

Lawsuit Challenges Twitter's Attempts to Restrict Data Access

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Did you ever wonder what happens to the nearly 400 million Tweets posted to [Twitter](#) every day? Because they reveal so much about what people are thinking and doing, Twitter has spawned a whole industry of companies that analyze the data and convert it into valuable market information.

While the social media company has generally made its feed available to companies seeking to mine it for valuable information, [Twitter is gradually restricting access](#). Not surprisingly, companies that have built their business models around mining user Tweets are fighting back. A California court recently awarded a temporary restraining order to PeopleBrowsr Inc., a company that relies on Twitter data to provide analytics to clients that include Fortune 500 companies and the federal government.

The [business lawsuit](#) alleges that Twitter's recent decision to cut ties with PeopleBrowsr could put the company out of business. The company's business model relies on Twitter's "Firehose," which provides every tweet posted on the social media network. However, Twitter recently informed the company that it is terminating their current access and will now require the company to go through other service providers that provide only samples of Twitter content.

As detailed in its lawsuit, "PeopleBrowsr built its business on the Firehose because Twitter promised to maintain an 'open ecosystem' for its data, where PeopleBrowsr and other developers could compete without Twitter using its control over data access to pick who could survive."

In [court documents](#) submitted in connection with the preliminary injunction motion, PeopleBrowsr alleges that Twitter is limiting its data access in order to ensure that Twitter or its partners will dominate the "Twitter Big Data Analytics market."

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Meanwhile, Twitter's lawyers argue that the case is simply a matter of contract law. They point to the contract between the parties, which states that either party may terminate the agreement without cause with 30 days prior written notice.

In response, PeopleBrowsr maintains that "Twitter contracted to provide an open ecosystem, and Twitter cannot terminate for reasons inconsistent with this obligation." It further contends that the termination clause does not allow Twitter to terminate for an illegal purpose, which it asserts is to "interfere with PeopleBrowsr's business relationships and restrain competition."

Both sides will be back in court early next year, when the court is scheduled to hear arguments for a preliminary injunction.

This case highlights that efforts to restrict access to content by companies like Twitter and Facebook are not going unnoticed, particularly by other tech companies that have staked their future success on this model. While both companies promised to foster “open access” when they were start-ups, many argue that they changed course when they became multi-million dollar companies.