

# ANONYMOUS APPS

INTERACTIVE RESOURCE GUIDE



SAFER  
SCHOOLS  
TOGETHER



International Center for  
Digital Threat Assessment



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This is an interactive document. Click the underlined links to read more or navigate to the correlating section of the document.

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## INTRODUCTION

This Interactive Resource Guide and accompanying Micro Module will provide School Safety / Threat Assessment (SS/TA) Teams with a functional understanding of Anonymous Apps (Applications) and their utility in online data collection.

To make this training most effective, we encourage SS/TA Teams to download and/or browse the platforms and forums referenced in this guide and follow along. In line with the recommendations provided in our [Digital Threat Assessment® training](#), we suggest that your SS/TA Teams create specific accounts for data collection. [Safer Schools Together \(SST\)](#) recommends against using personal accounts when searching as there is a possibility that the searching methods demonstrated may notify the Subject(s) of Concern (SOC).

## ANONYMOUS APPS

The internet has often provided its users with a certain sense of anonymity due to the ability to interact with others from across the globe without ever having to provide their real identity. Over the last decade, there have been notable advancements by platforms and programs that market themselves based on their ability to allow users to remain completely anonymous. Subsequently, users are often able to avoid repercussions for their actions online. For SS/TA Teams, it is important to be able to identify these platforms and understand how to navigate them effectively.

Anonymous apps and platforms have been around since the early days of the internet and have evolved drastically as social media has increased in popularity. One of the earliest examples of this was the Japanese textboard forum 2channel, which was first introduced on May 30th, 1999. This platform largely inspired the creation of one of the most well-known imageboard / anonymous apps sites– 4chan. Anonymous apps have always been a major part of internet culture. It wasn't until later that single-identity networks, pioneered by Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg,<sup>1</sup> were established. Only now are people beginning to pay careful attention to how our online activity is traced and tied to our real-world identities.



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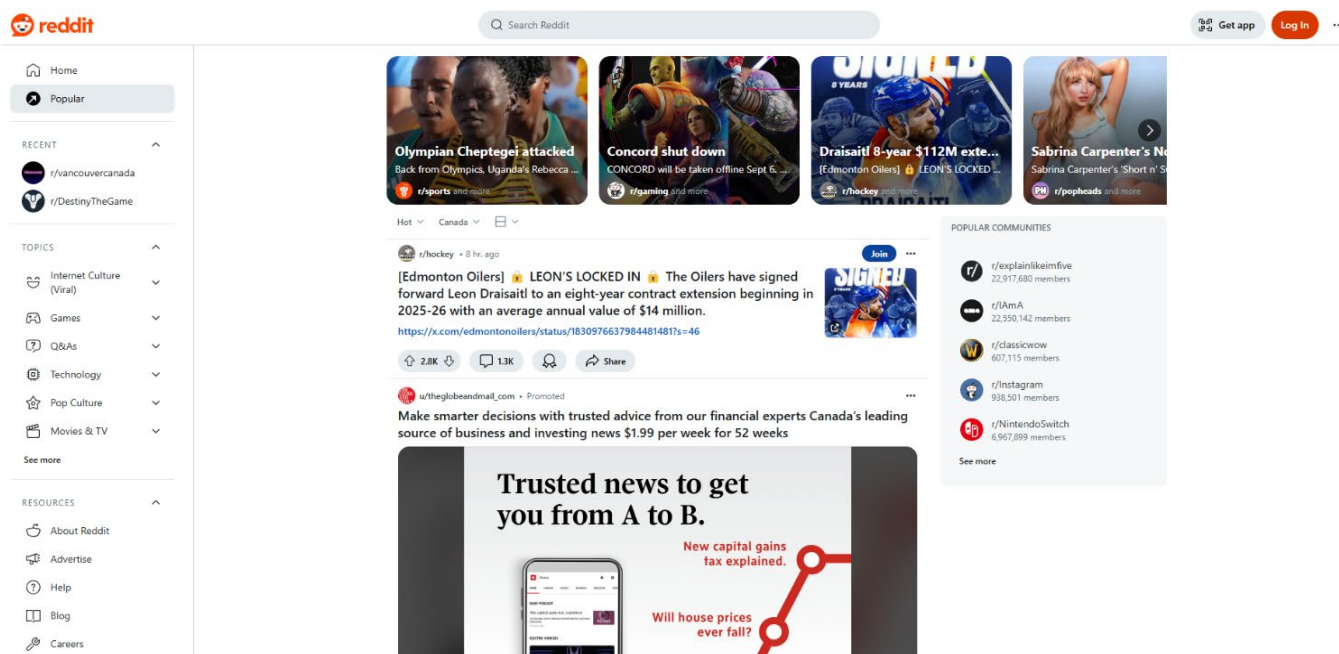
<sup>1</sup> <https://michaelzimmer.org/2010/05/14/facebooks-zuckerberg-having-two-identities-for-yourself-is-an-example-of-a-lack-of-integrity/>

# REDDIT



Photo Courtesy of Google Play.

[Reddit](#) is an anonymous app/website that is referred to as “the front page of the internet” and is made up of large groups of forums called subreddits. Registered users can discuss a wide variety of topics, from politics to pop culture and beyond. Reddit has earned its reputation by staying up-to-date with events and trends, as well as providing a platform for users to engage in open discussions with others in real time. Although users must create an account to engage and have discussions within forums, there is no registration or login required to browse the site openly. Those who consistently use Reddit refer to themselves as Redditors.



## Commonly Used Terminology

### SUBREDDITS

To find a subreddit, a user will navigate to the search field at the top of the page. On Reddit, they have the option to search “Not Safe for Work” (NSFW) content. NSFW content often includes pornographic, gore, or other graphic topics, images, and/or videos. To view these subreddits, the user needs to be registered and have the NSFW Topic activated in their settings.

