Facebook Messenger lets users call Uber cars

December 16 2015

Facebook's stand-alone Messenger app now allows users to summon an Uber vehicle from within the program, the companies announced December 16, 2015

Facebook on Wednesday announced an alliance with Uber that lets people summon cars from the ride sharing service using the Messenger smartphone application.

The partnership was a major move for both California firms, further expanding Facebook's stand-alone messaging service beyond simply

communicating and putting Uber in a social network-backed application with some 700 million users.

"With this new feature, you can request a ride from a car service without ever needing to download an extra app or leave a conversation," product manager Seth Rosenberg said in a blog post.

"It's super easy and doesn't take you away from the plans that you're making with your friends or family."

Uber was described as the first partner in the launch of "transportation on Messenger," leaving the door open to add Uber rivals as options for users of the smartphone messaging service.

Uber is making its Messenger debut in the United States in the latest version of the application. Rosenberg promised that more countries and partners would be soon added.

People can access the feature by tapping a "transportation" menu tab during text message exchanges or can enter Uber as a search query, according to Facebook.

Updates on the status of drivers will be delivered in Messenger, and friends can be notified that a ride has been summoned.

"With the ability to request, track and pay for a ride in Messenger, we're making transportation as simple as sending a message," Rosenberg said.

Facebook made Messenger an independent mobile application nearly two years ago and has steadily woven new capabilities into the service.

Last month, Facebook began letting users in France send vanishing missives with Messenger application, ramping up the challenge to

Snapchat.

Facebook earlier this year began testing a Messenger app virtual assistant that the leading social network said goes beyond artificial intelligence programs already on the market.

Uber on the move

Controversial ride-sharing service Uber has also been motoring apace.

The company is out to expand, and has openly targeted China where messaging apps loaded with extra features are a norm.

In October, the head of Uber said the ride-sharing firm has spent a billion dollars to gain traction in China.

Uber is also dabbling in the US with a local deliver service, aiming for a slice of the fast-growing segment.

UberRUSH launch in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco in October with a mission to "get customers pretty much anything in minutes," according to a post at the company's website.

With a valuation that has reportedly climbed to $64 billion based on private funding rounds, Uber has become the most precious Internet industry "unicorn," a reference to startups that remain private despite being valued at more than a billion dollars.

Uber's ridesharing service has made it one of the world's largest startups, operating in dozens of countries, but has faced regulatory hurdles in many areas and protests from established taxi operators.

© 2015 AFP