04.09.2018

White Paper

An innovative open collaboration platform to protect journalists and their sources

Introduction

Enough is a platform for journalists, sources and human rights defenders to communicate privately and securely. It starts as a service offering the same functions and level of security as an online storage provider (such as DropBox, Google Drive etc.). To match greater security requirements, Enough can be upgraded progressively starting with Two Factor Authentication (2FA) up to an airgap machine dedicated to decrypting classified documents.

Mostly, its users will be journalists and civil society representatives who do not require high-level security, because the cloud option is simply "enough" for them. As they learn about more complicated techniques, Enough adapts and can be upgraded to activate the corresponding features. In the long run, the goal is to contribute to a change in culture to enable its users with the most secure communication and effectively protect their privacy.

Enough is also a community of individuals providing support, training and hosting. Freelancers and organizations supporting investigative journalist or human rights defenders are welcome to join and get the help they need.

The Problem

One of the major challenges in the digital era is the establishment of secure communication and data storage facilities. In a continuously advancing process of digitalization, online communication has become the norm and involves an increasing number of intermediaries. At the same time, the access of governments and corporations to citizens' personal data through said intermediaries as well as gaps in shield laws create an imbalance in power, significantly jeopardizing freedom of the press and individual privacy by impeding the work of those who defend them.

This concerns journalists, human rights defenders, and their sources in particular, as by default, they often work on matters concerning breaches of civil liberties, democratic principles, human rights, abuse of power and other forms of misconduct. How can they perform when their data and communications are handled by the very institutions they are trying to monitor? Large corporations and governments have shown tendencies to use this imbalance in power to their advantage when they have reason to believe their interests are threatened. And since most countries lack effective whistleblower protection measures and far-reaching freedom of information laws, the lives and livelihoods of courageous individuals are at risk when they share sensitive information to protect the interest of the public.

To safeguard civil liberties it is thus important to counterbalance this trend by developing and supporting tools to allow civil society to maintain control. Technical solutions offering the necessary privacy, such as encrypted channels or data storage that do not require an intermediary, can significantly minimize these risks while at the same time allowing information to flow. However, in many cases, there is a lack of technical expertise to apply these tools: Sources have no time to learn, journalists are no technical experts and NGOs have limited financial resources. They need solutions tailored to their needs, cheap and unencumbered by details that are not directly relevant to them.

Proposed Solution

To respond to this situation, we propose the communication platform Enough. Based on Free Software technology and developed by a decentralized community, it offers journalists and human rights defenders a way of communicating and exchanging documents with their sources. It is offers the same features as well-known solutions (DropBox, Google Drive, etc.), thus providing a familiar user experience. And it removes the need for an intermediary which guarantees independence in data management.

Additional options of the interface include the possibility to store documents in an encrypted cloud system, as well as additional, but voluntary functions to enhance security and privacy.

Both of these features – an easy-to-use, familiarly designed data management platform combined with decentralized, encryption technology allowing increasing levels of security – contribute to a better understanding of technical solutions to enhance privacy and data protection. Enough underlines and reinforces the benefits of encryption measures, while at the same time demystifying their application. As a result, journalists and human rights defenders become more autonomous in digitally protecting their sources, the information they are handling and ultimately themselves. This is why Enough – though it does facilitate the exchange of documents between sources and recipients – should not be understood as a leaking platform in the traditional sense. Instead, it is set up in a manner that encourages autonomy and learning new security concepts.

For sources, Enough provides a simple platform to submit documents. The anonymous drop system significantly enhances their personal security by safeguarding their identity.

How it Works

Organizations or individuals who employ Enough will be provided with access to a Free Software data management service, which can be accessed through a web browser, a desktop client or via a smart phone app. The service can be hosted via institutional or private servers, or via the servers of the Enough community. Depending on the users of Enough – whether they are individuals or part of a consortium – the setup is reasonably flexible.

The Application for Journalists

At the base, Enough works like any other cloud storage service. It also includes a function that allows to receive and access files which have been submitted from outside. Due to the Free Software nature of the cloud service provider, journalists maintain control over the files they store within Enough. The risk of information being tracked is reduced.

With increased understanding of the benefits of the service as well as familiarity with its technical implications and options, journalists may choose additional levels of security within their personal settings. These include Two Factor Authentication, End-to-End encryption, Tor Hidden Services etc. At the ultimate level, journalists may choose the option of introducing an airgap machine to decrypt documents, granting the highest level of security and a requirement for SecureDrop.

