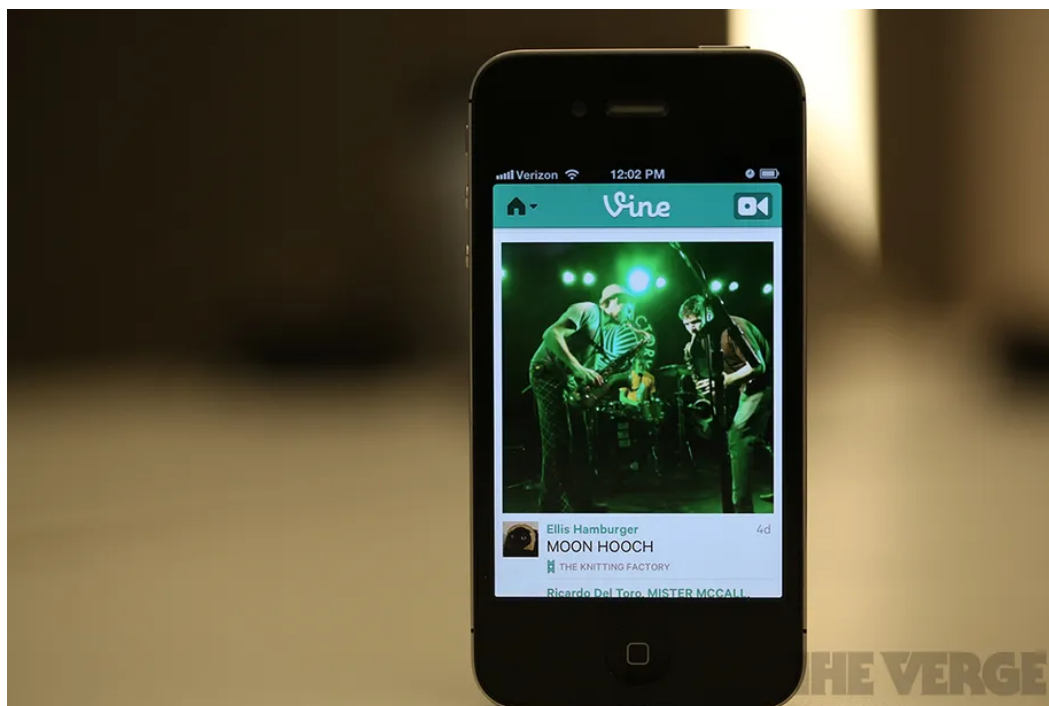


Why Vine died

theverge.com/2016/10/28/13456208/why-vine-died-twitter-shutdown

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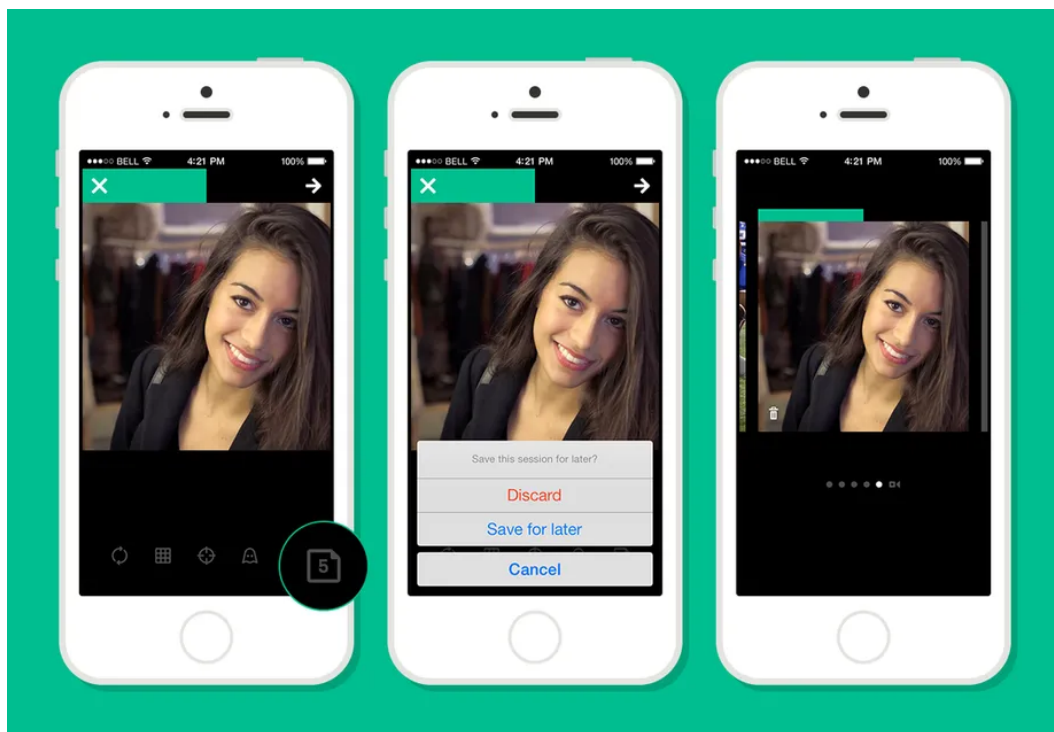
The thing about Vine becoming the internet’s premier tool for making short-form videos is that it happened almost completely by accident. Its founders had envisioned their tool for making 6-second clips as a way to help people capture casual moments in their lives and share them with friends. It was part of their pitch to Twitter, which bought the company for a reported \$30 million in October 2012, seeing it as a near-perfect video analog to its flagship app’s short-form text posts.

And yet even before the app launched, users had taken the 6-second constraint as a creative challenge. Something about that loop — the way a Vine endlessly rewound itself after completing, like a GIF with audio — encouraged people to put the app to strange uses. “It was surprising,” said Dom Hofmann, who founded Vine with Rus Yusupov and Colin Kroll four months before Twitter bought it. “Our original beta had something like 10 or 15 people on it, and even with that small group we started to see experimentation pretty early on.”

Within weeks, it appeared that Vine probably would never become the everyday video sharing tool its founders had envisioned. Instead it became something wilder — and much more culturally interesting. “It became pretty clear as soon after we launched,” Hofmann said. “Watching the community and the tool push on each other was exciting and unreal, and almost immediately it became clear that Vine’s culture was going to shift towards creativity and experimentation.”

