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Facebook Brings Down The Hammer Again: Cuts Off MessageMe's Access To Its Social Graph

Kim-Mai Cutler 9:20 PM PDT · March 15, 2013

MessageMe, an app that launched last week and raced up the charts to the #2 spot in social networking in the U.S., is confronting Facebook's touchiness around access to its social graph.

The app's integration with Facebook stopped functioning earlier today (see left), the result of the company's decision to cut MessageMe off from its "Find Friends" functionality, according to sources familiar with decision. MessageMe CEO Arjun Sethi declined to comment in this story and Facebook didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

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The move resembles Facebook's decision last month to shut off Voxer's access to the graph, even though Voxer connected to Facebook for well over a year. Voxer is another communications app that supports calling

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and voice chat. Facebook cut the app off around the same time that it launched competing functionality with free voice calling to other users.

In that decision, Facebook cited Section 10 of its platform policy (which is the same one it's using in MessageMe's case):

Reciprocity and Replicating core functionality: (a) Reciprocity: Facebook Platform enables developers to build personalized, social experiences via the Graph API and related APIs. If you use any Facebook APIs to build personalized or social experiences, you must also enable people to easily share their experiences back with people on Facebook. (b) **Replicating core functionality: You may not use Facebook Platform to promote, or to export user data to, a product or service that replicates a core Facebook product or service without our permission.**

MessageMe apparently replicates too much of Facebook Messenger's functionality for the company to be comfortable with it. Facebook has long been touchy about providing access to the biggest of its strategic competitors like Google and Twitter. Back in 2010, Twitter's then-CEO Ev Williams griped about the company's unwillingness to let Twitter users look up their Facebook friends on the service or to send Facebook updates to Twitter. In the same year, Google and Facebook had a back-and-forth over Facebook's access to Gmail's contact importer because the social network wouldn't send data the other way.

But it's only in the last year that the company has really stepped up enforcement against other startups. After cutting off Voxer last month, Facebook clarified its policy, saying that apps needed to share content back to Facebook and couldn't replicate too much of Facebook's core functionality. It cited the same policy in cutting off Twitter's Vine hours after launch and Russian search engine Yandex's app Wonder, because it replicated too much of graph search.

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In MessageMe's case, asking the company to share data back is kind of silly considering that people wouldn't want to reveal who they message with or what they privately say.

But the effect might not be too bad on the company. Vine has thrived over the last two months and still holds the #1 social networking spot in the U.S. on the iOS app store. Voxer's active usage appears to have stayed level in the month after Facebook cut them off.

Plus, MessageMe actually doesn't rely on Facebook for most of its growth. It instead uses the address book, which is the same method that other big messaging apps like WhatsApp and Line have used.

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