

EXCLUSIVE

WIKILEAKS: THE NEXT GENERATION

Like their forerunner, the fledgling whistle-blowing sites sprouting up are a mixture of complex engineering, earnest campaigning, muckraking and self-promotion.



REUTERS/ GREENLEAKS/PELLE RINK/HANDOUT

BY MARK HOSENBALL
BERLIN, JAN 28

All across Europe, from Brussels to the Balkans, a new generation of WikiLeaks-style websites is sprouting.

Like their forerunner, the fledgling whistle-blowing sites are a chaotic mixture

of complex systems engineering, earnest campaigning, muckraking and self-promotion.

And though their goals are varied, the activists behind the sites told Reuters that they share one major concern: they all vow not to repeat mistakes they believe were made by Julian Assange, the controversial

WikiLeaks creator.

The proliferation of websites to encourage, facilitate and shelter leakers is so anarchic that two aspiring anti-corporate leak sites are both claiming rights to the rubric "GreenLeaks" and muttering about legal consequences if the other side doesn't back down.

The most closely watched rollout in the leak-hosting world was the launch on Thursday of OpenLeaks.org, a site whose principal creator, German transparency activist Daniel Domscheit-Berg, was once Assange's closest collaborator.

Domscheit-Berg, who used the pseudonym "Daniel Schmitt" as Assange's official WikiLeaks co-spokesman, says he doesn't believe, as Assange initially did, that confidential material should just be dumped on the Internet. The bare-bones mission statement posted on OpenLeaks describes Domscheit-Berg's vision as both a safe-deposit box and a social networking site for leakers and their consumers.

Other WikiLeaks copycats, spinoffs and wannabes are germinating: activists say they have learned of recent launches of leak-accepting websites focused on specialized topics or regions -- from Russia and the European Union bureaucracy to international trade and the pharmaceutical industry.

Major news organizations are also moving to establish web-based mechanisms for receiving leaks directly, such as electronic "drop boxes" which would enable leakers to feed the media outlets directly, cutting out middlemen like Assange.

"THE ARCHITECT"

THE MOST AMBITIOUS and potentially far-reaching WikiLeaks spinoff to surface this week is Domscheit-Berg's OpenLeaks, which its founder describes as a mechanism both for putting together leakers with knowledgeable recipients and for linking leak-consuming organizations to each other.

The burgeoning Wikeworld has been eagerly anticipating Domscheit-Berg's next project since his falling out with Assange last year. The two became estranged following an e-mail exchange in which Assange summarily suspended Domscheit-Berg as WikiLeaks co-spokesman for allegedly leaking information to the media about growing concern among other WikiLeaks activists about Assange's private life.

Domscheit-Berg subsequently quit WikiLeaks, denouncing Assange for "acting like an emperor or slave trader." He took with him other more shadowy figures who had been important collaborators with Assange in creating key elements of WikiLeaks' leak-handling systems architecture.

One of the defectors was a programmer known to most insiders simply as "The Architect." Described by colleagues as at least as brilliant at programming as Assange,



WIKI 1.0: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange speaks to the media on the steps of the High Court, in London December 16, 2010. REUTERS/STEFAN WERMUTH

BLOG

Find more Reuters special reports at our blog The Deep End here:
<http://link.reuters.com/heq72q>

The Architect was the principal designer of the systems WikiLeaks used to produce Assange's greatest public triumphs last year, the distribution of hundreds of thousands of classified U.S. government reports.

In a conversation with Reuters on Thursday from Davos, Switzerland, where he appeared on a World Economic Forum panel devoted to "Confidentiality and Transparency," Domscheit-Berg said his WikiLeaks experience had convinced him of the wrongness of Assange's view that the website should publish raw information and let others sort through it. (Assange's approach subsequently appears to have matured, as demonstrated by WikiLeaks current snail-like release of its cache of 250,000 U.S. diplomatic cables.)

