



NATIONAL

From Cooking Tips to X-Rated Fare, OnlyFans Has Revolutionized Content Creation and Now Looks to an \$8 Billion Sale

The platform sits at the intersection of tech, sex, digital entrepreneurship — and a broader social debate in America.



Actor, director, and fitness trainer Julian Shaw says he makes more money on OnlyFans than at any other job he's had. Via Instagram



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Published:
Jul. 13,
2025 04:00
AM ET



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Updated:
Jul. 13,
2025 11:08
AM ET

In June 2020, as pandemic lockdowns and social restrictions continued, New Zealand-born, United States-based actor, director, and fitness trainer Julian Shaw turned to an emerging content creation platform for some survival income: OnlyFans.

“I had been working full-time for minimum wage as a personal trainer in a local Portland gym, which was now shut down due to the pandemic. I’d just completed five years of work writing and directing a feature film, ‘Use Me.’ I had signed a global distribution deal for the movie, but there was no promise of ever seeing further income from it,” he tells the New York Sun.

“My back was against the wall, and I was \$20,000 in credit card debt with no hope of an unemployment check any time soon. A friend in the fetish space suggested I try creating an account.”

Now reportedly exploring a sale at a [valuation](#) of approximately \$8 billion, OnlyFans sits at the intersection of tech innovation, sex work, digital entrepreneurship — and a broader social debate about morality, work, and identity in modern America.

The subscription platform, known primarily for personalized adult content, bolstered Mr. Shaw’s bank account more than he could have ever imagined.

“I had a stigma in my mind that the site was a hardcore pornography platform; however, some brief research revealed there were all types of accounts ranging from safe for work to very not safe for work. I felt comfortable creating an aesthetic fitness account,” Mr. Shaw, who is 39, considered one of the top .53 percentage earners on OnlyFans, continued. “Within a couple of months, it was earning more money than any job I’ve ever had.”

OnlyFans, owned by Ukrainian-American businessman Leonid “Leo” Radvinsky, has grown into one of the most profitable and controversial platforms on the internet. In 2023, the most recent statistics available, the subscription-based site [reported](#) a pre-tax profit of \$658 million and [facilitated](#) over \$6.62 billion in user transactions. OnlyFans boasts over 305 million registered user accounts and upwards of 4 million creators, primarily women.

“OnlyFans have blurred the lines between intimacy, entrepreneurship, and labor, and what you are seeing these days are new forms of digital hustling — where autonomy, visibility, and monetization intersect in ways that traditional jobs often don’t offer,” Professor of Inclusive AI Cultures at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, Payal Arora, tells the Sun.

A New Kind of Work

OnlyFans was founded in November 2016 by British entrepreneur Tim Stokely. The platform allows users to [showcase](#) a wide range of content, from cooking tutorials and yoga classes to new music, but it is overwhelmingly known for

sexually explicit material, enabling creators to post nude and pornographic content, often personalized for subscribers, who pay monthly fees, tips, or per-message charges to engage.

“I primarily created fitness and wellness content, which I still post to this day as my main timeline offering. Of course, I started to receive requests in the DMs and began making custom clips for a premium price,” Mr. Shaw said. “These ranged from me reading erotic literature in a tuxedo to more typical jerk-off instructions (JOI) videos, muscle flexing and posing videos, and various fetish videos in all the genres you’d expect — feet, armpit, verbal domination, etc.”

OnlyFans takes a 20 percent cut of all earnings; creators keep the rest. Some have turned the platform into a full-time career. The top 0.1 percent of creators reportedly earn upwards of \$150,000 per month, with a handful — Hollywood stars in particular — publicly claiming tens of millions in earnings.

Among the most prominent examples, Denise Richards has reportedly garnered significant income, with various sources suggesting earnings that could reach up to \$2 million per month. Her 21-year-old daughter with Charlie Sheen, Sami Sheen, has also achieved considerable success, reportedly accumulating over \$3 million since joining.

Beyond them, the platform has seen top earners like rapper Iggy Azalea, with estimated monthly earnings of around \$9.2 million, and Cardi B, who reportedly earned nearly \$10 million a month at her peak in 2022. Grown-up child star Bella Thorne famously broke records by earning \$1 million within her first 24 hours, contributing to her estimated total earnings of \$37.3 million, and rapper Bhad Bhabie has amassed approximately \$75 million in total.

Yet, for the overwhelming majority, the financial return is modest. Most creators earn less than \$200 per month, and some as little as \$24. Like other corners of the gig economy, OnlyFans offers the possibility of wealth, while most workers face long hours, fierce competition, and income instability driven by algorithms.

In 2021, OnlyFans briefly announced a ban on explicit sexual content due to pressure from payment processors. The backlash from creators was swift and fierce, and the company reversed course within a week.

