

Qantas grounds spoof Twitter account

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The account, @QantasPR, was started following the carrier's dramatic 48-hour grounding of its worldwide fleet last October over an industrial dispute with its staff, which prompted an angry backlash from customers.

Using the distinctive red and white "Flying Kangaroo" icon as its profile image, the account lampooned the airline and was followed by thousands of the microblogging site's members.

It has been officially suspended by [Twitter](#) and Qantas confirmed it was behind the shutdown.

"Qantas reported @QantasPR for breaching the Twitter terms of use and causing confusion. As a result, the @QantasPR username has been removed," a Qantas spokeswoman told AFP.

Cricket legend Shane Warne was among the spoof account's victims, directing a tirade of abuse at @QantasPR after the airline lost his luggage on January 22.

"I thought you were meant to look after Australians, not be sarcastic. You too often are late, cancel flights and lose luggage," Warne tweeted.

Despite describing itself as "the non-official official broadcast channel for Australia's national airline", @QantasPR did not specify clearly enough that it was a parody account not affiliated with the carrier, Qantas said.

Twitter users criticised Qantas for the move, with one wag sarcastically thanking the airline because he was "genuinely unable to differentiate between your company and a joke".

Others claimed it was a cynical move ahead of the release of Qantas's half-year results on Thursday, with speculation it is poised to announce job cuts.

A new account, @QantasPRPR soon sprang up, calling itself the "unofficial official Twitter account of the now defunct @QantasPR" and calling for the ban of "plane-sized Coke cans" and flights into the southern city of Adelaide.

But another group, @Qantas_PR, later contacted AFP to insist it was

behind the original account, also providing a copy of its letter of protest to Twitter.

"We have many @replies from users acknowledging it is a parody account and at no time do we believe that we intentionally deceived users that it was an official account," the letter said.

"We would like to request to you, oh powerful Twitter, to reinstate the [account](#) under your parody policy and we will put 'fake' in its name to show our good faith in not wanting to hurt Qantas' feelings."

It is not the first time Qantas has hit turbulence on Twitter -- it was ridiculed for running a contest about the ultimate "luxury experience" just weeks after the grounding amid its dispute over staff pay and conditions.

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