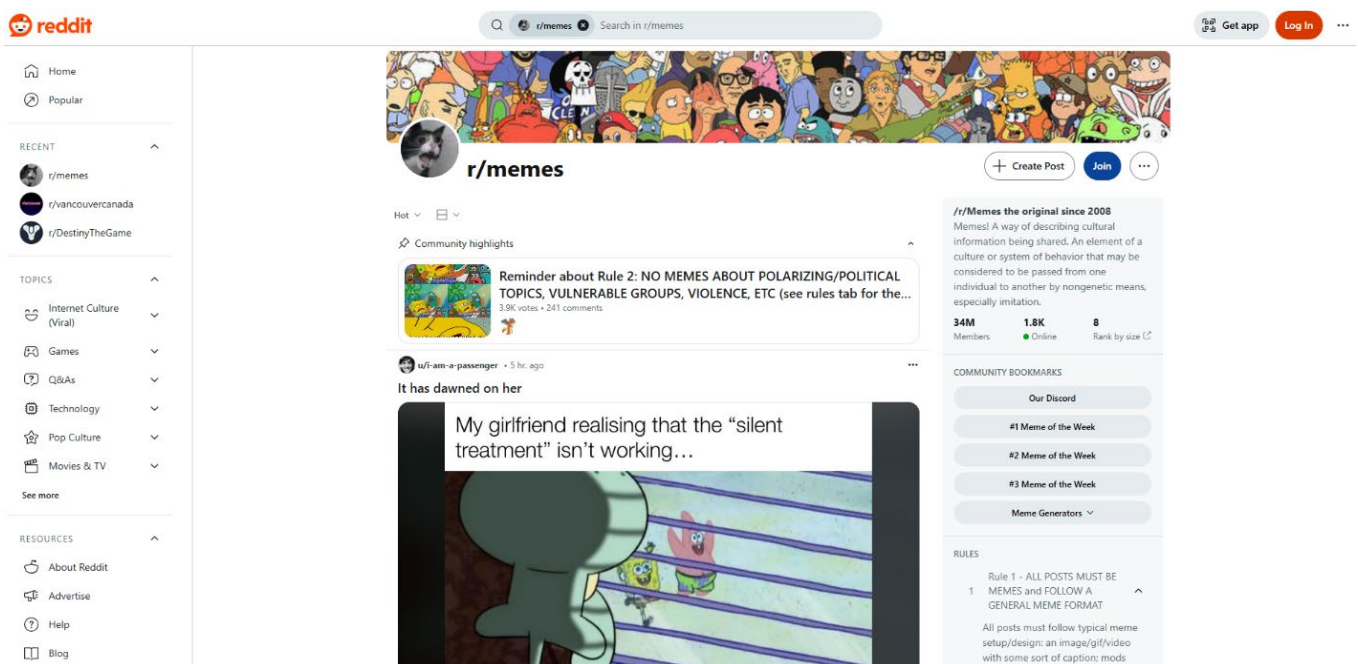
Each specific subreddit contains information and discussions around a topic, with each title being highlighted and

beginning with “r/”. A user can view and participate in subreddits for free, though some are private and will require the subreddit administrator to give users permission to enter. If a user wishes to subscribe to certain subreddits, the most popular posts will appear on the user’s personalized Reddit front page.

Any registered Reddit user can create their own subreddits. It is not required to be registered to view these subreddits.

Registered users can make submissions to any of the public subreddits. Users can also comment and reply to comments on other users’ submissions by clicking on the “Open Comment” or “Reply” buttons directly below the submission or comment.

Registered users can also upvote or downvote any of the submissions. Upvoting or downvoting on a submission will determine the rank of the submission.



## FRONTPAGE

The front page of Reddit is controlled by different algorithms which result in different submissions being featured and categorized by different options such as “Hot”, “Country” (location), “New”, “Top”, and “Rising”.

If the user is not registered, the default tab is “Hot”, which is a view of the submissions with the highest algorithm scores of downvotes subtracted by upvotes over a period of time determined by Reddit. If the user is registered, then the default tab is “Best” and features the most-voted posts from all subreddits. There are also other contributing factors in the submissions that are posted, such as how much time the user has spent browsing before, and the subreddits the user has joined. This is a personalized view that eliminates posts the user has already clicked on. This is important for SS/TA Teams to note, and even though the content is eliminated from being shown again to the user by the algorithm once it has been viewed, teams are still given an opportunity to view similar content to what an SOC is consistently interacting with.

Other tabs to become familiar with are the “Rising” tab, which features posts that are new and being upvoted at a

high rate, and the “Controversial” tab, which uses an algorithm to determine which posts are the subject of conflicting opinions by observing the fluctuation of upvotes and downvotes.

## SUBMISSIONS

There are six basic submissions: links, images, videos, Polls, Ask Me Anything (AMAs), and text. All submissions require a title, which Reddit encourages to be interesting, but devoid of hyperbole and self-promotion.

