SOCIAL

Mastodon CEO steps down as the social network restructures

Sarah Perez 12:00 AM PST · November 18, 2025

IMAGE CREDITS: MASTODON

Mastodon's creator, Eugen Rochko, is stepping down as CEO of the open source, decentralized social network and X rival as part of the organization's transition to a nonprofit structure, announced at the beginning of the year. The change is Mastodon's most significant leadership overhaul to date, and one designed to ensure Mastodon's longevity.

As part of the organization's restructuring, Mastodon will be governed by a board of directors, which today includes Twitter co-founder Biz Stone, Karien Bezuidenhout, Esra'a Al Shafei, Mastodon community director Hannah Aubry (who will be stepping down), and Felix Hlatky, who will be taking the role of executive director.

With the revamp, Mastodon has the potential to expand its business, product, and mission, without being dependent on a single person's leadership. It will also give Rochko a break, as he's been singularly focused on Mastodon for the past 10 years.

Going forward, Rochko will continue contributing to Mastodon as an adviser. He has also been compensated with a one-time payment of €1 million, given that he took less than a fair market salary over the years while building Mastodon.

Other members of the new leadership team include Renaud Chaput as technical director, Andy Piper as Head of Communications, and Philip Schröpel as Strategy & Product Advisor. In total, Mastodon has 10 full-time employees.

CEO says burnout was a factor in his decision

IMAGE CREDITS:BRYCE DURBIN / TECHCRUNCH

Rochko said he knew it was time to step aside as Mastodon had grown to be bigger than he could manage alone, and because he was also facing burnout.

"[Mastodon has] become kind of synonymous with my identity. I can't look somewhere and see something about social media without thinking about how it affects my work," Rochko explained in an interview with TechCrunch. "I want it to succeed. And it's led to a lot of stress, and obviously, it ultimately led to burnout."

"I think that taking a step back, realizing this isn't just mine anymore — now other people are involved, other people are responsible for this — is going to allow me to restore some balance in my life."

He also suggested others should do the same if they are able.

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IMAGE CREDITS:MASTODON

As a nonprofit, Mastodon will be able to unlock new funding opportunities, particularly in Europe, noted the new executive director, Hlatky.

The organization has already transitioned to a nonprofit in the U.S. but is still working to set up a nonprofit in Belgium, or an AISBL, to replace the German entity, which lost its nonprofit status last year. Once established, the Belgian nonprofit will be the future home of the organization. In the meantime, the U.S.-based 501(c)(3) c nonprofit will own the trademark and other assets.

To aid in the transition, Mastodon raised funds from Stack Exchange founder Jeff Atwood and the Atwood family (who gave €2.2 million); Biz Stone; alternative app marketplace AltStore (€260,000); the Global Chinese Community of Universal Digital Commons (€65,000); and Craigslist founder Craig Newmark.

Hlatky, who has a business and finance background in tech, had been consulting for Mastodon ahead of this transition, having helped the organization establish its German nonprofit.

He says that through his work, he had become disenchanted with the typical startup system involving venture capital.

"It works for the outliers, but for all the others, it doesn't work," Hlatky said. "I just got bored with the system, and I didn't really see any meaning in contributing to the system anymore."

In his new position, Hlatky will engage in more conversations with industry stakeholders and the media, and sees the opportunity to have politicians, political parties, and journalists engage more on the platform.

He will also help oversee projects to make Mastodon more financially sustainable, including its new hosting and moderation business. Other members of the leadership team will also focus on trust and safety issues, technical infrastructure, and product.

One thing that Mastodon won't be focusing on is any sort of native interoperability between its platform, powered by the ActivityPub protocol and other decentralized social networks like Bluesky — which runs on the AT Protocol — or those running on Nostr, a protocol favored by Twitter co-founder and former CEO Jack Dorsey. Instead, Mastodon will leave interoperability to the makers of third-party projects like Bridgy Fed and Bounce. (These different protocols are essentially competing technical standards for how decentralized social networks communicate.)

"Billionaire-proof" social media

IMAGE CREDITS:MOZILLA

By restructuring Mastodon, Rochko believes the organization will maintain its position as "billionaire-proof" social media. That mission statement has also been adopted by Bluesky, a network that has grown larger than Mastodon with 40 million registered users, compared with Mastodon's 10 million. On both networks, a smaller number of those users are active on a monthly basis.

On Mastodon, monthly active users have since dropped to under 1 million, after the 2022 spike that came following Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter. Before the deal closed, Mastodon had only around 200,000 monthly active users, Rochko noted; after, it jumped to 2 million.

That, he believes, indicates demand for a platform not controlled by a billionaire.

"Threads, Instagram, and Facebook belong to a billionaire. X belongs to a billionaire ... All of these platforms belong to extremely rich people, and they're increasingly using these platforms to steer public perception, public conversation, and politics," he noted. "And Mastodon is one of the very few — if not the only — of these organizations and social media platforms — and the fediverse as a whole, I suppose — that is not subject to something like that," Rochko said.

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Sarah has worked as a reporter for TechCrunch since August 2011. She joined the company after having previously spent...

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