

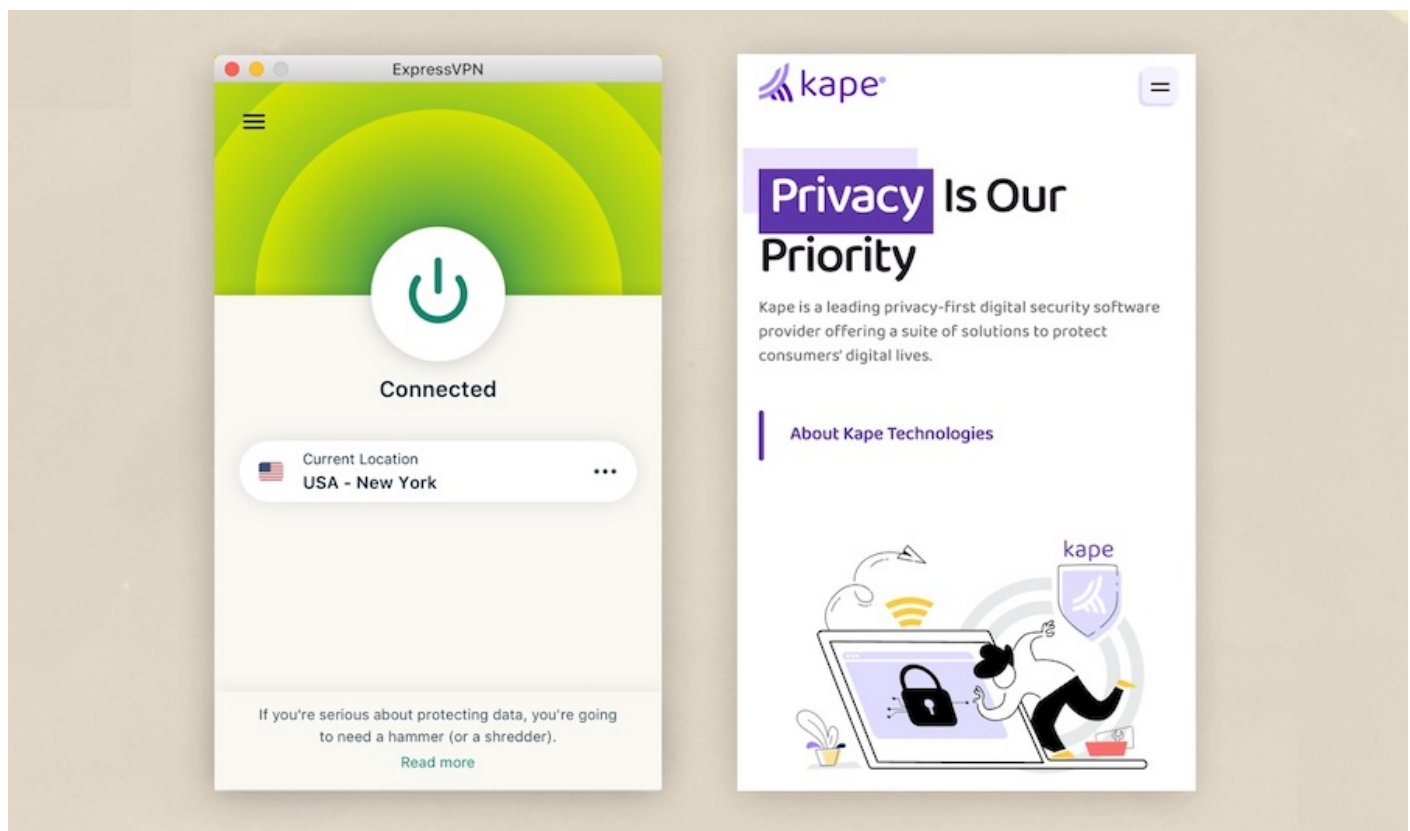
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Former Malware Distributor

Kape Technologies Now Owns ExpressVPN, CyberGhost, Private Internet Access, Zenmate, and a Collection of VPN “Review” Websites

September 15, 2021 By Sven Taylor —



Kape Technologies, a former malware distributor that operates in Israel, has now acquired four different VPN services and a collection of VPN “review” websites that rank Kape’s VPN holdings at the top of their recommendations. This report examines the controversial history of Kape Technologies and its rapid expansion into the VPN industry.

As is normal in the tech industry, the VPN world is undergoing some major changes and consolidation. The most recent example of this is with ExpressVPN, which announced plans this week to be acquired by Kape Technologies. While this may come as a surprise to many people, it is nothing new in the industry. In fact, Kape has been on a VPN buying spree since 2017.

Unfortunately, many VPN users remain oblivious about the **real owners** of the VPN they are using as well as the **questionable history** behind some of these entities. This in-depth report intends to reveal the details for all to see. Here's what we'll cover:

1. Kape (formerly Crossrider) was a distributor of malware and adware
2. The people behind Kape and Crossrider
3. Crossrider begins purchasing VPN services, then changes name to Kape Technologies
4. Kape purchases a collection of VPN "review" websites, then changes the rankings
5. The future of Kape's VPN ventures

To get a better understanding of the situation, we must first examine the history of Kape.

Kape (formerly Crossrider) was a distributor of malware and adware

Before 2018, Kape Technologies was called Crossrider and it was an infamous player in the malware industry. You can still find numerous articles about Crossrider's malware and adware infecting various devices.

