

# Instagram unveils private video, photo messaging (Update)

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Instagram co-founder Kevin Systrom addresses a press conference in New York, December 12, 2013

Instagram on Thursday unveiled a new service allowing its 150 million members to send private photo and video messages to friends and loved ones in an increasingly competitive market.

The Instagram Direct launch comes ahead of the holiday season two days after rival Twitter rolled out updated mobile software allowing smartphone users to send pictures in private messages.

The founder of the smartphone photo-sharing service, Kevin Systrom, made the announcement in Manhattan, fielding questions from journalists on site and those following all over the world.

"I would like to introduce Instagram Direct, a simple way to send photos and videos to your friends and family," he said.

"Sometimes there are moments that are meant for one person, or a few close friends: an inside joke among friends, or a picture sent to someone you love just to say hello," Instagram said.

The Facebook-owned company said the service is available to download immediately in Apple's App Store, and on Google Play.

The feature allows people to send a photo or video to up to 15 friends and loved ones. Systrom said the app had been designed to foster intimacy.

"We really wanted to make this about moments you wanted to share with your friends. The people you really care about," Systrom told the news conference. "It's not about spamming everyone you know."

But analysts saw the launch as an effort to fend off stiff competition from increasingly active rivals, which allow person-to-person photo or video message.

Chief among those are fast-growing social network Snapchat, which reportedly rejected a \$3 billion takeover bid from Facebook last month and which handles hundreds of millions of messages each day.

Eden Zoller, principal analyst at Ovum, said Instagram Direct was "a clear move" by Facebook to keep users engaged.

"Instagram is being threatened by more direct rivals such as Vine and Snapchat, but is also seeing indirect competition from popular messaging services like WhatsApp, where users are spending more time at the expense of Instagram and also Facebook itself," he said.

Last month Instagram began displaying ads, as Facebook moved to start making money from the service it bought in a billion-dollar deal last year.

Facebook was also protecting its revenue resources on advertising on Instagram, Zoller said.

"The private groups feature will appeal to people that are either disenchanted with or wary of more open social broadcast platforms," he said.

Systrom said there were currently no plans to introduce advertisements to Instagram Direct

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