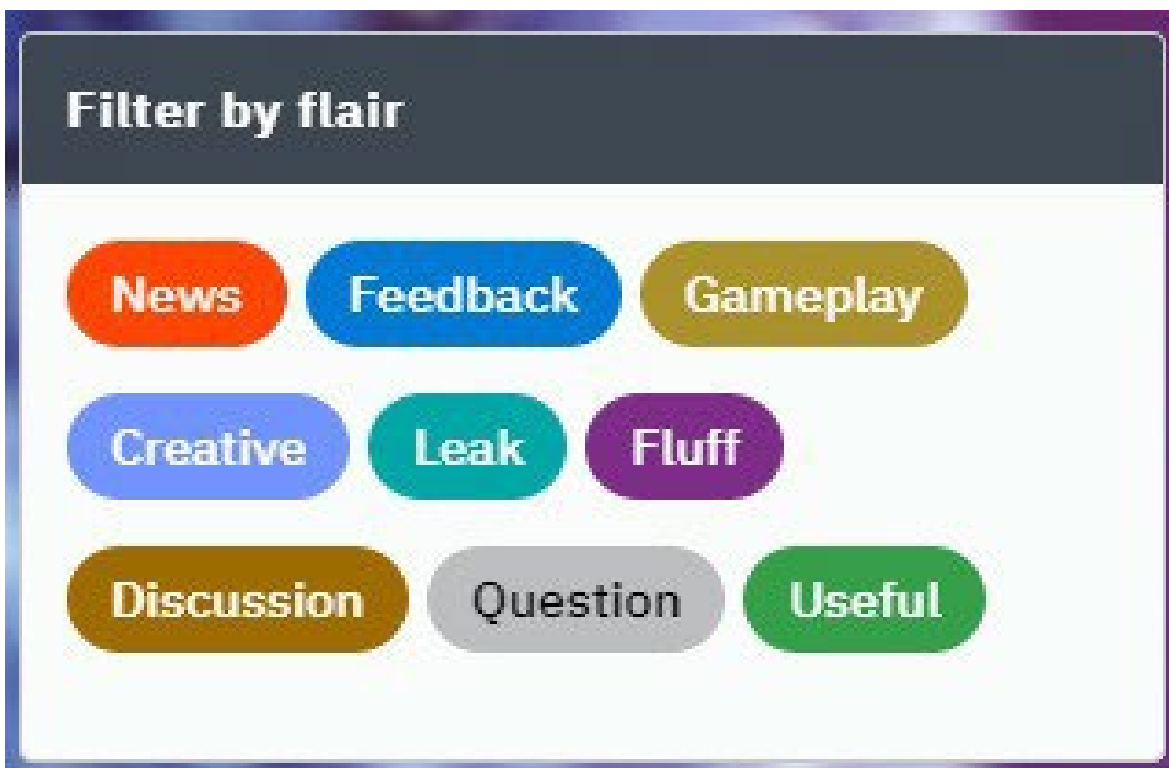
## RULES

Reddit and Redditors refer to community guidelines as “Reddit etiquette.” Simply put, this set of rules is a reminder to the user that there are real individuals on both sides of the screen and that there is no self-promotion or spam allowed on Reddit. Overall, Reddit asks users to be respectful of others: How or how often this is enforced is not publicly shared information.

Subreddits contain another layer of rules that users must abide by when posting and commenting. For example, “r/pics” may only accept image submissions and no external links. Other subreddits require the user to be more descriptive in their posts (e.g., r/science).

## FLAIR

A flair is required to be added to certain submissions and is used to identify the relevancy of the submission to the subreddit. For example, the subreddit “r/gadgets” contains flairs such as “Phones”, “Desktop” and “Laptop”.

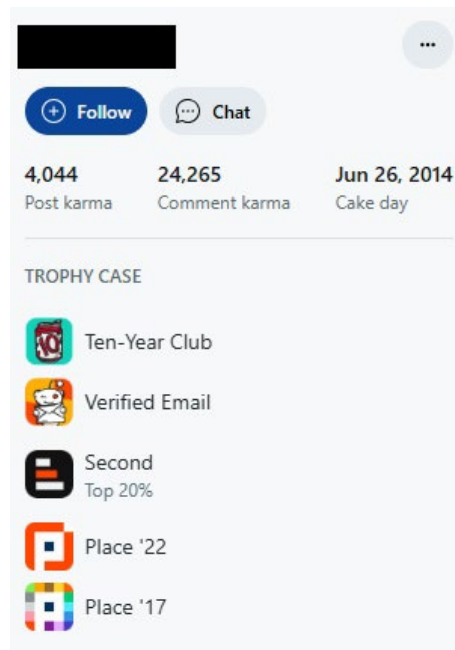


## KARMA

As users upvote or downvote posts and comments, this is reflected in the individual user's Karma. The higher a user's Karma, the more highly regarded that user may be in the community. For SS/TA Teams, understanding how much an SOC is interacting with and using Reddit could be supplemented by knowledge of the SOC's Karma points.

### To see a user's Karma points

On the Reddit mobile app, swipe right, then tap the Karma number to see the post and comment Karma. On the Reddit redesign, hover over the name of the user to see their Karma. On the older version of Reddit (for cached purposes), the post and comment Karma points are viewable from the upper right side of the front page.



## BANS

By not adhering to Reddit etiquette, a user can be banned. When a user is banned, they can no longer post or comment. However, the user will still be able to view content. However, once a user has been banned, typically there is no coming back.

Subreddit bans are done by the specific subreddit moderators: This is at their sole discretion. If banned from a subreddit, there is an option to reach out to the moderator and ask for reinstatement. However, depending on the reason for the ban, it is unlikely the moderator will agree to reinstate the user.

## REDDIT LANGUAGE

**AITAH / YTA / NTA / ETA:** A subreddit where people will put their situations for others to judge if the original poster (OP) was an "asshole" or not. In order, the acronyms follow; Am I the asshole / You're the asshole / Not the asshole / Everyone is the asshole.

**Alt Accounts:** Alternative user account.

**Note:** *Alternative accounts are important for SS/TA Teams to understand, as it is common for users on most platforms and social media to have them.*

**Sockpuppets/Throwaway:** This is a Reddit-specific definition. These accounts are alternate accounts used by Redditors to speak from a perspective different than that of the creator's recognized username. These accounts differ from ordinary Alt accounts as they often express controversial or negative opinions, rants, or trolls (see Troll definition below). In some cases, a sockpuppet may be shared amongst a group of users, for such purposes as moderation, vote brigading, or trolling. Not all Alt accounts are sockpuppets.

**Troll:** A user who posts inflammatory, insincere, digressive, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community, with the intent of provoking readers into displaying emotional responses or manipulating others' perceptions.

**AMA:** "Ask Me Anything"; also, a subreddit called "r/AMA."

**NSFW:** "Not Safe for Work"; primarily a warning for a link leading to pornography or extreme gore.

**OP:** "Original Poster"; the user who made the original submission that is now being commented on.

**TL;DR: "Too Long; Didn't Read";** comes before or after a wall of text that a poster or commenter may include as a shorter description of what they wrote about for people who do not want to take the time to read the full post. Sometimes inserted by another commentator to explain an article or previous comment.

**Viewable Activity:** Users can see other user's posts and comments but cannot see what other users have liked or what they are subscribed to.

**IMO/IMHO:** "In My Opinion" / "In My Humble/Honest Opinion."

**Cakeday:** The day a user joins Reddit.

**Power User:** A user with a high karma score, whose username is recognizable to a large group of people on Reddit – often very frequent posters.

**X-post:** Indicates something that has been posted in multiple subreddits.

**TIL:** "Today, I learned..."

**That's the Joke or thatsthejoke.jpg:** Indicates the commenter has just pointed out the humor in a joke, especially if the source of the humor is obvious.

**THIS:** Indicates a user agrees with or wants to draw attention to a comment.

When coming across terms that you are unsure of the meaning or context, there are a few techniques and tools to help understand these terms better such as [Urban Dictionary](#) or the [Reddit Glossary](#).

## 4CHAN



### What is 4chan?

4chan is a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images. There are boards dedicated to a variety of topics, from Japanese animation and culture to videogames, music, and photography. Users do not need to register an account before participating in the community. Feel free to click on a board below that interests you and jump right in!

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the [Rules](#) before posting, and read the [FAQ](#) if you wish to learn more about how to use the site.