Below is an excerpt from a [Malwarebytes article](https://blog.malwarebytes.com/detections/adware-crossrider/) (<https://blog.malwarebytes.com/detections/adware-crossrider/>) that discussed how Crossrider malware infected devices through software bundles:

*Crossrider offers a highly configurable method for its clients to monetize their software. The common **method to infect end-users is software bundlers**. The installers usually resort to **browser hijacking**. Targeted browsers are Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, and sometimes Opera. Crossrider not only targets Windows machines but Macs as well.*

PUP.Optional.Crossrider installs are typically triggered by bundlers that offer software you might be interested in and combine them with adware or other monetizing methods.

In studying Crossrider's business, it appears that Crossrider profited from infecting devices with malware, which would then use browser hijacking to direct traffic to partner advertisers. This pernicious line of work earned Crossrider a notorious reputation. This business model goes hand-in-hand with data collection, while also abusing the privacy and security of the end-user who suffered the misfortune of being infected with Crossrider malware.

Note: Crossrider malware was still wreaking havoc as late as August 2019 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20200817112415/https://www.digitalmunition.me/crossrider-adware-still-causing-unwanted-mac-browser-redirects/>). This is about two years after the purchase of CyberGhost VPN and the initial promise to refocus on user privacy. Another post from Malwarebytes (<https://blog.malwarebytes.com/threat-analysis/2018/04/new-crossrider-variant-installs-configuration-profiles-on-macs/>) explains how Crossrider malware was infecting devices in 2018:

Persistence is the goal of most malware. After all, what good is it to infect a machine if the malware stops running as soon as the computer restarts? There are some cases where that can still be useful (ransomware, for example), but in most cases, that's not desired behavior. So malware creators are often stuck using the same old methods of persistence that are easy to spot. Sometimes, though, they get creative.

Infection method

This new Crossrider variant doesn't look like much on the surface. It's yet another fake Adobe Flash Player installer, looking like the thousands of others we've seen over the years.

Opening the installer results in a familiar install process, with nothing unique about it. In the course of installation, it dumps a copy of Advanced Mac Cleaner, which commences to announce that it has found problems with your system using Siri's voice. (No such problems actually exist, of course.) Safari also pops open and then closes again suspiciously. This is all very blasé, as far as malware goes.

But something interesting has happened behind the scenes. After removing Advanced Mac Cleaner, and removing all the various components of Crossrider that have been littered around the system, there's still a problem. Safari's homepage setting is still locked to a Crossrider-related domain, and cannot be changed.

– Malwarebytes article from 2018 (<https://blog.malwarebytes.com/threat-analysis/2018/04/new-crossrider-variant-installs-configuration-profiles-on-macs/>)

Note: I have not seen any evidence suggesting that Kape is still in the adware/malware business as of today (September 2021).

Now that we've examined the business operations of Kape/Crossrider, let's look at the leadership.

The people behind Kape and Crossrider

The main person behind Kape is **Teddy Sagi** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teddy_Sagi), an Israeli billionaire who previously spent time in jail (<https://archive.is/ER7yd>) for insider trading. Sagi earned much of his wealth from a gambling company called Playtech. Sagi acquired Kape Technologies in 2012 and led it to be a major player in the malware and adware industry.

Interestingly, Sagi is also **named in the Panama Papers** (<https://offshoreleaks.icij.org/nodes/10122208>) that detail a “rogue offshore financial industry (<https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/>).”

The other key figure behind Kape is Koby Menachemi. Forbes wrote a good article (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2015/06/09/from-israel-unit-8200-to-ad-men/?sh=d17284426e29>) on Menachemi, detailing his **ties to Israeli intelligence and cyber espionage**.

Forbes noted the ties that Kape had to Israeli state surveillance entities:

*A vast number of companies are affiliated with ad injectors, either packaging their tools or funnelling ads down to them. One of the biggest is Crossrider, the majority stake of which is held by billionaire Teddy Sagi, a serial entrepreneur and ex-con who was jailed for insider trading in the 1990s. His biggest money maker to date is gambling software developer Playtech. **Co-founder and CEO Koby Menachemi was part of Unit 8200, where he was a developer for three years.***

*What went unnoticed, until now, is that most of the searchable organisations involved in this potentially dangerous business are based in Israel. They also happen to have **links to the nation's military and its top signals intelligence agency, the Israeli equivalent of the NSA or GCHQ: Unit 8200, which works out of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).***

Interestingly, we also just learned that ExpressVPN's CIO, Daniel Gericke, also has ties to state surveillance activities (<https://restoreprivacy.com/expressvpn-executive-uae-surveillance/>). According to Reuters (<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/american-hacker-mercenaries-face-us-charges-work-uae-2021-09-14/>), Gericke and two others, "admitted to violating U.S. hacking laws and prohibitions on selling sensitive military technology" to the United Arab Emirates. According to reports, this "sensitive military technology" helped the UAE spy on dissidents and human rights activists.

"Hackers-for-hire and those who otherwise support such activities in violation of U.S. law should fully expect to be prosecuted for their criminal conduct," Acting Assistant Attorney General Mark J. Lesko for the Justice Department's National Security Division said in a statement.

Make of this situation what you will. However, keep in mind that when you use a VPN, you are trusting the service to handle all of your internet traffic and not do anything questionable in the background.

