

Elon Musk takes over Twitter but where will he go from here?

October 29 2022, by BARBARA ORTUTAY, TOM KRISHER and MATT O'BRIEN



Twitter headquarters is shown in San Francisco, Friday, Oct. 28, 2022. Elon Musk has taken control of Twitter after a protracted legal battle and months of uncertainty. The question now is what the billionaire Tesla CEO will actually do with the social media platform. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

Elon Musk has taken control of Twitter after a protracted legal battle and months of uncertainty. The question now is [what the billionaire Tesla CEO will actually do](#) with the social media platform.

Musk gave one indication of where he's headed in a tweet Friday, saying no decisions on content or reinstating of accounts will be made until a "content moderation council" is put in place. The council, he wrote, would have diverse viewpoints.

Major personnel shakeups are widely expected, with Musk ousting several top Twitter executives on Thursday. A fourth confirmed his departure, in a tweet.

But Musk, the tech guru and self-proclaimed "Chief Twit," has otherwise made contradictory statements about his vision for the company—and shared few concrete plans for how he will run it after buying it for \$44 billion.

That has left Twitter's users, advertisers and employees to parse his every move in an effort to guess where he might take the company. Many are looking to see if he will welcome back a number of influential conservative figures banned for violating Twitter's rules—speculation that is only heightened by upcoming elections in Brazil, the U.S. and elsewhere.

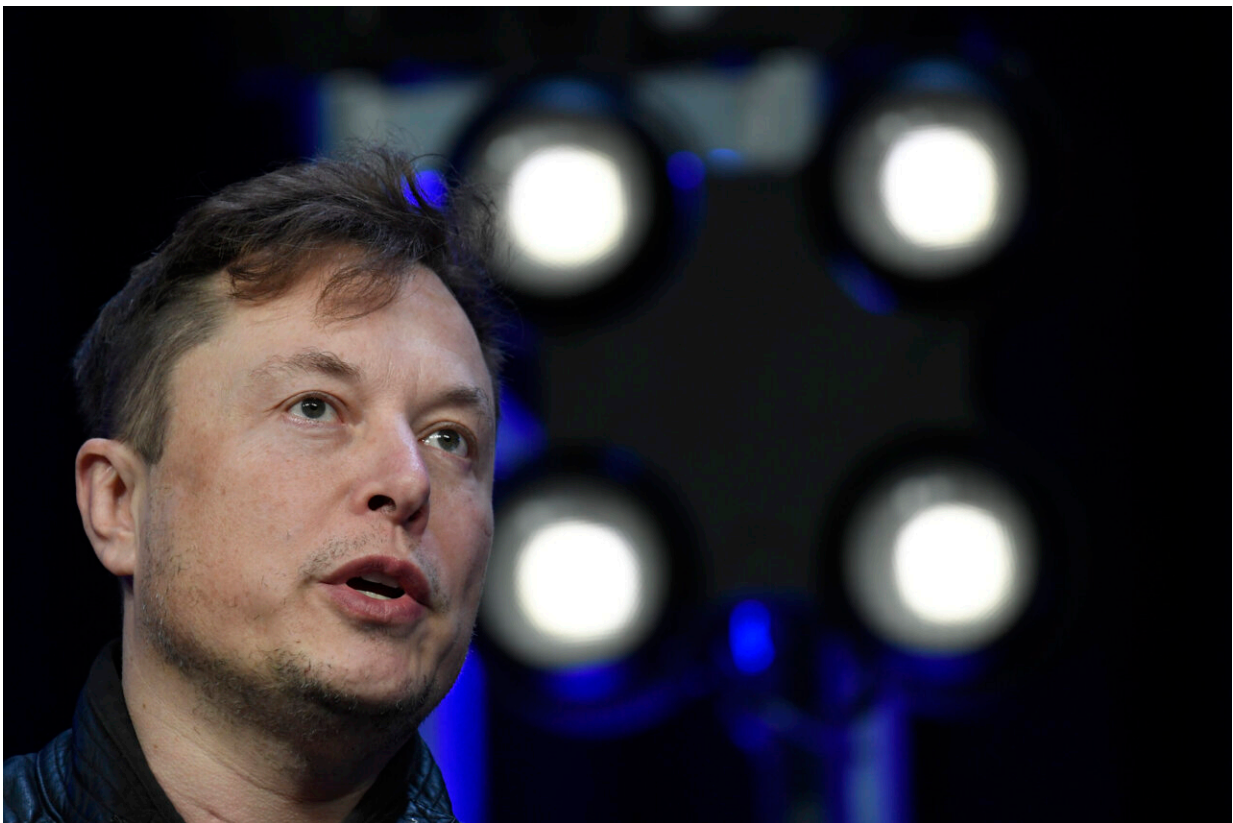
"I will be digging in more today," he tweeted early Friday, in response to a conservative political podcaster who has complained that the platform favors liberals and secretly downgrades conservative voices.

