

Tech blog TechCrunch in tussle with parent AOL

September 6 2011, by Chris Lefkow



Founder and co-editor of TechCrunch Michael Arrington, pictured in May 2011. Less than a year after its acquisition by AOL, leading technology blog TechCrunch is involved in a tussle with its new parent company over journalism ethics and editorial independence.

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After several days of confusion, controversy and conflicting reports about his fate, [TechCrunch](#) founder and ousted co-editor [Michael Arrington](#) broke his silence Tuesday with a post on TechCrunch.com.

Arrington demanded AOL either grant TechCrunch the editorial independence it promised when the [Internet company](#) acquired the site

in late September of last year or it sell the popular blog back to him.

Otherwise, he said: "I cannot be a part of TechCrunch going forward."

The legendarily combative Arrington illustrated his blog post with a picture from the movie "300," which features a small band of Spartans battling against the Persians in a fictionalized account of the Battle of Thermopylae.

Arrington's situation at TechCrunch has been murky since [he launched a \\$20 million venture capital fund](#) last week called CrunchFund. Several of Silicon Valley's leading [venture capitalists](#) are contributors to the fund.

The launch of a fund investing in startup companies like those TechCrunch covers was seen as a breach of journalism ethics by some media analysts and rival tech bloggers and prompted Arrington's removal as co-editor.

The decision to remove Arrington from an editorial position at TechCrunch was reportedly made by [Arianna Huffington](#), founder of The Huffington Post, which AOL bought in February.

Huffington was named the head of all editorial content at AOL following the purchase of her news and opinion site for \$315 million, making her Arrington's de facto boss.

Complicating matters, however, was the fact that \$10 million of the funding for CrunchFund came from the venture capital arm of AOL itself and the project received the blessing of Huffington's boss, AOL chief executive Tim Armstrong.

"TechCrunch is a different property and they have different standards,"

Armstrong told The New York Times in an article last week announcing the creation of the fund.

"We have a traditional understanding of journalism with the exception of TechCrunch, which is different but is transparent about it," he said.

Neither Armstrong, Huffington or AOL has made any public comment since the controversy erupted last week.

In his blog post, Arrington said the "core issue" was not his employment situation at TechCrunch but "editorial independence and self determination."

"As of late last week TechCrunch no longer has editorial independence," he said. "Some argue that the circumstances demanded it. I disagree."

Without specifically mentioning Huffington, president and editor-in-chief of The Huffington Post Media Group, Arrington said that editorial independence "means autonomy from Huffington Post."

"To put it simply, TechCrunch would stay with AOL but would be independent of the Huffington Post," he said.

AOL's purchases of TechCrunch and The [Huffington Post](#) have been the most high-profile efforts by Armstrong, a former Google executive, to turn around a company whose name has become synonymous with the dotcom era's excesses.

AOL merged with Time Warner in 2001 at the height of the dotcom boom in what is considered one of the most disastrous mergers ever and was spun off by Time Warner in December into an independent company.

AOL shares gained 3.38 percent to \$14.99 on Wall Street on Tuesday.

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