Crossrider begins purchasing VPN services, then changes name to Kape Technologies

Now that you understand the background and leadership behind Kape Technologies, let's examine its involvement in the VPN industry.

2017: Crossrider purchases CyberGhost VPN for \$10 million

Crossrider's first big VPN acquisition was in March 2017 when it [purchased \(https://business-review.eu/news/israeli-company-crossrider-buys-romanas-cyberghost-for-eur-9-2-mln-132813\)](https://business-review.eu/news/israeli-company-crossrider-buys-romanas-cyberghost-for-eur-9-2-mln-132813) CyberGhost VPN for about \$10 million. Originally founded in 2004, CyberGhost was a big player in the industry that experienced rapid growth before it was acquired.

2018: Crossrider changes name to "Kape"

Sometime in 2018, Crossrider decided to change its name to "Kape Technologies" as part of a rebranding effort. Ido Erlichman, the CEO of Kape, [admitted \(https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-crossrider-renamed-kape-after-switching-to-cybersecurity-1001227178\)](https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-crossrider-renamed-kape-after-switching-to-cybersecurity-1001227178) that the name change was an attempt to distance Kape from controversial "past activities":

*The decision to rename the company, explains Erlichman was due to the **strong association to the past activities** of the company as well as the need to enhance the consumer facing brand for the business.*

CyberGhost also admitted in a [blog post \(http://archive.is/znwJr\)](http://archive.is/znwJr) that Crossrider was an "ad tech" company that did the "opposite" of what CyberGhost does (privacy and security):

*While CyberGhost focused on privacy and security from day one, Crossrider started out as a company that distributed browser extensions and developed ad tech products. **Quite the opposite of what we did.***

2018: Kape purchases Zenmate VPN for \$5 million

Not being content with just one VPN service, Kape then moved on to purchase Zenmate VPN, based in Germany, for around \$5 million.

2019: Kape purchases Private Internet Access for \$127 million

The next acquisition came in 2019 when Kape purchased Private Internet Access (<https://restoreprivacy.com/vpn/reviews/private-internet-access/>) (PIA) for \$127 million in cash and shares (<https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-kape-revenue-doubles-following-pia-acquisition-1001342824>). At the time, PIA was a major player in the VPN industry with a substantial user base.

We wrote an article (<https://restoreprivacy.com/private-internet-access-kape-crossrider/#comment-225714>) about it back in 2019 and described how **many PIA users were upset about the acquisition** and did not trust Kape. This screenshot from a PIA user on the PIA subreddit summarizes the situation in a few words.

But the acquisitions were not over...

2021: Kape purchases ExpressVPN for \$936 million

The latest major VPN acquisition we have for Kape Technologies is ExpressVPN, which it purchased for nearly \$1 billion. This is by far the largest VPN acquisition to date and a major addition to Kape's portfolio.

Watching this same story play out over and over again over the past four years is kind of like Groundhog Day ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groundhog_Day_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groundhog_Day_(film))). We generally find two reactions, with the user base being upset and the acquired VPN trying hard to calm everyone down.

- 1. ExpressVPN users largely seem upset by the news.**

2. ExpressVPN issues canned statements and press releases along the lines of “Don’t be alarmed, everything is good!”

Let’s see how many more times this same story plays out with future VPN acquisitions.

Kape purchases a collection of VPN “review” websites for \$149 million, then changes the rankings

In another twist to the plot, Kape Technologies also purchased a collection of VPN review websites in 2021. Yes, you got that right. The parent company that owns these VPNs now also owns a few high-profile websites that “review” and recommend VPNs to users around the world.

This is **clearly a conflict of interest**, but that goes without saying.

In May 2021, news broke that Kape had purchased a company called Webselenese. Like Kape, Webselenese also operates out of Israel and runs the websites **vpnMentor.com** and **Wizcase.com**. Collectively, these two websites have **monthly search traffic** of around **6.1 million visitors** according to Ahrefs traffic analysis tool (September 2021).

Note that there may be other VPN review websites in Kape's portfolio that we're not aware of.

Visiting vpnMentor's homepage today, we find that the parent company's three large VPN services all hold the top 3 spots in the rankings of the best VPNs for 2021.

VPNmentor.com: (<https://archive.is/T8J4v>)

All three of Kape's large VPNs made it into the top 3 spots of the best VPNs for 2021.

Wizcase.com: Similarly, we find the exact same top 3 rankings (<https://archive.md/ef2l2>) on Kape's other website Wizcase.com.

Just a few months ago, both vpnMentor and Wizcase had NordVPN and Surfshark in their top rankings. However, since Kape purchased these websites, we see significant rankings changes that give all of the top 3 spots to Kape's own VPN companies.

The future of Kape's VPN ventures

If the past is an indication of the future, Kape will continue to expand its holdings in the cybersecurity and VPN industry, which only continues to grow. Perhaps in the not-so-distant future, this conglomerate of VPNs and VPN review websites will be spun off and potentially sold as its own company.

In the meantime, there are now millions of VPN subscribers who fall under Kape's ownership and control. Unfortunately, none of Kape's VPNs that I have tested have been stand-out performers. The one exception would be ExpressVPN, but it too has fallen behind in the past year and dropped a few spots in our rankings, which will be updated soon to reflect these developments and the latest tests.

Hopefully, this trend in consolidation will slow down as it gives the end-user fewer choices with independently-owned VPN services.