Former President Donald Trump, an avid tweeter before he was banned, said Friday he was "very happy that Twitter is now in sane hands" but promoted his own social media site, Truth Social, that he launched after being blocked from the more widely used platform.

Trump was banned two days after the Jan. 6 attacks for a pair of tweets that the company said continued to [cast doubts](#) on the legitimacy of the presidential election and raised risks for the presidential inauguration that Trump said he would not be attending.

Trump has repeatedly said that he will not return to Twitter even if his account is reinstated, though some allies wonder if he'll be able to resist as he moves closer to announcing another expected presidential campaign. His Twitter account remained suspended Friday.

Meanwhile, conservative personalities on the site began recirculating long-debunked conspiracy theories, including about COVID-19 and the 2020 election, in a tongue-in-cheek attempt to "test" whether Twitter's policies on misinformation were still being enforced.



Elon Musk speaks at the SATELLITE Conference and Exhibition on March 9, 2020, in Washington. Musk posted video Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2022, showing him strolling into Twitter headquarters ahead of a Friday, Oct. 28, deadline to close his \$44 billion deal to buy the company. Credit: AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File

The mercurial Musk has not made it easy to anticipate what he'll do.

He has criticized Twitter's dependence on advertisers, but made a statement Thursday that seemed aimed at soothing their fears. He has complained about restrictions on speech on the platform—but then vowed he wouldn't let it become a "hellscape." And for months it wasn't even clear if he wanted to control the company at all.

After Musk signed a deal to acquire Twitter in April, he tried to back out of it, leading the company to sue him to force him to go through with the acquisition. A Delaware judge had ordered that the deal be finalized by Friday.

Wedbush analyst Dan Ives estimated that Musk and his investors overpaid. Even Musk has said the \$44 billion price tag for Twitter was too high but that the company had great potential.

The payment "will go down as one of the most overpaid tech acquisitions in the history of M&A deals on the Street, in our opinion," Ives wrote in a note to investors. "With fair value that we would peg at roughly \$25 billion, Musk buying Twitter remains a major head scratcher that ultimately he could not get out of once the Delaware Courts got involved."

