

Facebook lets Messenger 'bots' tap analytic smarts

November 14 2016, by Glenn Chapman



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg introduces a new messenger platform at the F8 summit in San Francisco, California, on March 25, 2015

Facebook on Monday began letting interactive "bots" inside its Messenger service tap into analytic capabilities once reserved for the social network, ramping up the potential to earn money from e-commerce.

The move comes as Facebook is under pressure to profit from services such as Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram, having recently told investors it is hitting a limit on the number of ads it can pack into the online social network.

Facebook last week rolled out news feed ads that open into Messenger exchanges, and began letting businesses send "sponsored messages" to users who have interacted with them before.

"Driving people to a Messenger conversation isn't enough," Facebook vice president of messaging products David Marcus said in an online post.

"This is where sponsored messages come in."

Facebook shares took a hit early this month after the huge social network delivered a blockbuster earnings report but warned that its stunning growth pace was set to slow.

Although the California group reported a surge in profit and revenue, it also said it was unlikely to sustain that kind of growth in the near future.

Facebook executives on an earnings call said the social network can no longer keep boosting the number of ads delivered without harming the user experience.

Bet on bots

Since they were first announced at Facebook's annual developer conference in April, more than 30,000 chatbots have been built with [artificial intelligence](#) to act as virtual agents for businesses in text exchanges with customers.

The bots can answer questions, offer goods and services, send receipts or confirm reservations.

Data gathered and provided by the social network would include how often people are transferred to humans at businesses or click through to websites to make purchases.

Analytics tools can also provide demographic insights on users based on what people share publicly at the leading social network.

"These bots are providing new ways for businesses to interact with their customers," Facebook product manager Josh Twist told AFP.

"Because we own the Messenger platform, we can help get analytics without any effort."

Twist stressed that data being made available to businesses came only from interactions in their own bots, and that any broad insights such as behavior breakdowns by demographics was aggregated and made anonymous.

Boosting business

Last year, Facebook made analytics tools available for apps synched to the social network.

Providing the insights to bots at Facebook-owned Messenger moves them outside the social network for the first time.

The company could then make money from the messaging service by acting as an intermediary between businesses and customers.

Analytics may reveal reasons people add items to virtual carts but don't

complete purchases, or which marketing approaches work better with women or men.

"This is about understanding user behavior and identity," Twist said.

User demographics derived from analytics potentially include information openly shared at Facebook including gender, country, language, education levels and relationship status.

That data is aggregated and made anonymous, according to Facebook.

"You could never snoop on a particular individual," Twist said.

Twist said the company's goal is to help businesses using bots discern what makes people buy rather than browse.

Bots do not receive analytic data in real time, so artificial intelligence cannot learn along the way or detect if it is chatting with a man or a woman, according to Twist.

He said developers currently build artificial intelligence for bots, and Facebook handles the analytics.

The company also announced it will begin accepting developers of [bots](#) for Messenger into a Facebook-sponsored program that provides free tools, services, and other resources to those who qualify.

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