

YouTube's ad blocker crackdown escalates, aggravating users

Google/YouTube

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YouTube has launched a global front against ad-blocking extensions, taking a small experiment it began in June full-scale.

As noticed by Android Authority on Monday morning, some YouTube users are now seeing a disruptive prompt when they try to watch videos while using a browser with an ad blocker. The prompt notes that "ad blockers violate YouTube's Terms of Service" and urges users to either allow ads on YouTube or subscribe to YouTube Premium.

While I was able to still watch YouTube with an ad blocker, recently, an increasing number of users have reported seeing the prompt. The Verge reported that sometimes those who see the prompt can continue watching videos anyway, but "for one Verge staffer, YouTube now fully blocks them nearly every time."

In a statement shared with The Verge and other publications, Google confirmed YouTube's ad blocker crackdown, saying:

The use of ad blockers violate YouTube's Terms of Service. We've launched a global effort to urge viewers with ad blockers enabled to allow ads on YouTube or try YouTube

Premium for an ad free experience. Ads support a diverse ecosystem of creators globally and allow billions to access their favorite content on YouTube.

The Google support page link in the above statement notes that “if you continue to use ad blockers, we may block your video playback.”

YouTube’s terms of service say that users aren’t allowed to “modify” the service or “circumvent, disable, fraudulently engage with, or otherwise interfere with any part of the Service (or attempt to do any of these things), including security-related features or features that (a) prevent or restrict the copying or other use of Content or (b) limit the use of the Service or Content.”

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In June, Google confirmed to The Verge “a small experiment globally that urges viewers with ad blockers enabled to allow ads on YouTube or try YouTube Premium.” Now it seems the effort has been expanded.

Since announcing the smaller “experiment,” ad blockers such as Adblock Plus have been looking for ways to continue serving YouTube users, but that will become harder as Google hardens its ad-blocker-blocking efforts.

“The bottom line is we know how important it is for our users to access an ad-free YouTube experience for free,” an Adblock Plus blog post from October 13 reads.

Indeed, YouTube users have hit social media to show their outrage over YouTube’s heightened war against ad blocking, pointing to criticisms like a “ridiculous” amount of ads, including offensive and “intrusive” ones, a plain distaste for ads, and the fact that even YouTube Premium subscribers are still subject to videos with a section committed to the video creators’ sponsor.

But YouTube's primary revenue source is advertising, and Google is willing to do what it takes to keep that money funneling in, even if it upsets its users. That's why you can expect to see 30-second-long un-skippable ads when watching YouTube on TVs soon. The company has even gone so far as to experiment with making the "skip ads" button hard to find.

Google is hoping that the ad-averse will move to YouTube Premium, which conveniently just saw a price hike in July. Experiments around pushing users to the service have included asking for a subscription to watch 4K videos and a surge in un-skippable ads.

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