Launched to the public on October 1, 2003, 4chan is described as an image-based bulletin board with more than 22 million unique monthly visitors.<sup>2</sup> Users primarily share a variety of images accompanied by comments in a thread-like format, similar to Reddit. Posts are known as “threads” and always start with an image. 4chan is unique from many other interactive platforms as there is no registration process. Most users leave the name field blank, as it is optional, which automatically generates the name “anonymous” on the thread.

There are specific image boards on 4chan for specific topics, ranging from Japanese anime to video games, with each board being assigned a semi-random name. The Random board is called the “/b/” board, where users can post completely random images and comments. Much of the content on the /b/ board involves shocking material such as pornographic images and racist or misogynistic comments. 4chan is not a website that SS/TA Teams will need to visit often, but it is important to understand the language that is associated with the website and be aware of its use by individuals.

Boards					filter ▼
<b><u>Japanese Culture</u></b>	<b><u>Interests</u></b>	<b><u>Creative</u></b>	<b><u>Other</u></b>	<b><u>Adult (NSFW)</u></b>	
Anime & Manga	Comics & Cartoons	Oekaki	Business & Finance	Sexy Beautiful Women	
Anime/Cute	Technology	Papercraft & Origami	Travel	Hardcore	
Anime/Wallpapers	Television & Film	Photography	Fitness	Handsome Men	
Mecha	Weapons	Food & Cooking	Paranormal	Hentai	
Cosplay & EGL	Auto	Artwork/Critique	Advice	Ecchi	
Cute/Male	Animals & Nature	Wallpapers/General	LGBT	Yuri	
Flash	Traditional Games	Literature	Pony	Hentai/Alternative	
Transportation	Sports	Music	Current News	Yaoi	
Otaku Culture	Extreme Sports	Fashion	Worksafe Requests	Torrents	
Virtual YouTubers	Professional Wrestling	3DCG	Very Important Posts	High Resolution	
<b><u>Video Games</u></b>	Science & Math	Graphic Design	<b><u>Misc. (NSFW)</u></b>	Adult GIF	
Video Games	History & Humanities	Do-It-Yourself	Random	Adult Cartoons	
Video Game Generals	International	Worksafe GIF	ROBOT9001	Adult Requests	
Video Games/Multiplayer	Outdoors	Quests	Politically Incorrect		
Video Games/Mobile	Toys		International/Random		
Pokémon			Cams & Meetups		
Retro Games			Shit 4chan Says		
Video Games/RPG					
Video Games/Strategy					

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4chan>

## NAVIGATION OF 4CHAN

On the 4chan homepage, users will see a list of boards to choose from, such as Japanese Culture, Video Games, Interests, Creative, and Adult. Before being able to access a board, a pop-up disclaimer will appear that must be accepted before continuing. Once a user opens a board, there will be a horizontal menu bar at the top of the webpage where other board names appear; this gives users the ability to navigate quickly from board to board.

[a / c / g / k / m / o / p / v / vg / vm / vmg / vr / vrbg / vst / w] [vip / qa] [cm / lgbt] [3 / adv / an / biz / cgl / ck / co / diy / fa / fit / gd / his / int / jp / lit / mlp / mu / n / news / out / po / pw / qst / sci / sp / tg / toy / trv / tv / vp / vt / wsg / wsr / x / xs] [Edit] [Settings] [Search] [Mobile] [Home]

### Disclaimer



To access this section of 4chan (the "website"), you understand and agree to the following:

1. The content of this website is for mature audiences only and may not be suitable for minors. If you are a minor or it is illegal for you to access mature images and language, do not proceed.
2. This website is presented to you AS IS, with no warranty, express or implied. By clicking "I Agree," you agree not to hold 4chan responsible for any damages from your use of the website, and you understand that the content posted is not owned or generated by 4chan, but rather by 4chan's users.
3. As a condition of using this website, you agree to comply with the "[Rules](#)" of 4chan, which are also linked on the home page. Please read the Rules carefully, because they are important.

Accept

Cancel

## THREADS

4chan posts are typically deleted within a few hours of creation. The platform does not allow any board to have more than 10 pages at a time, meaning that threads expire, or are pruned at a relatively high rate. Most content is only available for a few hours or a few days, which is why timely documentation is important to SS/TA Teams. By the time a post has been brought to the attention of an SS/TA Team member, it may have already been deleted. When gathering information from 4chan, there will often be limited availability, therefore SS/TA Teams should understand that screenshots are quite common as frequent users of 4chan know that the posts and threads are only available for a limited time.

To start a thread on any one of 4chan's boards, users can click the Start a New Thread link and upload an image.

## [Start a New Thread]

<b>Name</b>	Anonymous
<b>Options</b>	
<b>Subject</b>	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Post"/>
<b>Comment</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Verification</b>	<input type="button" value="Get Captcha"/> <input type="text" value="TYPE THE CAPTCHA HERE"/> <input type="button" value="?"/> <input type="text"/> 4chan Pass users can bypass this verification. <a href="#">[Learn More]</a> <a href="#">[Login]</a>
<b>File</b>	<input type="button" value="Choose File"/> No file chosen <input type="checkbox"/> Spoiler?

• Please read the Rules and FAQ before posting.

To comment on a post is to reply to the thread. A reply does not require the use of an image to post.

## [Post a Reply]

<b>Reply to Thread No.576779284</b> <input type="button" value="X"/>	
<b>Name</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Options</b>	
<b>Comment</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Verification</b>	<input type="button" value="Get Captcha"/> <input type="text" value="TYPE THE CAPTCHA HERE"/> <input type="button" value="?"/> <input type="text"/>
<b>File</b>	<input type="button" value="Choose File"/> No file chosen <input type="checkbox"/> Spoiler?
<input type="button" value="Post"/>	

## 4CHAN LANGUAGE/TOPICS

**LOLCats:** These are described as funny photographs of cats with superimposed text on them.

**Dusty the Cat:** A reference to an abused cat in Oklahoma whose video was posted to YouTube. 4chan tracked down the cat's owner and sent his details to the police.

**Advice Animals:** Reference to pictures of animals or humans with stereotypical or archetypal captions superimposed on them.

**Rage Comics:** A genre of simple, line-drawn web comics – many of them being familiar characters recognizable from memes.

**Rickrolling:** The practice of sending someone a link to the music video for Rick Astley’s “Never Gonna Give You Up”.

**Chocolate Rain:** A reference to the event where 4chan users swarmed the music video for Tay Zonday’s “Chocolate Rain”, moving it up the YouTube charts and transforming it into a meme.

**Celebgate:** The leak of dozens of stolen celebrity nude photos. While these are no longer available on 4chan, they still exist as downloadable torrents across the web.