About Sven Taylor

Sven Taylor is the founder of RestorePrivacy. With a passion for digital privacy and online freedom, he created this website to provide you with honest, useful, and up-to-date information about online privacy, security, and related topics. His focus is on privacy research, writing guides, testing privacy tools, and website admin.

Comments

VPN Woes

October 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-248851>)

Well dang, guess I need a new VPN... is the mozilla one ok?

Reply

Kodee

October 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-249031>)

Of the three main VPN criteria: fast, private, and cheap. Pick two. IVPN is the best I've found that is fast and private, but not too cheap (but really not that expensive either). _(`▽)`_/ but I'm just some random commenter on the interwebs. I have no affiliation w/ ivpn, but I do use their product.

Reply

guy

October 19, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-251164>)

what speeds do you consider 'fast'

i'm content with anything around 120Mbps

Reply

Rusty

October 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-249076>)

You might also try Bitdefender's VPN. It's the Hotspot Shield but coupled with Epic Privacy Browser with a perfect encrypted proxy selected, you could be safer,if not the safest.

It's quite logical really. If any secure and private service is created by humans, it can be hacked into by humans as well.

Reply

Johnny

October 24, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-255292>)

bitdefender, microshit (or soft), romanian company acquired.
everything microshit touches is shi*

Reply

J.M.

October 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-249115>)

I believe they are using Mullvad servers but can't tell if it is rebranded.

I would go straight to Mullvad because you would be under Mozilla's ToS and Privacy Policy rather than Mullvads and while I am not sure how strong they are, I would trust Mullvad more than Mozilla.

But I am biased against Mozilla and unless things take a huge 180, I would never trust them. I believe they are in Google and Microsoft's back pocket.

<https://www.tomsguide.com/features/firefox-vpn> (<https://www.tomsguide.com/features/firefox-vpn>)

As for my concerns about Mozilla and their VPN, this site really lays it out and shows the dangers.

<https://www.security.org/vpn/mozilla/review/> (<https://www.security.org/vpn/mozilla/review/>)

Reply

dan

October 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-249148>)

The Firefox VPN is just a rebranded and more expensive version of mullvad. Otherwise it is pretty good, I've only brought it to support Mozilla. But yeah look into mullvad

Reply

Wanyaysoomallibanikarfolsin

October 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-249220>)

Skip Mozilla and go straight for their provider, Mullvad. The difference? Mozilla is US-based and can be subpoenaed and searched by US authorities who may force them to turn over your logs and billing info. Mullvad is not US-based and they do not keep logs.

Reply

Robert

October 8, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-243115>)

Great article Sven.

Buying the VPN review sites reminds me of old Black Hat tricks. Like setting up one perfect looking Web Hosting Provider review site with one of the available WP review site plugins. And start promoting it. Then, to become your own competition, at the same time duplicate that first site and change the look of it on as many other domains that you could afford. That way it didn't matter where buyers closed the deal. There was a high probability that it would be one of the review sites owned by you. Of course, the top choice in the number one spot paid out the highest affiliate commission. 😊

Reply

Motoko Kusanagi

October 2, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-237397>)

Im terribly dissappointed and frustrated with this unfortunate event. I have been a loyal and support to ExpressVPN for years and influence like-minded community to level up privacy with ExpressVPN and now everything is a disaster. Now it is clear based on this action, ExpressVPN is no longer value PRIVACY and its DIGNITY uphold and MONEY cannot buy DIGNITY. You, ExpressVPN, may release a statement to defend your DIGNITY but WORDS are just WORDS not supported by actions and facts, in fact, with all fishy news going on recently with your troublesome CIO Daniel Gericke involved in serious case and now government crony British-Israeli company purchase ExpressVPN, this is real fact that contradict your no-backed statement. There are a lot privacy enthusiast billionaires out there like example CEO of Swisscows but why in God's sake must GOVERNMENT CRONY BRITISH-ISRAELI company? Im not to influence nor spread hate against you but cant you see the real event and fact here? It is conclude here and now, ExpressVPN is only value PROFIT and MONEY FIRST than everything. I hope my humble expression may guide everyone here to make CAREFUL decisions as you are about to fully TRUST your internet traffic to a VPN.

Reply

alien

September 26, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-233163>)

Thank you for bringing this important news. I cancelled my subscription to ExpressVPN the same day ("vote with your feet").

After carefully checking your VPN reviews I ended up with a shortlist of 2 VPN providers, OVPN (Sweden) and Perfect Privacy (Swiss). I like a.o. their no-logs policy, their hardware without hard disks and their IPv6 support.

Before making my decision I subscribed to both providers for a month; testing for (no) leaks, speeds etc. I found that both providers make use of third parties; OVPN uses M247 Ltd. (UK, 5 eyes) and Perfect Privacy uses Leaseweb (NL, 9 eyes). I am not legally trained, but if the jurisdiction of a VPN provider is given, shouldn't that be factored in?

Reply

Sven Taylor

September 27, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-233373>)

M247 and Leaseweb are just data centers where the VPN has a server, and these data centers and servers are obviously all around the world. Nothing to fear.

Reply

Riley Reid

September 27, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-233646>)

The server jurisdiction is important but in some cases it cannot be helped. If you want to connect to a server in the Netherlands, you will have to pay for one there. Moreover, if the server is configured properly, encrypted fully and

running in RAM mode, it doesn't matter much. It can be disabled, wiped and terminated instantly and remotely.

