

College student who tracks Elon Musk's plane not afraid of turbulence from Twitter purchase

May 5 2022, by Joe Mario Pedersen



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

While some white-knuckle over the turbulence made by billionaire Elon

Musk's purchase of Twitter, one University of Central Florida student is flying high without any worry.

UCF freshman Jack Sweeney caught the attention of the social media platform and Musk himself in 2020 after he created the aviation tracking Twitter bot [account](#) @ElonJet, which tracks the flight patterns of Musk's private jet and has 432,000 followers.

Earlier this year, Musk reached out to Sweeney asking him to remove the account because of privacy concerns, offering the UCF IT major \$5,000 to take it down. Sweeney countered with \$50,000. He said Musk told him he would think about it but negotiations ended soon after.

With Musk's \$44 billion Twitter purchase, fans of @ElonJet are concerned the platform acquisition could ground the account's activities but Sweeney said he's not concerned about Musk shutting him down.

"I'm not too worried about it, for myself," he said, focusing on other changes Musk might bring to Twitter. "I think it will do good for the platform. He wants to get rid of spam, make it more transparent. He likes to listen to customers and try to make things better. I think it's good for Twitter."

Although, if Musk does remove the account, Sweeney has prepared contingency platforms where fans can continue to observe Musk's aerial movements.

Still, Sweeney doubts the account will be removed because of Musk's comments about keeping the internet free. Musk tweeted his thoughts on the subject in favor of returning Twitter to a place of free speech without fear of banned accounts. While Musk has yet to release a plan for how he intends to run Twitter, he suggested there must be a heavier crackdown on fake Twitter accounts or Twitterbots.

"He's always talking about freedom of speech, so if he did do something and shut (me) down, people would call him out on it," Sweeney said.

Sweeney first made @ElonJet while he was in [high school](#), during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. He was interested in what the aerial information might reveal about potential Musk's business dealings—but mostly because Sweeney was stuck inside and bored.

"I was a fan of him, SpaceX and Tesla and all that. I knew about flight tracking and I knew he had a plane and thought it would be interesting to see where he goes," Sweeney said.

Musk uses blocking software to stop people from tracking his flights but all takeoffs and landings are public information. So, Sweeney got to work on manually trying to identify Musk's flight patterns.

Two months later, Sweeney launched @ElonJet, and soon after the account began to gain followers. Sweeney has run several other accounts tracking Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and others, but his Musk tracker remains the most popular.

In September 2020, Sweeney caught his first whiff that Musk knew of his account when @ElonJet spotlighted Musk's plane in Hawaii. Twitter users began commenting on how Musk wouldn't take a vacation, and they were right. Musk explained he was there meeting business investor and Oracle Corporation co-founder Larry Ellison.

Earlier this year, Sweeney said his phone notified him of a Twitter message from the "Dogefather" himself, Musk.

"Can you take this down? It's a [security risk](#)," the message said.

Then, Sweeney did what any person would do when being directly

reached out to by one of the most powerful individuals in the world. Sweeney put his phone down and went to sleep.

He left Musk unread until the following morning.

Then, the two communicated back and forth talking about Musk's [privacy concerns](#) and exposure to potential threats. Sweeney discussed different blocking software Musk might be interested in using. Eventually, Musk offered Sweeney \$5,000 to delete the account.

Sweeney countered, asking for \$50,000. He said Musk thought about it and eventually replied, "It doesn't feel right to pay to take it down."

Last week, Sweeney noticed he couldn't locate Musk's jet, and realized Musk was attempting to hide his flight patterns from the @ElonJet using the blocking software Sweeney had recommended to him.

"In some ways, it hides him more from other people, but since I know so much about the program and his movements, it actually made it easier for me to find him," Sweeney said. "There's only so many people with that blocking program filter and planes with it. His jet is always in Austin, Brownsville and (Los Angeles). He's the only person who does that on Earth."

Sweeney does make money from ElonJet, "but it isn't a lot," he said. "It's rewarding in other ways. Like, I have my own community now."

Best-case scenario, Sweeney hopes @ElonJet continues to soar through the open skies of a free speech internet and maybe even bring him to a land of opportunity.

"I mean, I hope he reaches out to me again. Maybe he'll give me a job at Twitter." Sweeney laughed.

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Citation: College student who tracks Elon Musk's plane not afraid of turbulence from Twitter purchase (2022, May 5) retrieved 27 February 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2022-05-college-student-tracks-elon-musk.html>

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