**Gamergate:** An ongoing movement to expose “corruption” in video game journalism which was started by 4chan users. Gamergate has since reportedly ruined the lives of several female gamers and commentators which spawned a larger discussion about the way the gaming industry treats women. The Cyberbullying of Jessi Slaughter: One of the earliest high-profile incidents of cyberbullying, where 4chan users sent death threats and calls to an 11-year-old girl.

**Google-Bombing or Poll-Bombing:** The practice of voting or searching for the same terms en masse to either sabotage an online vote or make a topic trend artificially. In the past, 4chan has successfully gotten a swastika to trend on Google.

**Fake Bomb Threats:** A vast number of threat hoaxers have posted mass bomb and shooting threats to 4chan’s boards, prompting several arrests and evacuations.

**#CutForBieber:** A Twitter hashtag developed on 4chan that encouraged young Justin Bieber fans to cut themselves, or self-harm to demonstrate their love for the performer.

**#LeakForJLaw:** A similar social media “prank” to #CutForBieber that encouraged women to post their nude photos in support of Jennifer Lawrence, who was the target of having her photos leaked online. Bikini Bridge: An invented beauty/fitness trend that encouraged women to lose enough weight to create a gap between the bones of their hips and pelvis.

**Apple Wave:** An alleged “feature” on the iPhone 6, hyped by 4chan users on Twitter, where people believed they could charge their phones by microwaving them.

**Ebola-chan:** A racist cartoon mascot for Ebola that became a hoax directed at vulnerable West Africans.

The screenshot shows the top section of the 8kun website. On the left is the 8kun logo, a yellow number 8 with the word 'kun' below it. To the right of the logo is a welcome message: "Welcome to 8kun. Speak freely - legally." Below this is a note: "On 8kun, you can create your own imageboard for free with no experience or programming knowledge needed." To the right of the welcome message is a warning in red text: "Warning: some boards on 8kun might have content of an adult, mature, or offensive nature. Please cease use of this website if you are under 18 years of age and/or if it is illegal for you to view such content. On 8kun, boards and posts are user-created and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the 8kun Administration. Any content that violates the laws of the United States of America will be deleted and the poster will be banned." Below the welcome message is a link: "The 8kun privacy policy has been updated. [September 30, 2020]". Below that is a quote: "What do you do with the mad that you feel, when you feel so mad you could bite? When the whole wide world seems oh-so-wrong, and nothing you do seems very right?" attributed to Fred Rogers. At the bottom of the screenshot is a row of five promotional images: a circular logo for 8kun, a box for 'SLICED AMERICANA', a box for '8kun SHIRTS', another box for 'SLICED AMERICANA', and a yellow box that says 'Get Yours!'. Below these images is a green-bordered box containing the text "Be a free speech hero! Donate →" and a progress bar showing 7%.

8kun was formally known as 8chan before they were removed and had to rebrand.

8kun began as a haven for graphic and/or illegal content that was not allowed on 4chan in 2014. Over the next 4 years, it became a site that took in some of the internet's worst content, including manifestos belonging to killers who committed acts of violence. These acts would often come in after the perpetrator had spent time on 8kun.

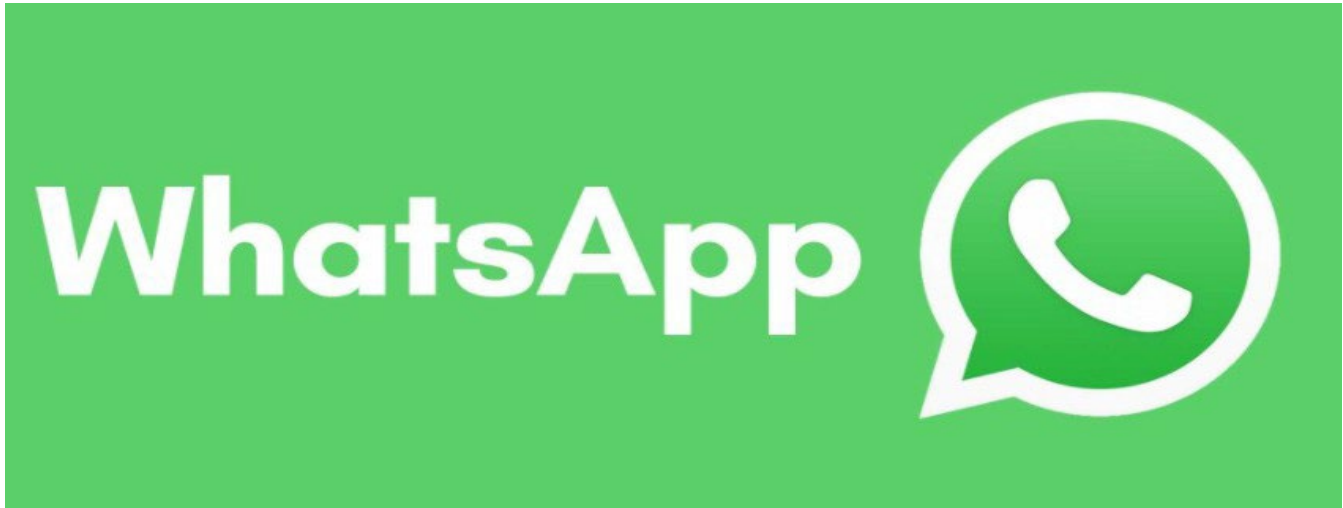
8kun is another image board website but has even less moderation than what 4chan had on what was posted. It has become a significant gathering place online for white supremacists and right-wing nationalists. Users have taken advantage of the ability to remain anonymous and face almost zero repercussions for their actions online. In 2019, the platform was forced offline after a series of killings. The killers used 8chan to spread manifestos and commentary of what they were planning to do or had done. Because of this, Cloudflare and other providers elected to cease working with the site.

Other service providers have since hosted 8kun, therefore, SS/TA Teams should be aware of this platform and its accessibility.

The Involuntary Celibate ("Incel") community is also well known to use these chan forums to communicate and discuss their beliefs, often leading to misogynistic and hateful threads about women and what these users would want to do to them.

Chan boards have been around since the late 1990s. SS/TA Teams need to understand the language and communities that are formed here. If an SOC is discussing topics that are often found on these platforms, including inordinate knowledge of incidents involving mass-killings, platforms such as 8Kun may be a potential source where this user is getting their information. It is worth noting that both 4chan and 8Kun do track IP addresses and neither are completely anonymous in this sense. Both have stated publicly that when information is requested, they will comply with law enforcement.