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On Thursday, the experimentation came to an end. With its own future increasingly uncertain, Twitter said it would shut down Vine’s mobile app some time in the next few months. And while existing Vines will remain on the web, a media format that had become beloved for its versatility now appears headed the way of Betamax.

Interviews with seven former executives reveal a portrait of a company whose cultural impact far outstripped its strategic benefits to Twitter. Working a continent apart from their parent company, Vine’s small, New York-based team struggled to grow its user base or find ways to make money. While Vine once boasted a commanding lead over other social video apps, it failed to keep pace as competitors added features — something that ultimately drove its biggest stars away. The app generated more beloved memes and cultural moments than most apps with twice as many users — but Twitter’s mounting core business problems this year all but ensured it would eventually be sold off or shuttered.



Ian Padgham saw the potential in Vine — both creative and monetary — before almost anyone. As a member of Twitter’s marketing team in 2012, he was responsible for making videos that explained how the service worked. (His early film about working at Twitter is likely one of the most-watched recruiting videos ever made.) After Twitter bought Vine, he sat in on meetings with the marketing team and began to explore its potential as a creative tool.

Padgham’s first Vine was a simple time-lapse video of the view from his window at Twitter. He loved the 6-second limit, which forced him to think differently about storytelling. “It’s kind of like drawing in Microsoft Paint,” he said. “It used to be the worst app ever, but you couldn’t get distracted by the bells and whistles.”

