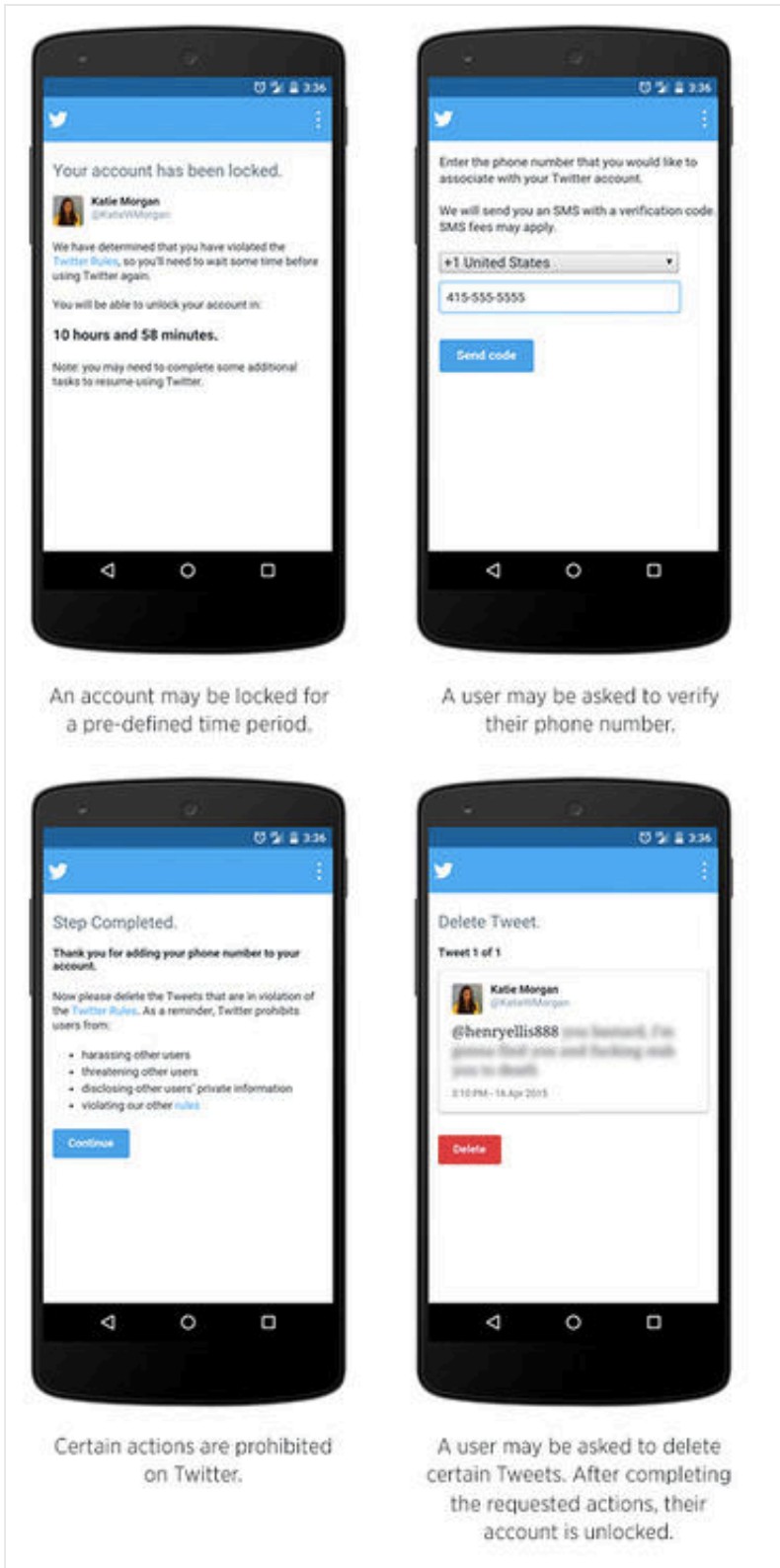


Twitter expands threats ban, may lock accounts in aim to limit abuse



An account may be locked for a pre-defined time period.