Reply

J.M.

October 1, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-236881>)

Both VPN's have been proven to not keep logs. As said, the location doesn't bother me as long as that evidence was there.

Reply

Chanson de Roland

September 25, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-232242>)

Teddy Sagi also own Avast, which own AVG. Sagi also owns Intego. So Sagi has also expanded into anti-malware companies, purchasing some of the largest of those firms.

Reply

Sven Taylor

September 25, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/>)

[sites/#comment-232431](#)

No, it does not look like (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avast>) Sagi owns Avast.

Reply

R&R

September 23, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-230748>)

So I'm not going to get any of these Kape products.

I decide to order NordVPN after trying SurfShark for 3 weeks.

I go to their page, click on the 2 year deal, click "continue to pay" and on the left side is the payment info I have to fill out which is all I'm focused on. But on the right side? Is the 2 year deal AND their Nord Pass. My invoice total is both combined. It's up to me to remove the Nord Pass.

They intentionally added an item to my invoice and I have to pay attention and find the light gray "remove" button to get rid of it.

That's some sleazy behavior. Crikey, it's back to SurfShark I guess.

Reply

Riley Reid

September 25, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-232623>)

Surfshark is moving to the Netherlands. Better stick to Nord.

Reply

Robert

October 8, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-243109>)

Ever wondered why VPN companies started offering deep discounts for their 2 and 3 year subscriptions?

They are building their member base, to be attractive enough for that takeover and then cash out with the lump sum. In true ExpressVPN style. NordVPN next? Can you blame them?

Reply

Robert

October 8, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-243127>)

It doesn't really matter with diskless servers (100% RAM only servers) : <http://surfshark.com/blog/surfshark-upgraded-to-ram-only-servers> (<https://surfshark.com/blog/surfshark-upgraded-to-ram-only-servers>)

Perfect Privacy and other VPN providers have this too.

Reply

Jack

September 20, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-229401>)

Aw c'mon guys. Just because the previous owner Crossrider, who previously wrote spyware and malware, and changed their name to Kape Technologies to lose their reputation, who previously hid who is behind not revealing who is behind it with the phrase to "protect their employees", who began purchasing VPNs such as CyberGhost, PIA, and Zenmate, and now ExpressVPN for \$1B that came out of nowhere, with another 1/3rd that much to invest in it, and then purchased review sites and changed the scores to show theirs having the highest scores, and just now it comes out their CTO plead no-contest to illegally spying for the UAE, is no reason to doubt their integrity. Just because it looks like a duck, quacks like duck, and walks like a duck, now all of the sudden you guys believe that it could be a duck. You guys are just being paranoid. (tic)

Reply

Brody

September 21, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-229902>)

Lmao

Reply

veritas156

October 7, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-242683>)

****EXCELLENT SUMMATION.****



Reply**BoBeX**

September 18, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-227802>)

Hi Sven,

Great article.

I have never used this companies services (as far as I am aware – nod, nod).
They are truly disgusting.

There must be a lot people who sign up and forget about there subscription or use
vpns for access to geo-blocked content. Maybe it's all those ads and paid
sponsorships? (rhetorical)

Regards,

BoBeX

Reply**Thinker**

September 18, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-227778>)

Hi Again,

Concerning VPN paranoia (I am quite paranoid myself):

One's paranoia level is tied to one's risk level. Someone trying to elude a government – or the law – should be far more paranoid than someone trying to prevent his ISP, and commercial companies, from tracking his web browsing habits.

Analogy: an animal must always be vigilant for predators or it won't survive. But an animal also has to eat so it can't stay in hiding all day. Therefore it *has* to trust its camouflage, or cryptic behavior, or nocturnal activity, or hair-trigger reflexes and fast running speed.

Likewise: privacy paranoia is essential but beyond a certain point it cripples or eliminates one's ability to use the Internet, or computers in general. No one is fully trustworthy but you must trust someone to use the Internet.

ISPs log, share and sell user data so they can't be trusted.

Cell phone service providers can't be trusted.

Tor browser can't be fully trusted, situation depending.

No other browser, or browser privacy add-on, can be fully trusted.

Social media can't be trusted (some trust fully encrypted messaging).

Free VPNs can't be trusted.

Microsoft and Apple can't be trusted.

Google, Adobe and most other IT companies can't be trusted.

Independent software developers can't be trusted – who's verifying their claims ?

We just saw that even Protonmail can't be trusted.

What if espionage agencies are snooping on (or hacking) NordVPN and Surfshark servers, and using supercomputers + artificial intelligence to ferret out users' IP addresses ? What if Mozilla or privacy add-ons (e.g. HTTPS Everywhere, NoScript) are secretly collecting / monitoring user data ?

So it's not a matter of who is fully trustworthy – nobody is – but who is *most* trustworthy.

The answer, I'd argue, is companies whose entire business model is providing privacy. All their revenue comes thence. One violation and they're out. These companies include major, for-profit VPN providers and cybersecurity firms.

One can't fully trust these at their word, so how do we assure safety ? Reputable 3rd party auditing.

BUT – who is auditing the auditors ? Maybe the auditors are colluding with government agencies to certify faulty VPNs ? Who vets auditors and deems them “reputable” ?