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Padgham began making Vines every day before he left for work, and they soon grew both in popularity and in ambition. He cut out 300 photo prints and spent three hours painstakingly turning them into a tribute to Eadweard Muybridge, a photographer who did pioneering work in motion pictures. He stood underneath Big Ben and recorded a time lapse of himself appearing to move the hands of the clock with his fingers, a loop that was viewed more than 5 million times. Soon brands like Sony and Airbnb were contacting Padgham asking him to make Vines on their behalf, and six months after Vine launched he quit Twitter to do it full time.

In 2013, Vine began allowing users to record clips with their phones' front-facing cameras, and usage exploded. An ecosystem of young stars sprung up around the service, which evolved into a kind of live-action cartoon network. There was Zach King, whose eye-popping magic tricks earned him 4 million followers and more than 1.4 billion views. Or Amanda Cerny, whose physical comedy earned more than 2.2 billion views. Logan Paul, whose Vines looped more than 4 billion times, parlayed his following into a series of acting roles — while earning \$200,000 to create a single Vine for a brand, according to a recent *60 Minutes* report.

In a 2014 look at how video platforms were creating the next generation of celebrities, *The New Yorker* put Vine at the center. "A Vine's blink-quick transience, combined with its endless looping, simultaneously squeezes time and stretches it," Tad Friend wrote. The app generated countless memes, and grew increasingly self-referential over time, so that a single 6-second clip might reference a dozen previous hit Vines. And yet in retrospect it seems clear that 2014 was when Vine peaked. Research firm 7Park Data says 3.64 percent of all Android users opened Vine in August 2014; today that number has fallen to 0.66 percent. (Twitter never said how many people used Vine, but once claimed it had an audience of 200 million people on the web.)

Former executives say that a major competitive challenged emerged in the form of Instagram, which introduced 15-second video clips in June 2013. "Instagram video was the beginning of the end," one former executive told me. "[Vine] didn't move fast enough to differentiate." Instagram courted celebrities with longer videos, eventually bumping the limit to a more flexible 60 seconds. (Vines didn't break the 6-second barrier until earlier this year, and its extended videos never caught on.) Instagram also began promoting celebrity accounts in its popular "explore" tab, bringing them attention that Vine found difficult to match. Marketers began shifting their money away from Vine, and stars followed.

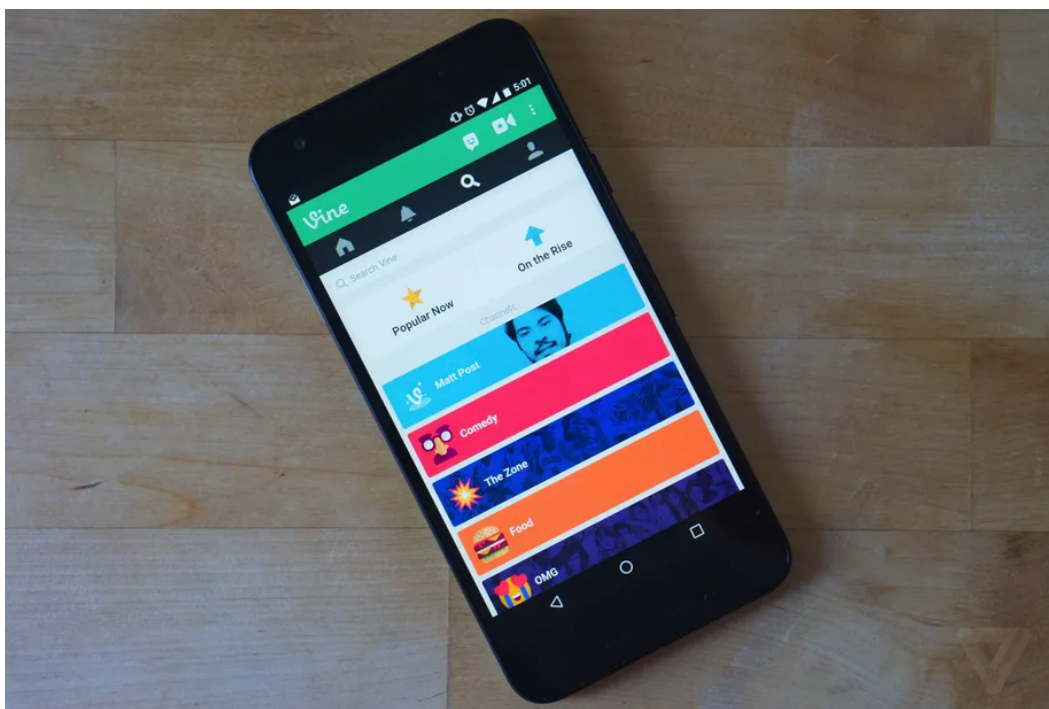
""Vine didn't move fast enough to differentiate.""

