is a difficult task. Different community crackers have different ways of thinking and working. Internet trolls, very good described in former works, are only a part of whole phenomenon. Current Web is not only about writing new topics at forums, taking part in discussions at usenet or writing e-mails. It's about every act of the society - at work in a company, in the game server while entertaining or at social networking website like orkut or facebook.

There are many ways of catching community crackers. One, the most common, is basing on the whole work which someone already did for the community. It requires conscious and mature managers of the society to be able to actually catch the forbidden behavior. What's more, it usually responds to deleting current cracker's work, in which might other users be involved, and that might actually entail arise of anxiety of the community about free speech. And don't forget, that it can be simply too late. That's why it's better to prevent them than trying to stabilize the situation after.

### 7.1. EXAMPLE OF THE WAY OF A COMMUNITY CRACKER.

Important hint is that it's rare for them to start cracking the society from the very beginning. Inversely, at the beginning they are willing to help, want to get as much trust as they can, show off as someone valuable, who might have right. However (like usual trolls) it happens that they have some strict thoughts about various topics, and they are defending it till the end (ordinarily starting a flame war). Because of their aim, they need to be admired, so they don't get aggressive (unlike trolls). They are strict in what they are doing (saying). They are doing everything with the netiquette so no one can make an accusation on them for anything. Community crackers happens to accuse someone for something, more or less serious, but they are not doing it often.

Then, after gaining a position in the society, they starts their attack. Usually it's about situation in which society managers don't care, but which is able to call many people's attention to it. In that point, it's only up to wise decisions of administrators to keep the community together, act professionally, just as the society wants them to. If they won't, sooner or later community cracker will win. Even if he will lose that battle, it's more possible that he will strike back, usually as chameleon, role-playing someone else, and having his way to repeat the thing (how to catch those you can read in [4]).

## 8. SUMMARY.

So, what is the whole thing about? And - let me state the question once again - is there something really to worry about? I want to underline again the fact, that our social life is more and more taking part in the world wide web. More and more from us is there, and going further we don't want to lose that part of us at all. While society designers will try to make the community unable to destroy, users have to learn that in the Internet you are not anonymous.

Does community crackers exist already? I think they have existed since the very beginning of mankind. However, their role will depend only on the role of society in our life, on how much will we care about them.

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## BUDOWANIE SPOŁECZNOŚCI INTERNETOWEJ: PRZECIWDZIAŁANIE AKCJOM CRACKERÓW SPOŁECZNOŚCI

Z dnia na dzień wzrasta znaczenie społeczności internetowych w naszym życiu. Niektórzy są już nawet od nich uzależnieni. W tym przypadku, prawdopodobieństwo wzrostu liczby osób nazwanych jako „crackerzy społeczności” jest stosunkowo wysoki. Ta praca przedstawia krótką historię wzrostu społeczności, tłumaczy, gdzie leży problem, omawia problem dostępności społeczności, przedstawia jedno stadium przypadku oraz jedną z możliwych dróg, jaka może być użyta do zniszczenia społeczności. Zawiera także przemyślenia na temat roli administratorów społeczności w jej życiu.