At this paranoia level one might, perhaps, pursue IT training and build one's own hardware and software. But what if the processors have built-in backdoors enabling espionage agencies to control the BIOS ? Who is watching Intel ? And who is watching that watcher ? What if spy agencies have a secret method to decrypt top-rated encryptions ?

Bottom line: paranoia is essential but so is realism. Surveillance & espionage agencies themselves have to trust *someone* with security / privacy. So do all governments, militaries, banks and major financial institutions. And periodically they do get hacked because nothing is 100% safe. But they survive.

Hence my previous comments about caution with assailing ExpressVPN contingent upon passing credible, 3rd party audits for best practices and maintaining transparency. ExpressVPN's statement about Daniel Gericke – actually about the company's trustworthiness – is honorable (<https://www.expressvpn.com/blog/daniel-gericke-expressvpn/> (<https://www.expressvpn.com/blog/daniel-gericke-expressvpn/>)). Note especially:

“an ongoing part of our work to invite auditors, penetration testers, and other third parties to evaluate and stress-test our systems... we transitioned to using BugCrowd... [this] encouraged even more researchers to look at our apps and make them safer for our users. It also encouraged greater transparency, since all bugs and their respective fixes can be publicly disclosed...

we'll be increasing the cadence of our existing third-party audits to annually recertify our full compliance with our Privacy Policy, including our policy of not storing any activity or connection logs...

the extensive steps we take to prevent anyone from injecting malware into our

apps.”

[\(https://www.expressvpn.com/blog/build-verification-system-prevents-malware/](https://www.expressvpn.com/blog/build-verification-system-prevents-malware/) (<https://www.expressvpn.com/blog/build-verification-system-prevents-malware/>))

Most people would be well served with a (relatively) secure browser, reputable privacy add-ons, an externally-audited VPN and safe browsing habits. The truly paranoid would daisy-chain 2 or 3 VPNs and then use Tor browser, all running through TAILS on a dedicated computer. Beyond this, one is in professional IT territory – if not spy territory.

Reply

P.

September 19, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-228696>)

Good points.

I would add that ExpressVPN provided a tangible proof of their declarations with their server seizure. Well, that could be marketing too, as can be “independent” audits, but seriously, can be a better confirmation of the company policies?

Reply

JohnQ

September 17, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-227181>)

I was unclear, I tried to convey too much with too little, I apologize, not throwing shade at you, just vpns in general... The news being so fresh coupled with that it was so short a time ago you recommended expressvpn in the mentioned article....and as you are someone as diligent in your research, to have to reverse course with the new revelation...now all vpns in any list are suspect. Especially so with controlled 'independent' review aka propoganda (marketing) sites out there they just purchased, so obvious the strategy with that move. Totally dishonest practice, and anything Kade says about turning over a new leaf should fall on deaf ears, especially when considering the totality of their actions. A new grift on a larger and more complex scale. Which leads me to my next thought.

If a vpn that was generally regarded as secure and highly recommended is now clearly a threat, what hope of securing trust, and what lengths will other vpns need to go to in order to keep/grow their customer base?

What a weird time to be alive...trust is being eroded in so many areas of life all happening simultaneously.

Also what is weird is the financial purchasing power Kape has. Is it financed? Is it profits from their illicit business? Or is it something more sinister given the involvement of a former intel agent, state sponsored through shell company investments/fundraising? Were they so unsatisfied with their previous success or more emboldened.? Is the UK aware, if so, the lack of investigation/fines implies possible sanctioning of or silent partnership with...If true, what other services are compromised?

With the proliferation of scraping tech by facebook, google, apple, microsoft, do vpns even matter? Is the essential info about the activity hidden behind vpns compromised at the base system level and Kape saw this and said, why not us too, we are going legit too, wink wink...

Reply

Thinker

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226977>)

Thank you much for this review.

On the one hand, this is clearly bad news and betrayal of user trust. ExpressVPN shouldn't have done this.

On the other hand, I think we are seeing an over-reaction. Condemnation of ExpressVPN should be based on facts, not suspicion and perhaps paranoia.

To date, ExpressVPN hasn't been found to do anything bad. As far as I know they haven't changed their terms of service, which would signal trouble. These terms are available publicly, hence easily monitored. What if they will continue 3rd party audits which would verify their privacy claims ? What if they retain their current, relative transparency ?

To date, has Kape been found to violate Zenmate and PIA privacy practices ?

Kape's rating manipulations are slimy but these sorts of things occur frequently. Same for closing comments for controversial blog articles and disabling user reviews following controversy. Privacy-conscious people do their research before signing up, e.g. on this excellent website.

More importantly – if they sell customers a privacy service and then are found to violate it, not only ExpressVPN but Kape could face costly lawsuits for breaching the official terms of service. They will also lose perhaps the majority of customers for all VPN services Kape owns. Being based in Israel is no protection because under Israeli law, its businesses and citizens are subject to foreign lawsuits and legal proceedings.

Kape has invested nearly a billion dollars acquiring ExpressVPN, and the other VPNs. If they get caught violating privacy this investment will go down the drain. They will also lose a fortune due to customer departures and possibly lawsuits. Kape knows

from first-hand experience it can't get away with shady practices. They would get exposed.

Hence Kape has a vested interest to let its VPN acquisitions continue running their routine operations, thus getting return-on-investment and helping to clear their sketchy reputation. With VPNs, one confirmed breach of user privacy / trust and you're out of business.

