Apple says App Store appeals process is now live, so developers can start challenging decisions

Apple on Monday announced that its new App Store appeals process, first revealed at WWDC in June, is now live, meaning developers can challenge Apple over whether their app is in fact violating one of its guidelines. In addition to that, Apple says developers can also suggest changes to the App Store guidelines through a form submission on its online developer portal.

“For apps that are already on the App Store, bug fixes will no longer be delayed over guideline violations except for those related to legal issues. You’ll instead be able to address guideline violations in your next submission,” reads a note posted to Apple’s developer website. “And now, in addition to appealing decisions about whether an app violates guidelines, you can suggest changes to the guidelines.”

These changes were introduced at WWDC on the heels of a rather public feud with software maker Basecamp, the creator of a new email service called Hey. Basecamp openly challenged Apple over whether it could distribute an iOS companion app to its email service without including in-app sign-up options, as Hey costs $99 a year and Basecamp felt it unnecessary to give Apple its standard 30 percent cut of that revenue (although Apple does only take 15 percent of in-app subscription revenue after one year of service). Apple, in response, held up the company’s bug fixes and update capability.

Apple is facing pressure from all sides about its rules governing the App Store and iOS

Eventually, the two companies reached a compromise: Basecamp added dummy accounts to its iOS app, allowing consumers to sign up and then transition to a paid account later on the web. In return, Apple would allow the company to follow the model of enterprise apps — Hey said it would also start supporting businesses, in addition to consumers — and not require in-app purchase options.

In the aftermath, however, Apple sustained a fair amount of bad press and developer outcry over its actions, which presumably led to the App Store appeals process. (Apple did not specifically cite Basecamp as the reason for the changes.) Now, developers can appeal when Apple finds them in violation of a guideline, and the company won't do to any developers in the future what it did to Basecamp when it effectively held the company's updates hostage until the dispute was resolved.

Of course, Apple is in a much more precarious position than it was in June. Right around the time of WWDC, the European Union launched two antitrust investigations into Apple and the App Store, including one specifically around the company's 30 percent cut. Following the conference, Apple got into two high-profile fights with Facebook and Microsoft over cloud gaming services (and then a separate feud with Facebook last week over in-app purchases). Then, earlier this month, Epic Games challenged Apple over in-app payments in *Fortnite* (and Google as well), kicking off a massive legal battle that is only in the early stages of what could be a multiyear saga with substantial consequences for the App Store and mobile app distribution in general.

It's unclear how the developer appeals process will work with Apple, as the only company to have publicly said it contacted Apple about an appeal was Facebook, which said Apple did not respond to its request about its Facebook Gaming app. It's unclear whether Apple stiffed Facebook because it felt like it

or if it was because the appeals process simply wasn’t officially live yet. But hopefully the process of getting an appeal started with Apple is now more formalized, so you don’t have to be a giant corporation to get the ball rolling if you feel you have a legitimate grievance worth investigating.

Here’s the Apple developer note in full:

> *The App Store is dedicated to providing a great experience for everyone. To continue offering a safe place for users to download apps and helping you successfully develop apps that are secure, high-quality, reliable, and respectful of user privacy, we’ve updated the app review process as announced at WWDC20. For apps that are already on the App Store, bug fixes will no longer be delayed over guideline violations except for those related to legal issues. You’ll instead be able to address guideline violations in your next submission. And now, in addition to appealing decisions about whether an app violates guidelines, you can suggest changes to the guidelines. We also encourage you to submit your App Store and Apple development platform suggestions so we can continue to improve experiences for the developer community.*

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