

Outgoing Facebook exec takes fall for hiring opposition firm

November 22 2018



This Feb. 19, 2014, file photo, shows a Facebook app icon on a smartphone in New York. Facebook's outgoing head of communications, Elliot Schrage, is taking the blame for hiring Definers, the public relations firm doing opposition research on the company's critics, including billionaire philanthropist George Soros. In a Facebook post that went up late Wednesday, Nov. 21, 2018, Schrage said the responsibility to hire Definers rests with him and that he approved the decision to hire it and similar firms. (AP Photo/Patrick Sison, File)

Facebook's outgoing head of communications is taking the blame for hiring Definers, the public relations firm doing opposition research on the company's critics, including billionaire philanthropist George Soros.

In a Facebook post that went up late Wednesday, Elliot Schrage said the responsibility to hire Definers rests with him and that he approved the decision to hire it and similar firms.

Schrage provided his explanation in a message sent Tuesday to Facebook's employees, but the company waited until late Wednesday to publicly share it at a time when most people in its home country were focusing on the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg also didn't mention Schrage's role in hiring and working with Definers in an interview with CNN aired late Tuesday.

Definers' link to the Menlo Park, California, company was exposed in a story published by The New York Times earlier this month.

Schrage has been at Facebook for a decade and announced his departure in June. In the post, he acknowledges that Facebook asked Definers "to do [work](#)" on Soros after he called Facebook a "menace to society" in a January speech. Definers also helped respond to what Schrage described as unfair claims about the company.

Even so, Schrage conceded that Definers' got carried away in its work to discredit Facebook's critics. The system he set up on the company's communications team "failed here and I'm sorry I let you all down," he wrote.

Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer, followed up with Schrage's note of contrition with one of her own, acknowledging her responsibility for overseeing Facebook's communications team. Like Schrage, Sandberg was a top executive at Google before coming to

Facebook a decade ago.

Sandberg said she did not remember Definers when she the Times article, but said she then asked employees to double check if she had ever been notified about the firm.

"Some of their work was incorporated into materials presented to me and I received a small number of emails where Definers was referenced," Sandberg wrote.

Zuckerberg, who is Facebook's controlling shareholder as well as its CEO, is standing behind Sandberg, despite the backlash caused by the company's retention of Definers and its campaign against Soros. He told CNN on Tuesday that he hopes to work with Sandberg "for decades" to come.

Facebook stopped working with Definers after the New York Times' investigation unveiled its tactics.

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Outgoing Facebook exec takes fall for hiring opposition firm (2018, November 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2018-11-outgoing-facebook-exec-fall-hiring.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.