

# Facebook launches Amber Alerts to help find missing children

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This Friday, May 18, 2012, file photo shows a sign at Facebook's headquarters behind flowers in Menlo Park, Calif. Facebook users in the U.S. will soon receive Amber Alerts to help find missing children who may be located near them, the company announced Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma, File)

Facebook users in the U.S. will soon receive Amber Alerts to help find missing children who may be located near them.

Facebook Inc. is working with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to send the alerts to users' mobile phones if they are in a search area where a child has been abducted. Facebook says people are already using its site to encourage their friends and family to help find missing children, and that several children have been reunited with their families as a result of information shared on the site.

Last March, a missing 11-year-old girl was found in a South Carolina motel room when a motel clerk called police after seeing an Amber Alert on Facebook, according to the company and reports at the time.

The Amber Alert warning system was started after the 1996 kidnapping and murder of 9-year-old Amber Hagerman in Arlington, Texas. Since then, more than 700 children have been found as a direct result of the alerts. The alerts are issued over TV and radio, on highway signs, as text messages and over the Internet.

On Facebook, the alerts will include the missing child's photo and any other information that could be relevant, said Emily Vacher, trust and safety manager at Facebook and former FBI agent. She said Facebook's Amber Alert distribution tool is "very comprehensive" and complements other systems that are out there now. Text alerts and highway signs, for example, don't include photos, and the text alerts are limited to some 90 characters.

Vacher said the alerts will only go to people who may be in a position to help find the missing child.

"When people see this on Facebook we want them to know that this is a very rare occurrence," she said.

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