Reddit is about to get a little less accessible



r/TranscribersOfReddit, a Reddit community of volunteers who write transcriptions for media that appears on subreddits like r/ProgrammerHumor and r/technicallythetruth, will be closing down in a matter of days, according to a post from a moderator. The community's final day will be June 30th, 2023.

"Our role in the Reddit community has always been to point out inadequacies in the platform – namely, the lack of accessibility features such as alt text – and provide a temporary, constructive solution while raising awareness of these problems," wrote Rebekah Ginsburg, who goes by u/halailah on Reddit and is chairwoman of the board of Grafeas Group, the nonprofit that operates the system powering r/TranscribersOfReddit. Users on the subreddit transcribe images, audio, and video for about 100 subreddits.

"We believed that Reddit was ultimately interested in addressing these flaws, and our beliefs were reinforced by the positive relationships we have maintained with admins over the past six years," Ginsburg said. "But in light of recent

events, we now recognize that Reddit corporate has demonstrated a severe lack of willingness to fix core issues with the platform."

Part of the reason for the shutdown is Reddit's forthcoming API changes, which include potentially huge costs for using the API. While the changes would "likely make it more difficult, though not impossible, for Transcribers of Reddit to function," according to Ginsburg, "we believe it is only a matter of time until further changes truly make it impossible."

The changes also halted plans to transition to a custom third-party app for the service, r/TranscribersOfReddit and Grafeas Group co-founder Joe Kaufeld, who goes by u/Itsthejoker on Reddit, wrote in a different post. "That move has now been cut off at the ankles, and combined with Everything Else and the amount of money it takes to keep the sub running, we decided it was the 'least sucky' option to close down here," Kaufeld said.

Many users are mourning the shutdown. "r/ToR_Archive is my r/all," wrote u/MostlyBlindGamer, who is also a mod on r/blind. "Transcriptions on r/ProgrammerHumor are how I senselessly stay connected to the memes around my work." "r/worldnewsvideo and its community will miss you terribly… thank you for all you have done to bring Reddit to everyone," wrote another user.

In the shutdown post, Ginsburg pointed to Reddit's unclear timeline for accessibility improvements to the official app and how the impending shutdown of some third-party apps will hurt users. Many blind and visually impaired moderators rely on third-party apps to moderate because the company's app does not have what they need, and they're worried about how they will be able to moderate once apps like Apollo shut down (also on June 30th).

Reddit says it will exempt accessibility-focused apps from the API fees, a list that includes RedReader, Dystopia, and Luna. However, according to a post in r/software, which is read-only in protest of Reddit, those apps do not have full moderator functionality. Even though Luna is apparently working on some moderator features, the post said, so if the third-party apps do shut down at the end of the month, many moderators might be in a tough spot.

Ginsburg also said the “lack of trust in Reddit and severe disappointment in their responses to user protests” were a factor in deciding to close the community.

Reddit did meet with moderators of r/blind and other accessibility-focused subreddits on June 16th, according to a post on r/blind, but it didn’t seem to do much to calm fears. Reddit apparently “seemed unaware that the apps which have so far received exemptions from API pricing do not have sufficient moderation functions,” for example. When one moderator noted that blind mods who can’t effectively moderate after the changes “may be removed at Reddit’s discretion per policy,” Reddit “deferred comment.”

“While the call was promising in that Reddit invited us to be part of continuing dialog and demonstrated some well-conceived accessible designs for Reddit users, we came away with serious concerns which Reddit was either unable or unwilling to address during the meeting,” the post said.