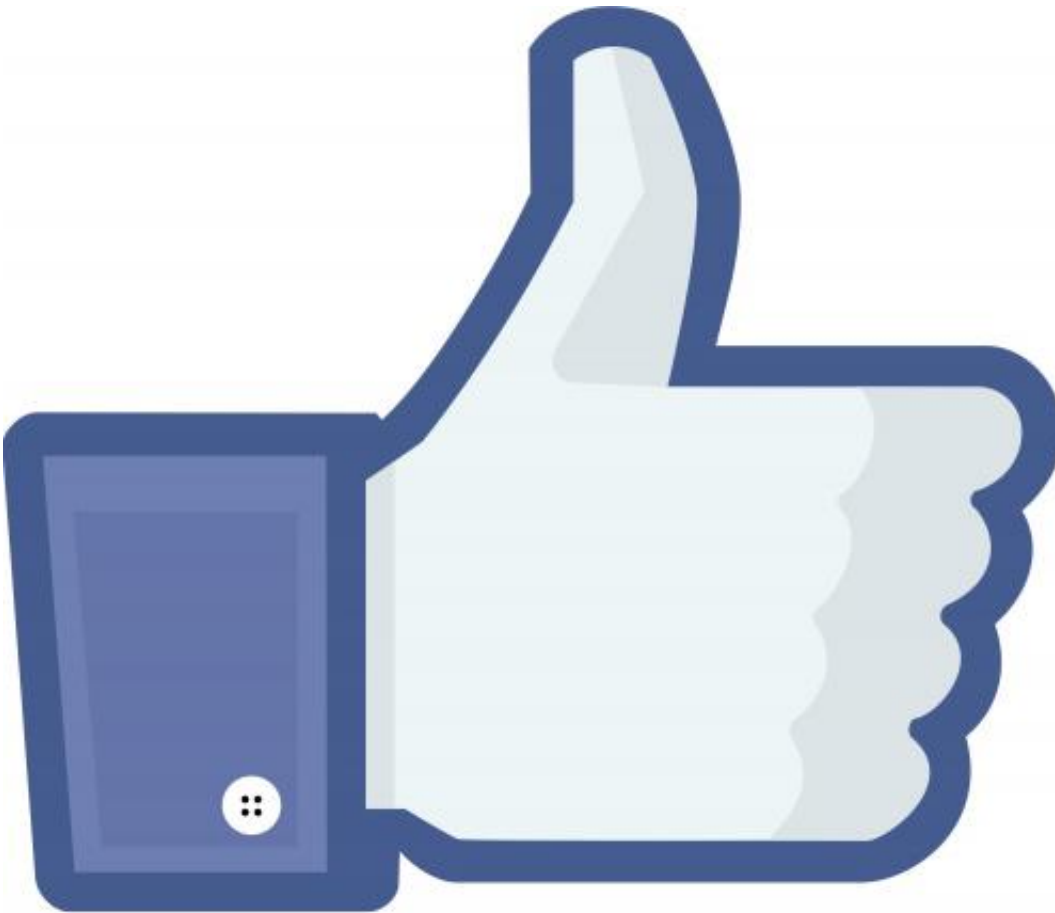# Facebook aims to get the world online (Update 2)

August 21 2013, by Barbara Ortutay

Food, water and the Internet? Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg wants to get all of the world's 7 billion people online through a partnership with

some of the largest mobile technology companies. He says the Web is an essential part of life, and everyone deserves to be connected, whether they live in Norway, Nicaragua or Namibia.

"The Internet not only connects us to our friends, families and communities, but it is also the foundation of the global knowledge economy," Zuckerberg wrote in a paper posted to his Facebook page late Tuesday. The title asks "Is Connectivity A Human Right?"

Of course, connecting more people to the Internet is the kind of philanthropy that would create more potential Facebook users, which would also help boost the company's bottom line.

"There's nothing wrong with that," said Fordham University communications professor Paul Levinson, author of "New New Media."

"I think it is actually a profoundly important human right in the 21st century to have access to the Internet."

To get there, Facebook Inc. on Wednesday announced a partnership called Internet.org. It includes the world's biggest social network, plus Korean electronics giant Samsung, Finnish handset maker Nokia and wireless chip maker Qualcomm Inc. More companies are expected to join.

Facebook said the group's goal is to "make Internet access available to the two-thirds of the world who are not yet connected"—about 5 billion people.

Levinson called the venture "profoundly humanistic, while adding that "at the same time, I would never say that Facebook is run by angels."

If the effort pays off, Facebook will grow its user base, advertising

revenue and influence. Business and philanthropy, in this case, can go hand in hand, Levinson said.

The group's plans, still in an early, rough-draft phase, include developing cheaper smartphones and tools that would reduce the amount of data required to run mobile applications. For Facebook, the move would certainly add more users to its current 1.15 billion, and with them more advertising revenue. Still, Zuckerberg paints the effort as something larger.

"For nine years, we've been on a mission to connect the world. We now connect more than 1 billion people, but to connect the next 5 billion we must solve a much bigger problem: the vast majority of people don't have access to the Internet," Zuckerberg wrote.

He points out that the people who already use Facebook "have way more money than the rest of the world combined." That means it may "not actually be profitable for us to serve the next few billion people for a very long time, if ever. But we believe everyone deserves to be connected."

Most of Facebook's users live outside the U.S., and much of the site's new user base will come from developing countries in the years ahead. And while most Americans first got online using desktop computers, many of the Internet's newest users are bypassing PCs entirely, relying on mobile phones instead.

Javier Olivan, vice president of growth and analytics at Facebook, said Facebook's move continues what the company has already been doing to get more people online. This includes "Facebook For Every Phone," an app that launched in 2011 to let people with simple, non-smartphones use Facebook. Facebook says it has invested more than $1 billion so far to connect people in the developing world to the Internet.

The Internet.org project is Zuckerberg's latest venture that seeks to meld philanthropy with ambition.

The billionaire CEO made his first charitable splash in 2010, two years before his company went public, when he donated $100 million in Facebook Inc. stock to Newark, New Jersey, schools. He later gave another $500 million to a Silicon Valley charity with the aim of funding health and education issues. Earlier this year, he launched Fwd.us, a political group aimed at changing immigration policy, boosting education and encouraging investment in scientific research.

Wireless equipment company Ericsson, Web browser developer Opera Software and MediaTek, another wireless semiconductor company, are also founding members of Internet.org.

Google Inc., which is not a part of the Internet.org effort, launched a similar undertaking earlier this year with the goal of getting everyone on Earth online. Called Project Loon, the effort launched Internet-beaming antennas aloft on giant helium balloons.

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