## WHATSAPP



Launched in 2009 and purchased by Meta in 2014, WhatsApp has become one of the most used online messaging platforms. This is partially due to WhatsApp being a free application, built without advertising, and having a significant existing user base. Another feature that makes WhatsApp so popular is end-to-end encryption: This ensures that user messages are private and secure.

Every message and call made through WhatsApp is encrypted by default – this means that neither the app nor the parent company, Facebook, can see the content of user’s messages. To further protect user privacy, two-factor authentication (“2FA”) is also supported as a 6-digit PIN.

Although these two companies may not be able to see the exact messages sent by users, it is worth noting that Meta does share data between their platforms, which includes WhatsApp.

### INSTALLATION/SETUP

WhatsApp is free and only requires a phone number and a mobile device to sign up.

Users can begin installation by downloading the app to their mobile device through the App Store on iPhone or Play Store on Android. The link to download WhatsApp on your device can also be found on the [WhatsApp website](#).

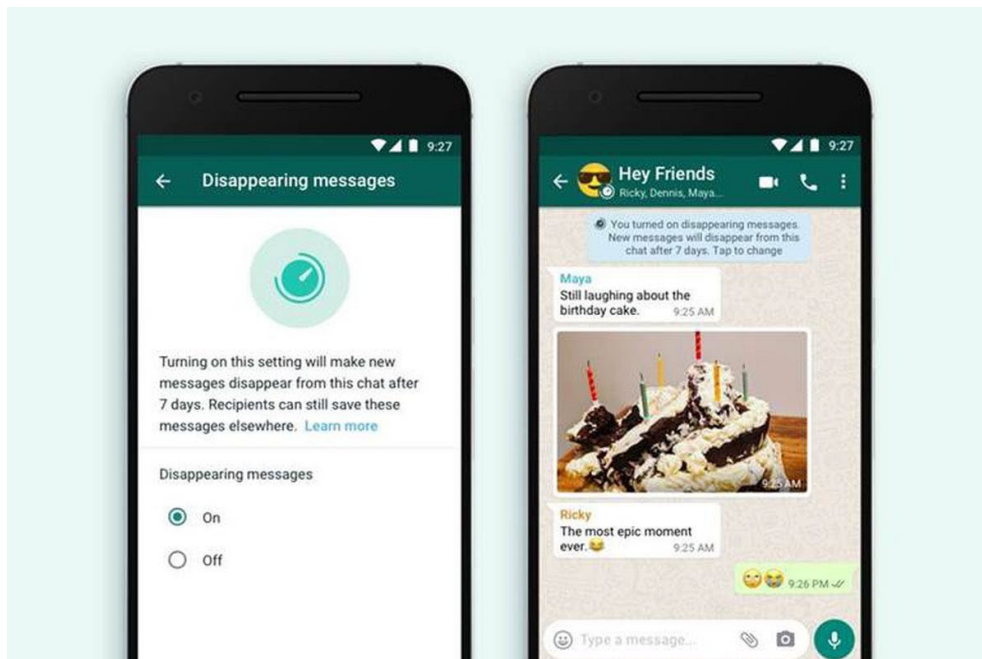
Once downloaded, the user can launch the app and accept the requested permissions to begin using it. The user can then enter their phone number and tap “Confirm”. This will send the user an SMS text confirmation code, which they will then use to confirm their identity within WhatsApp.

The user is also given the option to import existing contacts from their device.

## HOW TO START A CHAT

On Android, a chat can be initiated by tapping on the green chat bubble on the bottom right of the screen. From here, the user can select the contact(s) they wish to chat with from the list. Selecting multiple contacts will initiate a group chat. If there is already a pre-existing chat with a user, the chat will be opened with the previous messages included. Now, the user can type out their message and tap on the arrow icon that appears alongside the text box to send it. Users can also send pictures or files by tapping on the paperclip or camera icons at the bottom of the screen.

On iOS, a chat can be initiated by tapping on the icon on the top right corner of the screen. This will bring up the user's contact list, where they can now select what user(s) they wish to chat with. If there is already a pre-existing chat with this user, the chat will be opened with the previous messages included. There is also an option to create a "New Group" and begin a group chat with multiple users. To send photos or files, the user can tap on the addition symbol on the bottom left of the screen. This will lead to a prompt where the user can select "Documents" to send pre-existing photos or videos, or take them directly through the app.



*Photo courtesy of The Verge.*

## CALLING

WhatsApp Calling is a popular free feature, accessed by using WiFi or mobile data. WhatsApp is not a service provider for telephone capabilities but has become a free alternative calling solution in many countries where there is a price for phone calls – especially those that are international and typically very expensive.

Starting a call via WhatsApp is simple. The user opens a chat window and taps on the phone icon on the top right to initiate a call. This can be done through both one-on-one chats and group chats. The process is virtually identical for video chats – users just click the video camera icon rather than the phone icon to start a video call.

## SIGNAL



Signal is a platform that is built along the same lines as WhatsApp, but has much more secure encryption in comparison to its competitors. Signal is free to use and privacy-focused for both messaging and voice-talk purposes. It is available on both Android and iOS devices through the app store, as well as on desktop. A phone number is all that is required to join. Once a user is registered, they can begin messaging with others, as well as call and start group chats with end-to-end encryption. Signal also has features that are included in other messaging apps, such as sending gifs, stickers, and emojis.

Like in WhatsApp, users can set messages to disappear after certain customizable time frames. Signal is a non-profit organization that collects minimal data from users, including the phone numbers and personal contact lists used to sign up for the platform.

### How To Join

Phone number registration is the first step to signing up. From there, users will receive an SMS text message with a verification code to enter on the sign-up screen. Once verified, the platform will create a contact list for the user of all their contacts that are also using Signal. The user can message or call all the people on their contact list that are also using Signal and can add any additional contacts that they wish manually.

## TELEGRAM



# Telegram

Telegram operates along the same lines as Signal and WhatsApp and facilitates encrypted voice messages and video calling in one-on-one conversations. Group voice chats, however, are not encrypted. Security experts have even disputed the security of Telegram due to its cryptography being untested technology.<sup>3</sup> It is also important to note that Telegram was the preferred communication platform for ISIS.<sup>4</sup>

Text-based messaging via Telegram is also not encrypted (unlike its counterparts; Signal and WhatsApp). This means that the platform can read user messages and may pass them along to law enforcement. It is unclear if the reason for this relates to the controversies Telegram had with its association with ISIS.