Meanwhile Snapchat, which allowed users to send each other 10-second video clips and (later) broadcast them publicly, ultimately became the casual mass-market lifecasting app that Vine's founders had once pitched their product to Twitter as. When other platforms

surged ahead, some Vine stars began negotiating to be paid to post on the service. But the talks stalled, and by May the Washington Post found that Vine users with large followings were sharing new videos much less frequently.

At the management level, Vine was rarely stable for long. Hofmann quit in 2014 to pursue a new startup. Kroll followed him out the door later that year. Twitter laid off Yusupov, who was Vine's creative director, as part of last year's mass layoffs. ("Don't sell your company!", he tweeted on Thursday.) Jason Toff took over Vine in 2014 and led it for two years before quitting this year to work on virtual reality projects at Google. Hannah Donovan became general manager in March after working at a series of music startups. Her lack of previous experience running a company led some employees I spoke with to question whether her hiring might be the beginning of the end.

Years of executive churn likely contributed to Vine's failure to make money. For a while, brands were happy to pay Vine stars directly to make ads and share them to their millions of followers. But after Snapchat and Instagram grew into hundreds of millions of daily users, marketers' interest in Vine dropped significantly. They had once longed for ways to grow their own followings on the app — through paid placement offerings similar to Twitter's promoted tweets and promoted accounts. But Vine never came through with any options, in part because the founders resisted monetization from the start, sources said. It never took a cut of stars' deals with brands, although Twitter bought a social media talent agency last year in hopes it could begin to do so indirectly.



By this year, Twitter executives were discussing ways to bring Twitter's various video offerings together somehow, sources said. In June, the company held discussions about absorbing Vine into Twitter's flagship app. To Vine employees, those discussions served as

evidence that Twitter never valued Vine as a standalone property the way its audience did. But no Vine integration ever materialized, and this summer top Vine executives began heading for the exits. Twitter explored selling the app, according to the *New York Times*, but it never found a buyer.

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“A couple of things plagued Vine, and it all stems from the same thing, which is a lack of unity and leadership on a vision,” said Ankur Thakkar, who was Vine’s head of editorial from 2014 until May of this year. He told me he was proud of the work the app did to highlight rising stars, including Ruth B, who earned a record deal after his team gave her a coveted “editor’s pick” award. But by the end the company was rudderless, he said. “That trickled down into all of the project teams and the things they were working on,” he said. “Vine didn’t ship anything of consequence for a year.”

The stars who grew famous on Vine continue posting their work on other platforms. But they’re no longer pushing the surprisingly elastic boundaries of the 6-second medium. “The most important of part of Vine has always been the people that are on it,” Dom Hofmann told me. “It’s also the only part that can’t be replicated. So I’m going to miss them. Even though I can and do follow some people from Vine on Instagram or Snapchat or Twitter or wherever they’ve decided to go, it just doesn’t feel the same. It’s like the band is breaking up and everyone’s going solo.”