Domscheit-Berg said WikiLeaks taught him that huge efforts have to be made to authenticate, analyze, filter and if necessary redact leaked secret documents before making them public. He said that WikiLeaks also demonstrated that a top-down group like

WikiLeaks, which Assange by his own account rules like something of an absolute monarch, might not be the best model to undertake painstaking pre-publication reviews of complex, and potentially damaging, data.

He said his concept is to create a new network through which leakers of any kind -- government, corporate, environmental, whatever -- could make confidential submissions to groups that could make use of them. OpenLeaks itself would not evaluate, let alone publicly release, the information. Instead it would convey it from leaker to leakee.

The plan is to create a central web architecture for moving confidential documents from leaker to recipients, and then recruit organizations from the media, NGO world and labor movement, to become partners in the network he is creating.

With his system -- which is still being put together, and which, according to some activist sources, has had to postpone its launch date more than once -- would-be leakers could anonymously approach OpenLeaks to be connected with a group of OpenLeaks partners who would have the resources and expertise to process their data properly, or with a single leak recipient.

Leakers wanting to connect with a single recipient, such as a specific media outlet, would be able to. But Domscheit-Berg says



GREEN REBEL: Mads Bjerg, founder of the Greenleaks organisation, poses in this handout picture taken in Copenhagen, January 26, 2010. REUTERS/GREENLEAKS/PELLE RINK/HANDOUT

“WE WANT TO BE THE AUTHORITY WHEN IT COMES TO LEAKS ABOUT NATURE, THE CLIMATE AND THE ENVIRONMENT...THE VOICE OF THE EARTH... COUNTERINTELLIGENCE AGENCY FOR THE EARTH, YOU COULD SAY!”

that in most cases OpenLeaks’ practice would be that the individual media organization receiving a leak would have only a limited embargo period, usually a few weeks, to analyze the material and decide how or whether to use it.

After that, the leaked material would be shared with all partners in the OpenLeaks project. Domscheit-Berg says this system is designed both to provide leaks exposure to a wider circle of potential expertise and publicity and also to encourage partners to share more information among themselves.

“We’re trying to be a gatekeeper but actually enabling everyone else,” Domscheit-Berg said. If a leaker wanted the material never to be shared beyond a single initial recipient, he said, that could be arranged.

Domscheit-Berg said that at some point

he hoped to establish a foundation to help raise funds for not just OpenLeaks operations but also research legal and political issues related to transparency and disclosure.

He said none of the partners joining the OpenLeaks network would be asked to make any direct financial contribution, and that OpenLeaks would not generate revenue by brokering information. Instead, he said, OpenLeaks will suggest that potential partners with large servers contribute computer time or space to help build the network.

Some internet activists and journalists who heard details of Domscheit-Berg’s scheme before its official launch are already raising questions. They wonder whether the plan is too complicated and how the system will fulfill promises to leakers that their material

will only be shared with limited recipients if that’s what the leaker wants.

Domscheit-Berg said that leakers and partners would have to operate on a measure of “trust.” He declined to discuss the role “The Architect” or other activists would play in crafting OpenLeaks’ technical infrastructure, other than to acknowledge that some of his new site’s “technical people ... were with WikiLeaks.”

“COUNTERINTELLIGENCE FOR THE EARTH”

OF MORE IMMEDIATE interest to oil, mining and other natural resources industries might be the launch of two websites which say they intend to become conduits for corporate insiders wanting to blow the whistle on environmental abuses.

But the race to set up environmentally-oriented websites under the rubric "GreenLeaks" became slightly toxic earlier this week when groups of activists in Denmark and Germany, who say they have been working independently for months on creating infrastructures in cyberspace and assembling networks of lawyers and experts to process leaks, learned of each others' existence.

The rival groups were not pleased to discover they had become involved in a competition. Representatives of both groups say they are willing to discuss their visions with each other. But each side is also assessing possible legal moves. The leader of one of the groups told Reuters that his lawyers may file legal papers challenging his rivals' activities before the end of this week.

