



BUSINESS

## Report: Peter Thiel Is Bankrolling Hulk Hogan's Lawsuit Against Gawker

The Facebook board member and PayPal co-founder is funding a case that could financially ruin the digital publisher, according to a *Forbes* report.

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**Tom Gara**  
BuzzFeed News Business Editor

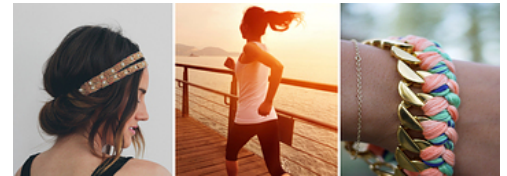


Neilson Barnard / Getty Images

Billionaire investor Peter Thiel has helped fund Hulk Hogan's lawsuit against Gawker Media, [Forbes reported on Tuesday](#), citing unnamed sources familiar with the case.

Thiel, who sits on the board of Facebook, did not respond to requests for comment. Hogan was recently [awarded \\$140 million](#) by a Florida jury hearing his long-running lawsuit against *Gawker*, which was filed after the company published excerpts of a leaked sex tape featuring the former pro wrestler.

*Gawker* is appealing the verdict, whose damages could be financially ruinous for the



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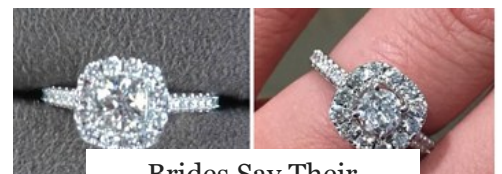
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by Stephanie McNeal

company if they are upheld. Founder Nick Denton told *Forbes* Thiel's name has been mentioned, among other Silicon Valley figures, in rumors of possible outside supporters of Hogan's case.

Thiel and *Gawker* have a history: In the comments to a 2007 *Gawker* article headlined "[Peter Thiel is totally gay, people](#)," Denton wrote he had previously been warned of "destruction that would rain down on me" if he reported on Thiel's sexual orientation.

"The only thing that's strange about Thiel's sexuality: why on earth was he so paranoid about its discovery for so long?" Denton wrote.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, to which Thiel was a major donor from 2008 to 2013, said it has "a wide variety of supporters with a wide variety of views."

"Regarding reports that Peter Thiel underwrote civil litigation by Hulk Hogan against *Gawker*, we note that we support the right of individuals in the United States and around the world to seek civil redress in cases of defamation," said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon in a statement. "However, we do not support efforts to abuse the process by seeking to punish or bankrupt particular media outlets."

Earlier on Tuesday, the *New York Times* [published a column](#) that quoted Denton sharing his suspicion that a Silicon Valley benefactor was funding a number of lawsuits against the company, including Hogan's. The suits were all filed by the same attorney, Charles Harder.

Harder did not respond to requests for comment from BuzzFeed News. "I do not discuss the finances of my clients," he told the *Times*.

On Wednesday, ahead of a court proceeding in Florida to hear *Gawker*'s motion for a new trial, the media company released a statement addressing Thiel's involvement.

"According to these reports, a board member of Facebook and a major funder of The Committee to Protect Journalists has been secretly funding a legal campaign against our journalists," the statement reads. "We trust the appeals court will correct the outsized Florida jury verdict and reaffirm the law that protects a free and critical press, which is more embattled and important than ever."

Shiva Ayyadurai, a businessman who is also suing *Gawker* and being represented by Harder, said in a statement to BuzzFeed News Tuesday night that he is "totally unaware of any behind-the-scenes financial arrangements involving my attorneys and anyone else."

Ayyadurai said a 2012 article by *Gawker* writer Sam Biddle, headlined "[Corruption, Lies, and Death Threats: The Crazy Story of the Man Who Pretended to Invent Email](#)," led to "very hurtful consequences" for him.

"The bottom line is that Biddle and *Gawker* publicly called me an 'asshole,' a 'loon,' and a 'dick' in an online publication directed at the tech industry in which I work," said Ayyadurai, whose [full statement is available here](#). "Now there will be consequences for Nick Denton and his publications."

- Matthew Zeitlin contributed to this article

Tom Gara is the business editor for BuzzFeed News and is based in New York.  
Contact Tom Gara at [tom.gara@buzzfeed.com](mailto:tom.gara@buzzfeed.com).

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