So while this acquisition is bad news, it would be wiser to monitor the situation and see what happens rather than accuse ExpressVPN of wrongdoing without credible evidence. Let's see if ExpressVPN's terms of service change and, especially, if they continue 3rd party audits.

Reply

JohnQ

September 17, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-227184>)

Only the paranoid survive, sometimes they are out to get you...

Reply

Someone

September 17, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-227484>)

A sensible perspective. Somewhat agree that being paranoid is the optimal strategy with this class of risk however your points are spot-on.

Reply

Shan

September 19, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-228849>)

I think though, they have proven their tactics to be dirty still by buying the VPN review websites & placing the results in their favour very sneakily. Shows they are still up to their old tricks and not playing by the book.

Reply

Secure

October 8, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-243427>)

I wonder if you would disclose your relationship to Kape.... Employee? Owner? Consultant?

Reply

Otto

October 24, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-255298>)

3rd party audit companies are owned by the same owner of the company they are auditing. buying review sites by kape, classic example. also monopolizing the market not good either. I'll give my money to the small unaudited vpn provider who provides.

Reply

OPTIQUEMARQUIS

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226971>)

If you use a vpn that doesn't disclose ownership and or has an affiliate programme you are doing it wrong.

Reply

brody

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226920>)

was cyberghost sold for 10 mil?

they pretty much gave away the company for free.

Reply

M.D

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226893>)

Excellent article!

In light of these events Mullvad has published the following blog post: <https://mullvad.net/en/blog/2021/9/16/ownership-and-future-mullvad-vpn/> (<https://mullvad.net/en/blog/2021/9/16/ownership-and-future-mullvad-vpn/>)

Looks like VPN companies will now have to not only guarantee a no-log policy, but a promise of commitment to not selling out to shady businesses like Kape...

Reply

Kees Closed

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226878>)

It's only a matter of time until VPN's will be declared illegal by western governments and you'll need an internet-access passport backed by your social security number. Anonymous access is a thorn in the side of governments.

Reply

Robert

October 8, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-243139>)

You can always run your own VPN on any Linux KVM VPS or Dedicated hosting provider.

Reply

Not Robert

October 12, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-246685>)

In which the hosting provider has your payment information, connection logs, signup information etc. And server centers keeps logs of everything. Hosting your own VPN is the worst idea.

Reply

John Doe

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226833>)

Good article and glad you covered this. Thankfully ExpressVPN posted they were bought out by Kape Technologies on their blog which I go to at least once every 3 or 4 days, usually once a day or every two days. And thankfully I was already aware of Kape Technologies past as Crossrider making malware. As soon as I read it was The Kape Technologies and not just some random company named Kape, I installed Nord VPN and set it up and closed my virtual card I used for ExpressVPN. I warned my brother and sister and my friends that ExpressVPN shouldn't be trusted. This was all before I even read about the CIO selling data on activists.

Reply

John Doe(again)

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226836>)

Also, for some weird reason, my public reviews on the Google Play Store on ExpressVPN keeps getting removed or something. I'm not deleting it either. I've changed up the wording, removed the sources, etc, but it keeps getting removed. I want to contact Google about this but I'm not sure if they'll be of any help. Perhaps, regardless of who runs the Play Store page for ExpressVPN, maybe they've been told to go into damage control and are having Google remove the comment. (Thankfully other people have posted about the acquisition and are warning others). Also, on the blog article on the new acquisition, at least for me, they disabled the comments and removed any and all comments they had on that article.

Reply

anonymous

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226782>)

Kape/PIA to provide VPN services for mobile subscribers in Hong Kong: <https://www.londonstockexchange.com/news-article/KAPE/pia-introduces-a-new-way-of-vpn-subscription/15059584> (<https://www.londonstockexchange.com/news-article/KAPE/pia-introduces-a-new-way-of-vpn-subscription/15059584>)

Reply

anonymous

October 20, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-252217>)

How interesting!

“China to allow overseas investment in VPNs but Beijing keeps control...”

https://www.theregister.com/2021/10/20/china_vpn_foreign_investment/ ([http://www.theregister.com/2021/10/20/china_vpn_foreign_investment/](https://www.theregister.com/2021/10/20/china_vpn_foreign_investment/))

Reply

heheheh

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226761>)

这个以色列人的背后资金可能就是某些国家机器，比如美国DS和中共CCP。

Reply

anonymous

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226734>)

Crunchbase lists the companies owned by Kape here: http://www.crunchbase.com/organization/crossrider/company_financials (http://www.crunchbase.com/organization/crossrider/company_financials)

Reply

George from Canada

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226713>)

WOW-WEE-WOW! I'm so glad I purchased the services of VPN.ac based on your sites description and recommendation. Hope they never sell out Internet criminals!!!
Cheers, George

Reply

Bronco

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226686>)

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2012/vol2/184110.htm> (<https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2012/vol2/184110.htm>)

So, a privacy jurisdictions mean nothing, as well. It's just another myth, unfortunately.

Reply

Sven Taylor

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226728>)

No, that's not necessarily true. Just look at real-world cases. Sure, there are MLAT treaties for cooperation on certain criminal cases, but that may or may not lead to anything. It's a lot easier for US, UK, or Australian governments to force logs and compliance out of a business in their own jurisdiction than one on the other side of the world. Switzerland is proving to be an interesting case, however, and probably not as "safe and secure" as we expected. This is evident with the recent ProtonMail logging case (<https://restoreprivacy.com/protonmail-logs-users/>).