The creators of both "GreenLeaks" websites each say they came up with the idea independently and have already expended considerable energy working on both legal and technical aspects of their sites. As the rival sites' founders describe them, each site has its own quirks and merits, which in theory could complement each other. But for now, the two sites are glowering at each other, hoping their antagonist will blink first.

A group based in Denmark has registered the Internet domain name "GreenLeaks.org" and said it has applied to trademark it as well. Based in Copenhagen, the group is led by Internet advertising executive Mads Bjerg and backed by his boss Jacob Hagemann, head of Searcus, a Copenhagen ad agency that specializes in crafting ads linked to internet searches.

Bjerg's project has been endorsed by Birgitta Jonsdottir, a member of Parliament in Iceland who was once a close collaborator with WikiLeaks and Assange. (After Swedish authorities opened a sexual misconduct investigation against him, Jonsdottir fell out with Assange and denounced him.)

Bjerg has also been in contact with OpenLeaks via one of Domscheit-Berg's collaborators, an Icelandic former WikiLeaks volunteer named Herbert Snorrason who uses the OpenLeaks handle "Odin".

In two days of interviews with Reuters at restaurants, lawyers' offices and the houseboat where he lives, Bjerg said he had recruited a group of prominent Danish lawyers, journalists and activists to help him build GreenLeaks.

He said he already had an idea about landing a big leak -- though he wouldn't say what it was -- and said that other supporters



THE GOODS: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange holds up CD's containing data on offshore bank account holders, which he received from former Swiss private banker Rudolf Elmer at the Frontline club in London, January 17, 2011. **REUTERS/PAUL HACKETT**



LEAKER: Scott Millwood poses for a picture in the lobby of Humboldt University in Berlin, January 26, 2011. **REUTERS/THOMAS PETER**

of his project included an unidentified former official of a European intelligence service, who would help his site with security issues.

Bjerg said that on January 17 he launched a homepage with a "GreenLeaks.org" logo (and little, if anything, else) and added: "Money is not an obstacle right now." He declined to

identify how much financial support his site had or where it came from. He said at the moment volunteers were offering help.

His ambition for the site is expansive. "We want to be the authority when it comes to leaks about nature, the climate and the environment ... The voice of the Earth ... Counterintelligence agency for the Earth, you could say."

Bjerg said journalists and activist groups -- including the Nordic branch of Greenpeace -- have already pledged support to GreenLeaks.org. DanWatch, a non-profit investigative journalism group which gets funding from both the Danish Government and the European Union, has also affiliated itself with Bjerg's website.

Anne Skjerning, DanWatch's director, said that her group, which specializes in corporate exposes, had "a hard time getting information on companies because it's confidential." She said that a GreenLeaks website "would be a big help for us" as a conduit through which anonymous leakers could supply inside information.

Bjerg said that Thorkild Hoyer, a prominent Copenhagen lawyer who specializes in human rights, has agreed to serve as one of the group's spokespeople. But responsibility will be shared among activists and supporters, and there will be no cults of personality. "We do not want this organization to be led by one person," Bjerg said. "As we saw with WikiLeaks, certain things can work against

an organization if the initial financier is also the early programmer and chief editor."

The competitor to Bjerg's GreenLeaks.org is being put together by Scott Millwood, an Australian documentary film-maker based in Germany.

Over lunch in a Berlin sushi bar, Millwood told Reuters his group acquired the domain name GreenLeaks in 36 countries where it also has registered GreenLeaks internet addresses under the ".com" and ".biz" designators. Millwood said he also has applied to the European Union to register "GreenLeaks" as a trademark, but recently learned that Bjerg's Denmark-based group had made a similar move within days of Millwood making his own application.

