

Popular legal blog shuts down over US government spying

Tom Carter
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Groklaw, an award-winning law and technology blog, announced last month that it would close down over concerns that its emails were being accessed and monitored by the US National Security Agency (NSA).

In an August 20 statement titled “Forced Exposure” announcing the end of the site’s operations, founder Pamela Johnson declared that the Obama administration’s pervasive warrantless surveillance made it impossible to continue operating. “There is now no shield from forced exposure,” Johnson wrote.

Even if a person’s private communications are not “terrorism-related,” she said, “no one can feel protected enough from forced exposure any more to say anything the least bit [private] to anyone in an email, particularly from the US out or to the US in, but really anywhere.”

“The foundation of Groklaw is over,” Johnson concluded.

Groklaw provided in-depth coverage and analysis of legal developments related to Internet and computer technology. The site rose to prominence in 2003 with its exposures of the attempt by the American software corporation SCO Group to establish control over the free, open-source Linux operating system. From day to day, relying on a broad network of volunteer collaborators and tipsters, the site published first-hand material on key technology-related litigation.

The site’s exposures were credited with undermining major lawsuits, doubtless earning Johnson enemies in high places. Nevertheless, the site won numerous accolades, including the Free Software Foundation (FSF) “Award for Projects of Social Benefit” in 2008 and the “Best Website of 2004” award from the *Inquirer*.

Electronic Frontier Foundation Executive Director Shari Steele, awarding the site one of four 2010 Pioneer

Awards, credited the site with working “tirelessly to give critical insight and context to the tough questions that arise in our evolving digital world.”

The shuttering of Groklaw follows on the heels of the closure of Lavabit on August 7 and the closure of Silent Mail on August 9. Both services provided enhanced email security. “We see the writing the wall, and we have decided that it is best for us to shut down Silent Mail now,” read a press release from the latter company.

Pamela Johnson’s statement evoked expressions of outrage and sympathy around the world, with hundreds of reader comments in support of Johnson accumulating on news sites that carried the story of Groklaw’s closure.

The closure of Groklaw underscores the chilling effect of the US government’s relentless drive to intercept and monitor all forms of human communication.



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