Google is killing YouTube’s “Hangouts on Air” this year

Enlarge / Google’s customary “We’re going to kill this service soon” pop-up.

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Another day, another dead or dying Google product. This time, Google has decided to shut down “Hangouts on Air,” a fairly popular service for broadcasting a group video call live over the Internet. Notices saying the service is “going away later this year” have started to pop up for users when they start a Hangout on Air. Hangouts on Air, by the way, is a totally different and unrelated service from “Google Hangouts,” which is also shutting down sometime in the future.

Google kills product

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Hangouts on Air was popular with podcasters, since it was a super easy way to get a group of people together, on video, and have the conversation broadcasted live. Hangouts on Air started life on Google+ and transitioned to a part of YouTube in 2016, where live group video conversations could be created in the YouTube interface and then be recorded as a video for your YouTube channel. The service had great features like chat, screenshare, and an automatic camera system that would

switch to the person that was talking, making it perfect for easy podcast videos.

With Hangouts on Air dying, there really is no equivalent, easy way to do a live streamed group video chat. Google's shutdown message points people to YouTube.com/webcam, but that page is only for a single person on a local webcam, not a group video chat. Rolling your own Hangouts on Air replacement would probably involve connecting multiple programs and services together. Skype can record calls but won't livestream them natively, for instance, so you'd need to pipe your calling software into some kind of livestream program like OBS, and from there you could hook it up to a Twitch or YouTube broadcast. That might be a normal workflow for live streaming pros, but it's a lot more complicated than just a few clicks on YouTube.com done entirely in a browser.

Google hasn't given an exact date for the shutdown or said if it plans to replicate group video calls through some other app.

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