A phone number is required to sign up for Telegram, and users will receive an SMS text verification code to verify their identity. At times, Telegram may verify identity via a phone call.

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<sup>3</sup> [Four cryptographic vulnerabilities in Telegram - Technology Org](#)

<sup>4</sup> [How Telegram Became The App Of Choice For ISIS | HuffPost Latest News](#)

## WORRISOME CONTENT

Teams must be aware of worrisome chats that can center around the exchanging of intimate images and videos. Often, people depicted in the images are not aware that they are being shared (i.e. sextortion cases). One-on-one and group encrypted platforms pose a significant opportunity for SOCs to send and receive files such as intimate images of others. SS/TA Teams should become familiar with law enforcement guides for encrypted platforms that are used by their students.

## ANONYMOUS QUESTION/MESSAGING APPS

Anonymous messages and questions have been synonymous with major social media platforms since the inception of apps. Bathroom Wall, which was featured on Facebook, involved users writing rumors, questions, ratings, and other conversations about others on a digital “bathroom wall”.

These platforms often involve users from their own communities—those who attend the same school or district. Anonymous communication with users that people may know in real life can give some a false sense of freedom to act in ways they may not in person.

Anonymous apps meant for messaging other users have consistently encountered cyberbullying, sextortion, and threats. These issues arise often and have caused platforms, such as Secret App and Sarahah, to shut down completely.

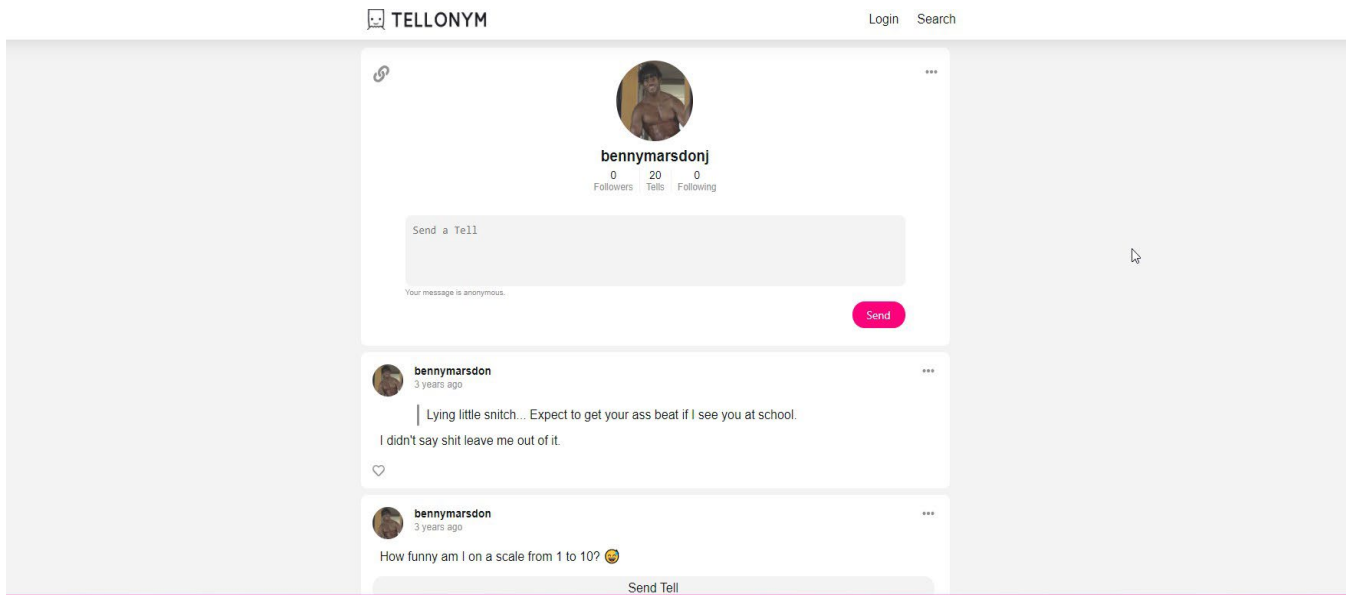
Present-day anonymous apps often use keywords in the app for targeted advertising, as they do not collect much user data. This means that specific keywords will trigger a set of ads that match—thus generating revenue. Many of these platforms operate with the same ideology as the chan platforms, believing anonymity equals free speech.

Social media platforms and anonymous apps often intersect in communities and school districts. A user who runs a “tea” or “confession” page will realize that not everyone is comfortable giving their identity when spreading gossip about themselves or others. Anonymous Instagram profiles will often have a link to a Tellonym or Ask.fm platform where the “tea” is collected. The same username will likely be shared between a “tea” page and an anonymous platform where users can submit their confessions. The confessions that are submitted are often screenshotted by the owner of the account and posted without identifiers on the Instagram page.

Other methods of anonymous posting can include a link on a social media bio to a Google Doc that asks for anonymous submissions when opened, or direct messages (“DMs”) that are screenshotted with the identifiers removed.

