

How legit is that verified Twitter account?

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

As Twitter keeps changing, misinformation experts are watching closely, hoping to offer tips on how to spot the difference between official accounts and the impostors.

After months of rocky uncertainty, Elon Musk bought Twitter at the end of October and quickly started making changes to the company, including laying off about half of its 7,500 employees and ending remote work.

The platform is changing daily (or hourly, in some cases) as Musk brainstorms ideas, institutes new policies and features and then walks back some decisions. Those changes, and the uncertainty of the future of the social media platform, is heightening concerns about misinformation spreading in the virtual world.

Since Musk's takeover of Twitter, more extremists and purveyors of hateful content are testing the boundaries of what the platform might allow, according to a recent review of political conversations on the app from Tufts University.

On Wednesday, Twitter introduced a new "official" label for high-profile accounts, like Coca-Cola, Nike or [government agencies](#). Hours later, it scrapped the idea entirely.

By Thursday evening, the label was back, according to Twitter Support.

The meaning of the iconic blue check mark—formerly used to mark "active, notable and authentic accounts of public interest" like government agencies, [political candidates](#), news outlets and celebrities—has also bounced around this week.

Before Musk's takeover, accounts had to apply for verification and get approved by Twitter. Musk introduced the idea that users could also purchase verification through a new service dubbed Twitter Blue. He suggested somewhere around \$20 and later settled on \$7.99 per month.

By Friday, there was speculation Twitter had suspended the launch of

Twitter Blue.

Hoping to draw attention to the risks of fake accounts, impersonation and the spread of misinformation, Washington's Emergency Management Department spoke out on the very platform it was concerned about.

"There is a reality now that someone could buy a blue checkmark and then they could suddenly say they are a [government agency](#) telling you [to] evacuate," it tweeted. "Even a blue checkmark might not mean what it used to mean.

"You might want to take steps to confirm the author."

However, there are some common sense measures you can take to keep tabs on which accounts are government agencies, and which might be faking it. Washington's EMD and Jevin West, a professor and co-founder director of the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public recommended checking:

- If a website—with a .gov address—is connected to the Twitter account.
- How old an account is. "Newly created accounts should throw up red flags," West said. This one isn't foolproof since some government agencies are still new to the platform, though.
- If other government accounts are following the account in question. EMD says the agencies usually follow one another on social media
- Google results. Google tends to favor real accounts over bots, EMD said. Search the agency's name plus Twitter.
- Whether the [account](#) has a bio written or a low number of interactions with other followers
- Whether the profile image is a stock photo or a computer-

generated image. For stock photos, you can use reverse image search

- Whether official names are misspelled.

"Slow down in sharing, especially during this state of Twitter flux," West said.

Washington EMD still had its blue check mark as of Monday, but told its Twitter followers last week, "there's no promises how long we have it."

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