

Facebook steps into middle of smartphone lifestyles

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Facebook social network founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg speaks at a press conference at Facebook headquarters in Palo Alto, California. Facebook on Wednesday moved to become the heart of smartphone lifestyles by making it easy for people to find deals at nearby shops and connect with mobile software applications.

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The world's top online [social networking service](#) updated its [mobile platform](#) to let people check into third-party applications with a click of a Facebook sign-in icon and also let them see bargains available at local businesses.

"There is obviously a lot of change in the mobile space," Facebook founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said during a press event at the firm's headquarters in the California city of Palo Alto.

"There is also a revolution happening in the social space," he continued.

"You can rethink any product area to be social, where all interactions involve someone's friends... That makes some really big opportunities for new companies to get built and more industries to get disrupted."

Facebook is intent on being a platform for socializing done using applications on mobile phones, regardless of who makes the devices or the programs, according to Zuckerberg.

"There has been this rumor floating around recently that Facebook is going to build a phone... No," Zuckerberg said.

"Our goal is to make it so that no matter what (mobile phone) platform you are writing for, it can be social."

Two of the three announcements made by Facebook were aimed at [software makers](#), with the social network eliminating the need to type in passwords for [mobile applications](#) and opening a location-based "Places" feature to programs crafted for smartphones running on Google-backed [Android](#) handsets.

A "Deals" feature unveiled by Facebook promised to resonate with users and businesses by tapping into location-sensing features of mobile phones to connect people with bargains at local shops, restaurants or bars.

Deals applications on smartphones would list promotions and other enticements nearby establishments post to lure customers.

"I see this as a game changer in the location-based services field," said Forrester analyst Augie Ray. "I think this advances Facebook's goals of being at the center of consumers' virtual worlds."

Facebook Deals comes as a threat to Foursquare, a popular service that lets people "check-in" at spots using smartphones and then letting selected friends know where each other are.

Facebook has more than 500 million users worldwide compared with approximately five million people at Foursquare, according to Ray.

Facebook is giving people incentives to check in by rewarding them with discounts or other rewards from local merchants.

"So many people have said there is no reason to check in at these location-based services," Ray said. "Now, there is a reason for moms, kids, or just about anyone to check in using Facebook."

Zuckerberg said that Facebook gets no money from promotions posted at Deals and that user privacy remained a priority.

Businesses can pay for ads to be posted at Deals pages, and if the service results in a deluge of promotions posted by local shops that could open the door for Facebook to charge for priority placement of offers.

"Once Deals is adopted there will be demand to differentiate deals," Ray said of the potential for Facebook to eventually make money from the service.

About 200 million people use Facebook mobile applications, according to Zuckerberg.

Facebook has been beefing up its team devoted to programs for Android

smartphones.

The single sign-on feature for third-party applications is intended to deal with a lament that trying to type on tiny keypads on smartphones is so frustrating that people don't bother with programs.

"For the applications that are important to you, you are willing to go through the pain," Facebook mobile product manager Erick Tseng said.

"In an age where we measure Internet searches in milliseconds and we expect online video to start immediately, removing friction counts."

Online social computer game star Zynga and coupon service Groupon were among Internet services that had single sign-in features in place on Wednesday.

Launch partners for Facebook Deals included fast-food giant McDonald's and Starbucks coffee shop chain.

Facebook teams are working on making software developers kits to various handset platforms, with Android and iPhone as priorities.

Zuckerberg made it clear that iPad is not in its targeted line-up of gadgets.

"iPad's not mobile, it's a computer," Zuckerberg said. "It's a different thing. Sorry. I didn't mean to be rude to Apple; we love Apple here."

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