The big wildcard, however, is whether the privacy service is willing to fight these requests in court, as we have seen with OVPN (<https://restoreprivacy.com/vpn/reviews/ovpn/>) and the recent Rights Alliance copyright case, or bow down to 3,000+ requests per year, as we see with ProtonMail. Either way, the argument still stands. A safe offshore jurisdiction is an additional layer of safety for the end user.

Reply

Bronco

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226755>)

Sven, I was referring on ExpressVPN's claims that the company will stay in the same jurisdiction (BVI), trying to prove they remain autonomous, I guess? 😏 These treaties will obviously help authorities and lawyers to get whatever they want, Kape won't fight against that for sure. So, again, jurisdiction is not much if the people behind the company can't be trusted. Right?

Reply

Sven Taylor

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226776>)

Ah gotcha. Yes, I would agree that the company behind the VPN is even more important than jurisdiction.

Nosferatu

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226620>)

Boy am I glad my Express subscription runs out this month. I'll probably move to something else. Anything else except this cancer.

Reply

Blob Ross

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226593>)

The only real currency in the VPN industry is Trust, and it's safe to say ExpressVPN went completely broke in that department. I really hope this news goes out to every single Express customer and they cancel their subscription and run this company into the ground for all the stupid decisions their management took and all the criminals they hired (and will hire).

Reply

The Riddler

September 16, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226575>)

Riddle me this.

How in the f*&% does an israeli malware company have billions (?) of dollars just sitting around to literally buy up the vpn industry???

Seriously frens. What the f*&% is going on here???. How do you make this much money from malware, or is something else going on? What are these shady f*&%s doing behind the scenes? Think about that frens. What is happening to your data when you connect to their vpn servers? Follow me yet?

If data = money, and vpns can collect data when they abuse privacy and LOG EVERYTHING, and these guys are buying up the industry, then that points to one scary f*&%ing conclusion.

Or do you really believe these malware criminals (yes they are literally convicted criminals) just woke up one day and decided they REALLY CARED ABOUT YOUR PRIVACY? Or is something else going on?

Ask the hard questions. Solve the riddle.

Riddler out.

Reply

Matti

September 17, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-227049>)

People associated with Kape (founders, stakeholders) have history with the IDF, particularly Unit 8200 (which also has ties with the NSO group), so we can speculate where at least part of their funding comes from.

ExpressVPN staff also have dirt on their hands;

<https://uk.pcmag.com/vpn/135678/expressvpn-cio-helped-united-arab-of-emirates-hack-into-phones-computers> (<https://uk.pcmag.com/vpn/135678/expressvpn-cio-helped-united-arab-of-emirates-hack-into-phones-computers>)

Not surprising Kape would want ExpressVPN in their honeypot.

Reply

Spooksville

October 7, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-242542>)

Yeah, it's just like I wrote in my other comment: these companies are military intelligence agency money laundering fronts.

Reply

Spooksville

October 7, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-242539>)

These companies are military intelligence agency fronts (CIA, MI6, GRU, Mossad, etc). Their funding comes from intelligence agency money laundering operations.

Reply

J.M.

September 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226569>)

ExpressVPN, seeking to assway everyone is doing just the thing all companies do in a merger.

The bought company assures that nothing will change.

And the parent company agrees....until it doesn't.

And all purchased companies will remain the same....until they don't.

I understand the users frustration.

Reply

Yoko Ohno

September 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226545>)

Edward Snowden just publicly denounced ExpressVPN. As far as I'm concerned, ExpressVPN is as good as malware.

<https://twitter.com/Snowden/status/1438291654239215619?s=19> (<https://twitter.com/Snowden/status/1438291654239215619?s=19>)

Reply

Sven Taylor

September 15, 2021 (<https://restoreprivacy.com/kape-technologies-owns-expressvpn-cyberghost-pia-zenmate-vpn-review-sites/#comment-226548>)

Yep, we'll be covering that this week as well. What a storm of news we have had in the past few days!

Reply

RestorePrivacy Checklist

1. **Secure browser:** Modified Firefox (<https://restoreprivacy.com/firefox-privacy/>) or Brave (<https://brave.com>)
2. **VPN:** NordVPN (<https://restoreprivacy.com/vpn/reviews/nordvpn/>) (72% Off Coupon (<https://restoreprivacy.com/go/nordvpn>)) or Surfshark (<https://restoreprivacy.com/vpn/reviews/surfshark/>)
3. **Ad blocker:** uBlock Origin (<https://github.com/gorhill/uBlock>) or AdGuard (<https://restoreprivacy.com/go/adguard>)
4. **Secure email:** Mailfence (<https://restoreprivacy.com/email/reviews/mailfence/>) or Tutanota (<https://restoreprivacy.com/email/reviews/tutanota/>)
5. **Secure Messenger:** Signal (<https://restoreprivacy.com/secure-encrypted-messaging-apps/signal/>) or Threema (<https://restoreprivacy.com/secure-encrypted-messaging-apps/threema/>)
6. **Private search engine:** MetaGer (<https://metager.org/>) or Swisscows (<https://swisscows.ch/>)
7. **Password manager:** NordPass (<https://restoreprivacy.com/password-manager/reviews/nordpass/>) or Bitwarden (<https://restoreprivacy.com/password-manager/reviews/bitwarden/>)

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