Blurred Boundaries: Work, Sex, and Identity

As the site grows, so too does the cultural conversation around it. For some, OnlyFans represents a new era of economic independence, where individuals — especially women — can control their image, set their prices, and bypass traditional gatekeepers in the adult industry.

President and CEO of the Woodhull Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to “defending the personal autonomy of all individuals,” Ricci Joy Levy, tells the Sun that platforms such as OnlyFans are “reshaping the definition of work by making it undeniable that sexual labor is labor — work that demands skill, emotional intelligence, resilience, and marketing savvy.”

“For many women, it’s also a path to financial independence on their own terms, outside of exploitative gatekeepers. For some, it is empowerment. For others, it’s survival. And for many, it’s both,” she explained. “My hope — and my fight — is for a future where we value consent, celebrate autonomy, and protect everyone’s right to define their own work, their own worth, and their own bodies.”

There are many, however, who worry that the lines have already been crossed, and the example set by such platforms, especially for young women, is detrimental.

“The adult creator economy warps young women’s career ambitions and priorities by teaching them to invest heavily in a depreciating asset,” issues analyst for conservative Christian organization Focus on the Family, which promotes traditional family values, Emily Washburn, tells the Sun.

“Creators in this space, women especially, rely on other people’s approval to make money. They do not have the luxury of tuning out the opinions of faceless strangers. In fact, they spend most of their time conforming to viewers’ desires. In this daily continuum, it’s nearly impossible to maintain a strong sense of your inherent value as a human being.”

Although OnlyFans enforces an 18 and over age limit, secondary exposure is rampant. Content often spills over into Twitter, TikTok, Reddit, and even Instagram, where users promote their OnlyFans accounts to large followings. Critics

argue that this type of digital proximity makes adult material seem more familiar and acceptable to younger audiences.

Digital parenting firms warn that the ubiquity of sexually explicit content — even if indirectly encountered — can shape adolescent development, especially when combined with celebrity endorsements and influencer culture.

Law enforcement officials have routinely expressed concern about minors posing as adults to gain access or being exploited on the platform. While these instances appear to be rare relative to the platform's size, they underscore broader concerns about the commodification of sexuality and the lack of strong digital safeguards.

Senior Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and Programs, National Center on Sexual Exploitation, Haley McNamara, also cautions that “OnlyFans’ glamorization of pornography creation is simply a tactic to attract vulnerable people so it can profit off them.”

“At the end of the day, the platform is just another pimp making false promises,” she tells the Sun.

OnlyFans operates legally with policies banning sex trafficking, non-consensual content, and underage users. A spokesperson cited its “Safety and Transparency Center,” which outlines AI tools, manual reviews, and user reports — though critics say these measures still miss subtle coercion and offline abuse.

The debate raises a deeper question: is OnlyFans a form of empowerment — or a symptom of economic and spiritual decline?

Ms. Arora observed that “on the one hand, OnlyFans can offer financial independence and body agency,” but “on the other, it can expose creators to mental health strains, privacy risks, and a culture that still stigmatizes sex work despite its digital normalization.”

Mr. Shaw, however, isn't bothered by the pushback and says that while he “believes the stigma will continue to decrease,” he “disavows” the notion some may have that this is “easy money.”

“There's a price to pay for the income — and it's burnout, plus potential strain on personal relationships. I've been rewarded

for this career, but I've paid the price," he continued. "That said, I would do it all again."

What's Next for the Platform

With potential acquisition talks underway and interest from private investors, the company has [launched](#) initiatives like OnlyFans Television, a safe-for-work content platform, and creator funds for musicians and fitness influencers.

Whether these efforts represent true diversification or strategic public relations is yet to be seen. However, behind the platform's shifting image and corporate ambitions lie the personal stories of its top creators — stories often marked by transformation, reflection, and reinvention.

Despite earning millions throughout her two-year stint on OnlyFans, 37-year-old model and television personality Blac Chyna [left](#) the platform in the winter of 2023, shortly after her baptism, citing her desire to be a better role model for her children.

"I'm just changing everything about me. It's a dead end. All that stuff is a dead end, and I know that I'm worth way more than that," she announced at the time. "(But) shout out to the people that do still have their OnlyFans and stuff like that. Get your money; don't let the money make you."

She has since focused on rebranding her image as Angela White, focusing on spirituality, wellness, and other business ventures, even joining a similarly structured yet nudity-free platform called Passes.

Meanwhile, the likes of Mr. Shaw have no grandiose beliefs on how long the windfall might last, but they intend to make hay while the Sun shines.

"I'm totally agnostic about the future. AI may threaten this industry or increase earnings. I'm taking it one step at a time," he added. "I firmly believe one must go where the eyeballs are, and a content creator must always be open to new possibilities."