Millwood acknowledged that there was "one inactive domain name that we don't own" -- Bjerg's URL, "GreenLeaks.org." By the same token he said, one of the URLs Millwood says he registered himself is "GreenLeaks.dk" -- a domain name specifically related to Denmark. Millwood acknowledged the rivalry between the two groups could escalate into a "legal dispute."

His GreenLeaks.com will be organizationally similar to the original WikiLeaks -- in that Millwood will be chief editor and principal spokesman. "I'm the public face and the editor. It's important our organization has a responsible editor. We're a news organization with a responsible editor. We're not clandestine. We won't be faceless or placeless."

Millwood nonetheless did not identify other collaborators in his website, other than to say that they included people located in several countries with backgrounds in environmental activism, information technology, social media and the law.

He said that despite his plan to be his website's public face, his philosophy of handling leaks is markedly different from the one pursued by WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. "He believed that he had a duty to history to put everything in the public sphere; information for its own sake," Millwood said. "That's not our philosophy. If we release



NEWSPAPER GUY: Bill Keller, executive editor of The New York Times, participates in the "The Future of Journalism: Who's Going to Report the News?" panel at the 2010 Milken Institute Global Conference in Beverly Hills, California April 28, 2010. **REUTERS/PHIL MCCARTEN**

information we want it to have a specific purpose."

To this end, Millwood, who produced documentaries about alleged environmental abuse in his native Tasmania, says that one of his main objectives will be to take leaked information and popularize it -- for example through reporting out stories or crafting graphics. Like his rival GreenLeaks and OpenLeaks, Millwood talks of enlisting partners or eventually setting up a network of regional GreenLeaks sites.

For the moment, however, Millwood's Greenleaks.com site, which he managed to launch a few days before his Danish rivals ".org" site went live, is skeletal. He acknowledged he is "still developing the

infrastructure" for a site which can receive and process confidential leaks.

"EZ-PASS FOR LEAKERS"

AT LEAST ONE OTHER website channeling purported insider disclosures on green issues, called EnviroLeaks.org, is also up and running, though much of its initial fare consisted of re-posting State Department cables already released by WikiLeaks. More original -- and arcane -- are recent launches such as balkanLeaks.eu and brusselsleaks.com, which deal, respectively, with scandals in countries like Bulgaria and in the European Union bureaucracy. (BalkanLeaks' content appears to be mainly a one-page manifesto.)

Meanwhile, one prominent media outlet which has had a productive, though tempestuous relationship with Assange and the original WikiLeaks, is brainstorming whether it might be possible to cut out the middleman entirely and establish a secure channel for leakers to feed stuff to it directly.

The New York Times, which is publishing an e-book on its dealings with WikiLeaks and also has posted a lengthy account by Executive Editor Bill Keller of his turbulent dealings with Assange, is examining whether it could set up its own Internet conduit for secure leaking.

"Yes, a few people in our computer-assisted reporting and interactive news units are looking at setting up a drop box of some kind," Keller told Reuters in an e-mail. "I've taken to calling it an EZ Pass lane for whistleblowers."

Keller noted that there are "some technical, legal and journalistic issues to work through" and added: "Nothing decided yet, but I'm intrigued."

(Editing by Jim Impoco and
Claudia Parsons)

COVER PHOTO: Mads Bjerg (L), founder of the Greenleaks organisation, poses with employees of DanWatch, investigative journalist Morten Hansen (C) and company director Anne Skjerning, in this handout picture taken in Copenhagen, January 26, 2010. **REUTERS/GREENLEAKS/PELLE RINK/HANDOUT**

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

JIM IMPOCO,
ENTERPRISE EDITOR, AMERICAS
+1 646 223 8923
jim.impoco@thomsonreuters.com

CLAUDIA PARSONS,
DEPUTY ENTERPRISE EDITOR
+1 646 223 6282
claudia.parsons@thomsonreuters.com

MARK HOSENBALL
+1 202 354 5821
mark.hosenball@thomsonreuters.com