

Section 10

The Web API paradox: a rule against the automation Valve ships

Investigated by: Agent Dylan

The Web API paradox: a rule against the automation Valve ships

An automation API. A rule against automation.

Context & source limits

The question this section puts is how the two are reconciled: which uses of the API are authorised, by whom, and on what published criteria. No count of authorised commercial API users is estimated here, and none is implied by the absence of a published list — the absence is the finding, not a number behind it. The Steam Support messages quoted above are reproduced by the ArchiSteamFarm project in its own FAQ (verified verbatim 2026-09-22); they are not Valve publications, and the accounts they were sent to are not identified.

The rule (SSA § 4.C): no scripts, no bots, no non-human systems on Steam. **The record:** Valve ships a headless REST API whose entire purpose is server-to-server automation, and hands the key to any account. **Users are banned for automation; the automation interface is Valve's own product.** Which commercial uses are authorised has never been published.



The "Game Developer" Fallacy

Steamworks SDK (Legitimate)

Used by legitimate game studios to integrate achievements, matchmaking, and leaderboards into their game clients. Requires complex C++ integration and official partner onboarding.

Steam Web API (The Loophole)

A headless JSON/REST architecture designed for external web servers. In the hijack pattern documented here it is used to read inventories and manipulate peer-to-peer trades from remote servers; its legitimate uses are not catalogued in this dossier.

Who the key is for An ordinary Steam user has no in-client need for a Web API key; the key page lives under a developer URL and its documented purpose is external, server-side access. The archived hijack complaints describe victims who did not know the page existed until a key had been registered on their account.

The Automation Contradiction

SSA § 4.C provides: "You may not use any form of scripts, bots, macros, or other non-human-controlled systems ('Automation') to interact with Content and Services on Steam in any manner." Yet the Web API endpoints (like `CancelTradeOffer`) require no human UI and no captcha and bypass the Steam client entirely. The API is designed for server-to-server automation; the rule prohibits automation by users; the boundary between the two is not published.

A server-side position in the trade flow

A Web API key lets a third-party server act on the account's trades without the Steam client. In the hijack pattern, that server sits between the account holder and the trade server.

- → No trade-confirmation screen is shown for the key's actions.
- → Allows background polling (`GetTradeOffers`).
- → Cancels and re-issues offers without user interaction.

Valve built the interface, prohibited user automation in its rules, and has published no criteria for which commercial uses are authorised.

[Download PDF](#)

[Download JSON](#)

[Download PGP signature](#)

PhishDestroy · file integrity signature for this fact

[Material record ↗](#)