YouTube permanently bans controversial creator LeafyIsHere

YouTube has banned the controversial creator Calvin Lee Vail, better known as LeafyIsHere, for repeatedly violating the company's harassment policies. The ban follows big changes to YouTube's harassment policy meant to deter behavior that in part helped creators in the commentary community like Leafy develop a following.

Although Vail has a history of making videos that include offensive comments about other creators on the site, including a now-deleted video from 2016 that mocked the appearance of another creator, the termination only came after his channel amassed at least three violations of YouTube's harassment policy over the last 90 days. That includes videos featuring cyberbullying (including malicious insults and name-calling based on someone's appearance, gender, or orientation) and encouraging viewers to disrupt other creators' streams. Vail told YouTube creator Daniel "Keemstar" Keem that he didn't receive any emails about specific videos prior to the ban.

"We have strict policies that prohibit harassment on YouTube, and we remove content that violates our policies when flagged to our attention," a YouTube spokesperson told *The Verge*. "Channels that repeatedly violate our policies will be terminated." The spokesperson confirmed that Vail's ban is permanent.

YouTube has started instituting new measures to try to prevent creator-on-creator harassment over the last year. The company came under fire after former *Vox* host Carlos Maza tweeted out

multiple instances where conservative pundit Steven Crowder used homophobic and other derogatory language to talk about him. YouTube didn't respond to the situation right away, but after backlash continued, the company temporarily removed Crowder from its partner program, essentially cutting off his channel's ability to run advertisements. CEO Susan Wojcicki acknowledged that YouTube needed to institute new policies.

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Vail, who had close to 5 million subscribers at the time of his ban, found himself at the center of a few high-profile disputes over the last few months, most notably with H3H3's Ethan Klein and Twitch streamer Imane "Pokimane" Anys. Vail tweeted in early June that he received two "channel strikes today for 'harassment' on my new videos," noting that he was setting all his videos to private to hopefully avoid a third strike.

YouTube's community guidelines state that three content strikes will lead to a channel's termination. YouTube did not comment on which videos led to Vail's ban. Notably, Vail's ban arrived after he started an ongoing video series about Anys, in which he lobbed personal insults at her and her fans, leading to criticism from several high-profile Twitch streamers and YouTube creators. Videos that contain prolonged insults and may encourage viewers to disrupt another person's stream violate the company's guidelines.

Vail's ban didn't come as a shock to many in the community, but his channel termination is a stark reminder of how different YouTube is in 2020 compared to the early 2010s. YouTube's new creator-on-creator harassment policy was specifically drafted to address videos from personalities who use their platform to attack others, which had previously been more common on the platform.

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but they’re criticizing them as a person”
“The policy has to be written in such a way that creators can comment on each other and criticize each other,” CEO Susan Wojcicki said in a 2019 interview while talking about the new policy. “The question is … where do you draw the line? Where do they cross the line? When it’s no longer just ideas, but they’re criticizing them as a person.”

The commentator community can run into this issue more than others because their videos are dedicated to talking about other YouTubers, but Vail has a history of using offensive language while doing so. Although some of Vail’s content might have been more accepted five years ago, new policies like the creator-on-creator harassment guidelines were created to prevent the type of behavior that Vail often employs. “I would love to see Leafy try and exist in today’s current landscape,” Klein, one of Vail’s staunchest critics, wrote on Twitter.

Other commentators, including John Scarce, spoke out against Vail’s ban, tweeting, “Even if you weren’t a fan of his videos, Leafy’s termination is very, very, concerning.” Some commentators are worried this could imply a larger crackdown is coming. “Leafy being terminated now means any of us could be next,” Scarce added.

Following his ban, Vail has joined StoryFire, an app co-created by Jesse Ridgway, a former YouTube creator who criticized YouTube’s demonetization practices. Parts of YouTube’s creator community are left to wonder what this means for the site’s culture, something that has radically changed over the last few years. Vail isn’t the only creator who makes these types of videos, but his videos represent the type of content that YouTube seems to be targeting.

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