The Application for Sources

Sources access the application via a single web page, which is linked from the website of the journalist, consortium or NGO they wish to contact. This allows them to share relevant information anonymously and securely via an encrypted channel.

The Enough Community

A horizontal community of volunteers sustains Enough. The individuals who constitute this community have different professional backgrounds, but are united by the aim to promote freedom of expression through the empowerment of journalists, human rights defenders and their sources.

The Enough community is the main developer and promoter of the service, provides advice on its use as well as technical support in application and self-hosting. For independent journalists who do not have a server of their own at their disposal, it provides the necessary infrastructure to employ the tool. The community does not have access to the content of files stored by users.

Members of the community are part of the broader open collaboration movement, which in itself is based on general egalitarianism, meritocracy and self-organization. They aim at contributing to an increase in transparency, fairness, equality and mutual respect, because they believe that these principles are essential drivers of positive social change. The Enough community is built upon this vision in order to exemplify the positive impact of its effective implementation. Beyond its practical application, Enough in itself is also designed as an opportunity for others to join this vision.

The community is organized in a decentralized, horizontal manner, distributing authority equally. To ensure that members interact in a well-defined, respectful and sustainable way that allows creative collaboration, it has established a Code of Conduct[1], which governs any interaction between members and users.

Benefits

Enough immediately contributes to the protection of whistleblowers

Enough provides a simple, easily applicable information sharing system, which allows documents to be sent to journalists securely. Whistleblowers' disclosures often relate to drawbacks stemming from legal grey zones, which constitutes a challenge in the establishment of normative grounds to defend their actions. At the same time, their disclosures – such as the case of Antoine Deltour or Edward Snowden – have often had significant relevance in the protection of the public interest, empowered citizens to make informed political decisions and contributed to positive social change.

In an environment where personal information tracked by digital intermediaries can easily be made available to the regulators because of a lack of legislative measures, whistleblowers take very high risks when making information available to professionals. Providing a practical tool that considers this practical framework and works around it allows information to flow without putting whistleblowers at unnecessary risk.

Enough upskills journalists on a technical level

The adaptable design of Enough encourages journalists to become more aware of technical solutions that not only protect their sources, but ultimately themselves and their work. In the course of our user research, many journalists expressed the awareness of the benefits of using more secure means of communication. At the same time, they stated a lack of technical skills as the main obstacle to employ them.

1https://enough.community/blog/2018/07/22/code-of-conduct/

Because Enough is set up similarly to technological solutions journalists are used to work with on a daily basis, the threshold to using a more secure version is much lower than when applying an entirely new tool. Through its flexibility in upgrading security measures, users choose themselves when they have capacities to learn a new feature. By offering the option of not only receiving and storing documents, but also sharing them with colleagues, Enough launches a snowball effect, facilitating further distribution of the tool.

Enough contributes to a standardization of encryption technology

At the same time, Enough contributes to a changed perception of encryption technology, and demystifies its application. Users can rely on the support of a community, which provides technical expertise and trainings for both institutions as well as individual journalists, according to their needs. Direct contact with and the integration into a network of experts leads users to become more tech-savvy and aware of the potential of technical solutions in facilitating their work themselves.

In the long-run, the tool thus feeds into to a change in culture regarding the perception of encryption technology as something reserved for experts. Ultimately, journalists become familiar with the technical solutions that are best suited to protecting their sources and their work.

Enough feeds into overall attempts to strengthen free speech and freedom of information

Finally, Enough strengthens free speech and freedom of information as vital features of a meaningful discourse in societies. The value of the application of privacy enhancing technologies in the protection of freedom of expression as a human right has been acknowledged on multiple levels[2]. Especially considering the increasing limitations of these values on a political level, it constitutes an empowering bottom-up approach for citizens to exercise their right to freedom of expression, and a counterbalance to mechanisms of oppression.

2See: United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures. Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 2018
https://freedex.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2015/files/2018/07/EncryptionAnonymityFollowUpReport.pdf
UNESCO Report "Keystones to foster inclusive Knowledge Societies. Access to information and knowledge, Freedom of Expression, Privacy, and Ethics on a Global Internet", 2015
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002325/232563E.pdf