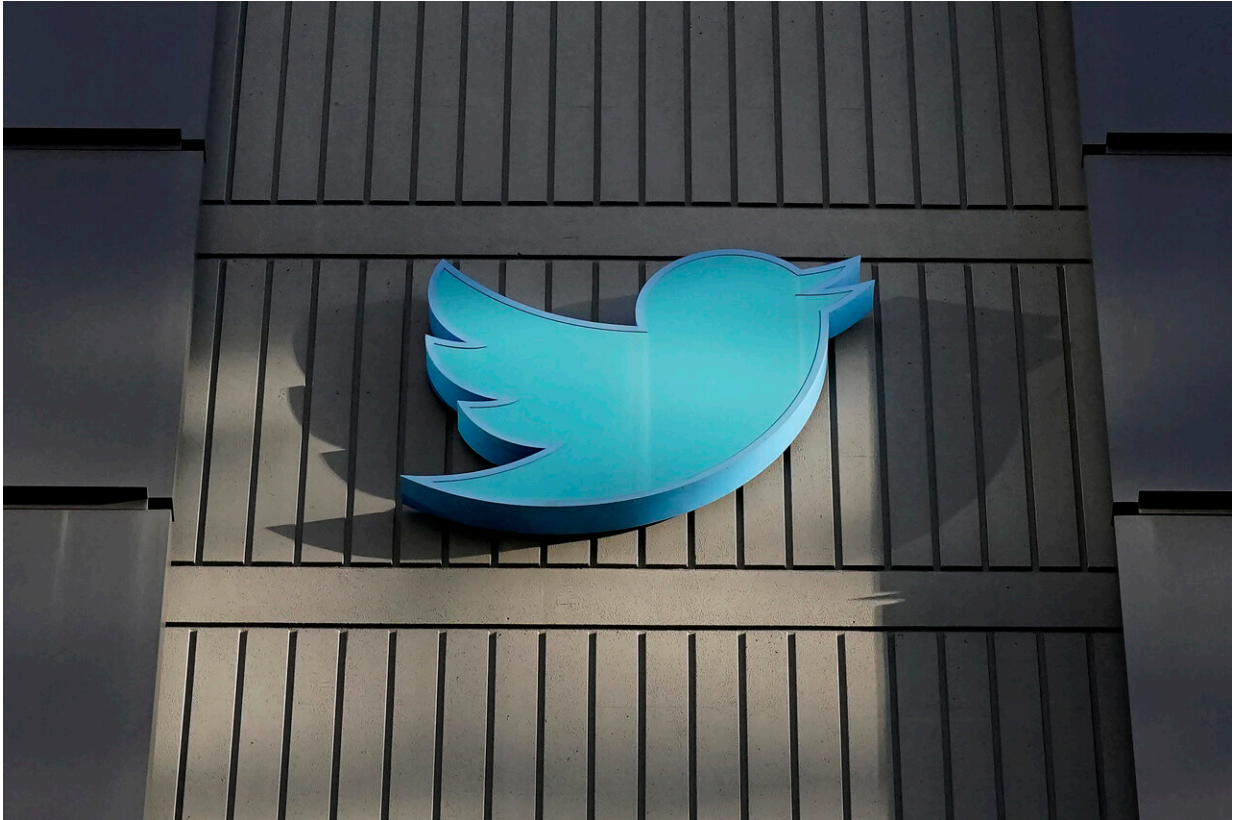
After months of uncertainty, a series of moves by Musk this week signaled that the deal would in fact go through.

On Wednesday, he strolled into the company's San Francisco headquarters carrying a porcelain sink and [tweeted](#) "Entering Twitter HQ—let that sink in!" Then on Thursday, he tweeted, "the bird is freed," a reference to Twitter's logo.

The same day, Musk fired CEO Parag Agrawal, CFO Ned Segal and Chief Legal Counsel Vijaya Gadde. Sean Edgett, who had been Twitter's [general counsel](#), confirmed on Twitter Friday that he's also out of a job, posting that the company is full of the most amazing people. "Keep taking good care of this place, Tweagle," he added, referring to the company name for Twitter's legal department. Gadde, meanwhile, removed all references to her former employer from her Twitter bio, while trolls continued to post thousands abusive messages in replies to her most recent tweet.

As concerns rise about the direction of Twitter's content moderation, European Union Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton tweeted to Musk on Friday that "In Europe, the bird will fly by our rules."

Breton and Musk met in May and appeared in a video together in which Musk said he agreed with the 27-nation bloc's strict new online regulations. Its Digital Services Act threatens big tech companies with billions in fines if they don't police platforms more strictly for illegal or harmful content such as [hate speech](#) and disinformation.



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Musk has also [spent months deriding Twitter's "spam bots"](#) and making sometimes conflicting pronouncements about Twitter's problems and how to fix them.

He posted a note Thursday aimed at addressing concerns that his plans to promote free speech by cutting back on moderating content will open the floodgates to more online toxicity and drive away users. It showed a newfound emphasis on [ad revenue](#), especially a need for Twitter to provide more "relevant ads"—which typically means targeted ads that

rely on collecting and analyzing users' [personal information](#).

About 90% of Twitter's revenue comes from advertising, but it's far from being the biggest digital marketing platform. Google, Amazon and Meta account for about 75% of digital ads. Twitter was just 1% of global digital ad spending in 2022, according to an Insider Intelligence projection.

Lou Paskalis, former head of media for Bank of America, said Twitter's most loyal advertisers, many Fortune 100 companies, believe in the platform and probably won't leave unless "some really untoward things" happen. On Friday, General Motors announced that it had temporarily paused its Twitter advertising while it works to "understand the direction of the platform" under Musk's ownership. GM described the pause as a normal step it takes when a media platform undergoes "significant change."

The takeover means Twitter is becoming a private [company](#). Trading of its shares was suspended Friday, and they will be pulled from the New York Stock Exchange next month.

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