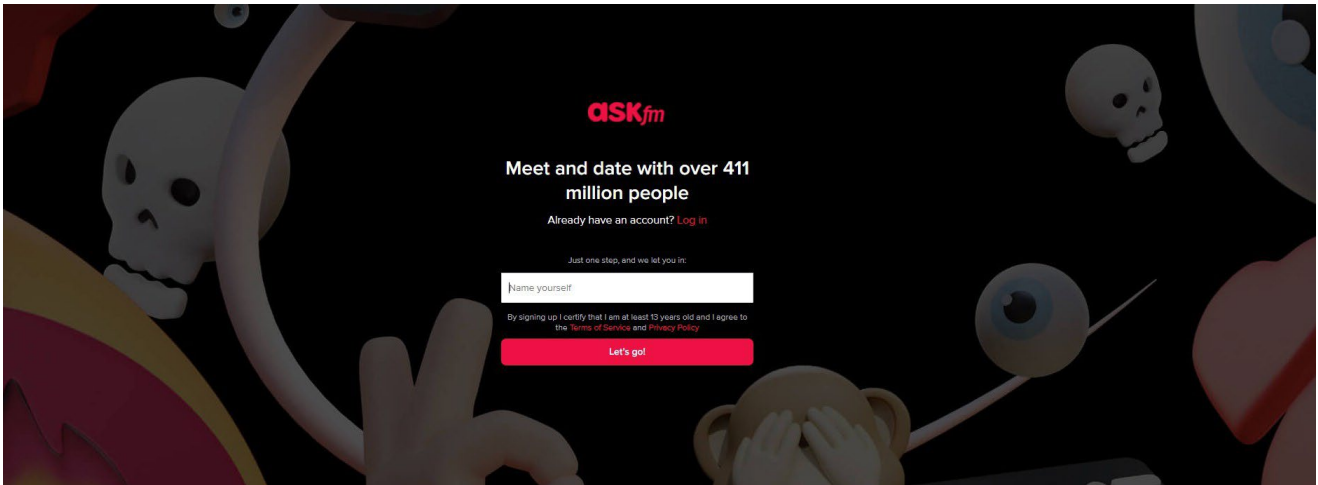


[Tellonym](#) allows users to “answer anonymous questions and ask others the things you have never dared before.”<sup>5</sup> Users often share the link to their Tellonym with others through their social media profiles on platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, and X (Formerly Twitter) and can follow and send each other anonymous public messages. There is a home feed that displays all messages addressed to a user, and push notifications alert users whenever a new message or “Tell” is delivered.



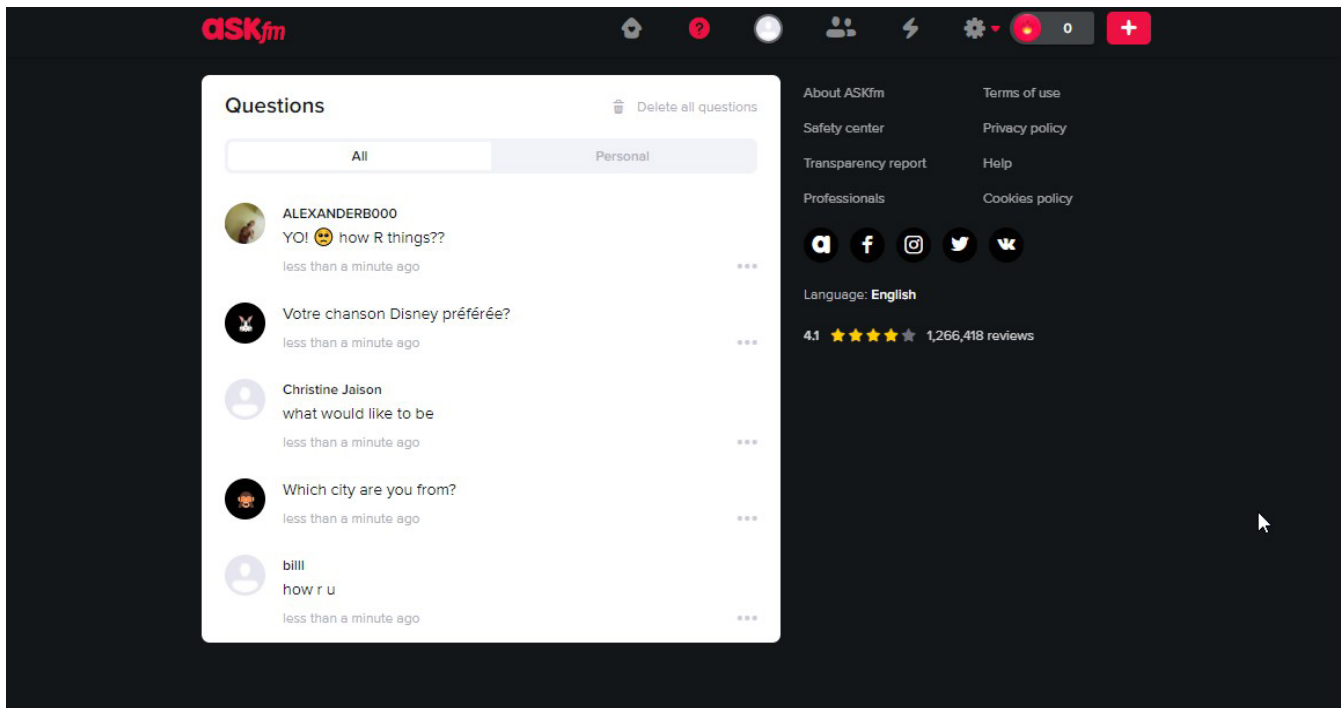
<sup>5</sup> [Tellonym](#)

# ASK.FM



[Ask.fm](https://ask.fm) is a free platform that allows users to post anonymous comments and questions to another user's profile. A user can sign up by creating an account through Ask.fm, or sign in using a Facebook or X account. The app makes it easy to share content on other social media sites, such as Facebook and X. On Ask.fm, users have the option of cross-posting questions and answers to their Facebook and X feeds and operate the Ask.fm app from within Facebook.

Recently, Ask.fm has also expanded its marketing messaging to reflect that its platform is a place to “meet and date with over 411 million people.”<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> [Ask.fm](https://ask.fm)

## VAULT APPS



Access to a device will assist SS/TA Teams with information gathering. Knowing where to look when inside the device is imperative. Not always will the platforms our teams are looking for be easy to find. Vault applications are used to hide apps that a user may not want others to know they have on their device. They work as a vault, often masked by appearing as a different app on the home screen. Once clicked, the app will open not as the app displayed, but instead open as the one it is masking. Commonly, vault apps will appear as calculators. By entering a certain string of 4-8 digits, the app will open a media library hidden within the fake calculator.

For SS/TA Teams, it is important to have permission to be inside the device, as some of these vault apps have a photo-taking feature that snaps a photo of the individual who enters the passcode to the vault app incorrectly and sends the photo to the owner of the device. Deleting the vault app may not be sufficient, as many of these apps are linked to another device. The other device is often a laptop and uses the cloud to share information between devices.

Private SMS and phone call information can also be stored inside of these apps. This is important for SS/TA Teams when gathering information on who an SOC is communicating with and assessing negative peer groups.

Snapchat itself has a “My Eyes Only” feature that is in the memories folder. It is a passcode-protected vault feature that can sync photos and videos from a device’s camera roll/gallery. To learn more, see the Snapchat Micro Module.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

International Center for Digital Threat Assessment® (ICDTA): <https://icdta.org/>

Safer Schools Together: <https://saferschoolstogether.com/>

All ICDTA® Modules: <https://icdta.org/modules/>

Digital Threat Assessment® (DTA) Training: <https://icdta.org/product/digital-threat-assessment-training/>



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