

Slack's messaging service sets sights on big businesses

January 31 2017, by Michael Liedtke



The Slack app is displayed on a mobile phone, Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017, in New York. Slack Technologies is hoping to convert more big businesses to its online business messaging service by making it easier for workers in different departments to communicate with each other. The new option, called "Enterprise Grid," represents another major step in Slack's attempt to get more workers and employers to lessen their dependence on conventional email and embrace its service instead. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

Slack Technologies, a fast-growing startup trying to wean businesses off

email by hooking employees on its more informal messaging service, is now hoping to snare the world's biggest companies as customers.

On Tuesday, the company unveiled a new feature intended to let [workers](#) in different departments communicate more easily with each other. The new option, called "Enterprise Grid," is Slack's latest step toward its ambitious goal of making life at work "simpler, more pleasant and more productive."

In contrast to traditional email, Slack works more like a social network, allowing employees to share their thoughts, updates, web links and documents in channels that can be viewed on a personal computer or smartphone.

Since its 2013 debut, Slack has emerged as a popular new way for teams of employees to communicate with each other, but those workers haven't been able to quickly connect with other departments within the same company to discuss projects or other issues. Reaching co-workers using different Slack teams typically requires employees to maintain separate profiles and logins.

Enterprise Grid is designed to let workers in different Slack teams message each other without having to hopscotch across the service. Executives and managers will be able to distribute important announcements across all of a company's Slack teams. And Slack also is working on an upgrade to its search engine to help its users sift through all the information on its service.

The product also complies with federal regulations governing communications about health records and financial transactions. Clearing that regulatory bar could provide Slack with new opportunities to sign up workers in the medical and banking industries.

Slack already has 5 million daily users, including 1.5 million who pay for the service. The San Francisco company offers a free version of its service in hopes that workers will like it so much they'll persuade their bosses to pay for a more versatile version.

Enterprise Grid will cost more than the \$150 per worker that Slack currently charges for its most expensive version, according to CEO Stewart Butterfield. How much more will vary from company to company, depending on the negotiations on each agreement, Butterfield said.

Slack's early inroads in reshaping how workers communicate has minted the privately held [company](#) with a market value of \$5 billion, based on the assessment of the venture capitalists and investors who have financed its growth so far.

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