A user may be asked to verify their phone number.

Certain actions are prohibited on Twitter.

A user may be asked to delete certain Tweets. After completing the requested actions, their account is unlocked.

A look at the way Twitter will now handle abusive accounts. Twitter

Twitter has announced policy changes that the company hopes will limit abuse on its social network.

Twitter has updated its policy pertaining to violent threats to include "promot[ing] violence against others." Previously, the policy banned tweets that were limited to "direct, specific threats of violence against others." In a **statement** on Tuesday, Twitter said that the previous policy was "unduly narrow" and didn't allow for the company to easily handle threats.

In addition, Twitter said it's also boosting its enforcement efforts. Once its enforcement team has determined that a person has abused another, it reserves the right to lock accounts for specified periods. Also, abusive users may be asked to delete tweets before they can get back on the service.

Abusive talk is somewhat commonplace on social networks, including Twitter. Indeed, Twitter General Counsel **Vijaya Gadde wrote an op-ed piece in the Washington Post** last week saying that the company must do more to ensure free speech is accepted across its network. Gadde explained that users should not feel unwilling to share their opinions due to fear of other users.

Twitter has for years been a cesspool of threatening tweets. In 2013, for instance, freelance journalist and feminist Caroline Criado-Perez **complained to Twitter after receiving rape threats over several days**. The abusive tweets led to an online petition calling on Twitter to improve its abuse-reporting policy. The company responded with an improvement, adding that it takes "online abuse seriously" and it would suspend the accounts of any users acting abusively.

Still, the harassment against some users continued. **In December**, Twitter announced a new set of tools aimed at reporting abusive behavior. The company's

modifications came after some Twitter users sent vicious messages to Robin Williams' daughter after her father's death, prompting her to delete the app from her phone. Anita Sarkeesian, an academic highlighting how women are portrayed in video games, was so disturbed by tweets she received last year that she fled her home to find safety. She also canceled a speech she was set to give in the wake of the threats.

In February, **Twitter CEO Dick Costolo issued an internal memo** that was subsequently leaked to the public, sharing his concern over the level of abuse and harassment occurring on his company's platform.

"We suck at dealing with abuse and trolls on the platform and we've sucked at it for years," Costolo wrote in one of the internal memos. "It's no secret and the rest of the world talks about it every day. We lose core user after core user by not addressing simple trolling issues that they face every day."

Costolo went on to write in a response to a Twitter employee's question on the company's internal forum that he's ultimately responsible for the abuse.

"I'm frankly ashamed of how poorly we've dealt with this issue during my tenure as CEO. It's absurd. There's no excuse for it. I take full responsibility for not being more aggressive on this front. It's nobody else's fault but mine, and it's embarrassing," he wrote. "We're going to start kicking these people off right and left and making sure that when they issue their ridiculous attacks, nobody hears them."

Still, actually stopping users from abusing others can be difficult. Twitter has historically relied on its staff to police abusive tweets. With 288 million users who log on to the service at least once a day sending 500 million tweets, quickly responding to abuse is challenging.

Twitter's reporting update last year promised faster responses, and last month, the

company unveiled a new feature that **lets victims of abuse create a full report of the harassment** to give to law enforcement. Twitter also started testing a "quality filtering" feature last month that **automatically removes tweets** that are deemed threatening, offensive or abusive. The company touched on that feature Tuesday, saying that it's currently testing it to "limit" the reach of abusive tweets.

All of the updates are aimed at making Twitter more user-friendly. Given how much the company has done in the past and that issues remain, however, users may wonder whether these latest efforts will finally turn the tide. Twitter director of product management Shreyas Doshi did not promise anything, but did say that the company will keep a close eye on its new improvements to see how it's affecting its community.

"We'll be monitoring how these changes discourage abuse and how they help ensure the overall health of a platform that encourages everyone's participation," Doshi wrote. "And as the ultimate goal is to ensure that Twitter is a safe place for the widest possible range of perspectives, we will continue to evaluate and update our approach in this critical arena."

Twitter declined to comment further on the announcement.