

First guilty plea in US online poker case

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Illustration. A man plays poker on his computer connected to an internet gaming site from his home in Manassas, Virginia. The American president of a Costa Rica-based company is facing up to 30 years in prison after pleading guilty to illegally processing payments for Internet poker firms.

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Bradley Franzen, 41, pleaded guilty in a Manhattan court to bank fraud, money laundering and [illegal gambling](#) offenses, Preet Bharara, the US attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement.

Franzen was one of 11 people charged last month in a crackdown on the three largest [online poker](#) companies operating in the [United States](#): PokerStars, Full Tilt Poker and Absolute Poker.

Most of the defendants are outside of the United States. Franzen is the first to enter a [guilty plea](#).

US law prohibits US banks and other financial institutions from knowingly accepting payments for online gambling made through credit cards, electronic funds transfers and checks.

Franzen and several other defendants were accused of helping to process billions of dollars for PokerStars, Full Tilt Poker and Absolute Poker by creating phony corporations and websites.

According to US authorities, Franzen arranged for gambling funds to be disguised as payments to a fictitious business called "Green2YourGreen," which claimed to sell environmentally-friendly household products.

Franzen, who is from Illinois and lives in Costa Rica, faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison. His sentencing date has not yet been set.

While Internet gambling has been illegal in the United States since 2006, online poker remains a multi-billion-dollar industry with companies using a variety of ways to flout the law, including locating their operations offshore.

The US ban on Internet gambling has been challenged as an unfair trade restriction at the [World Trade Organization](#) and some US lawmakers are seeking to have online gambling legalized.

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