In Tech: Instagram video series, billion-user club, Fitbit
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This Feb. 19, 2014, file photo, shows WhatsApp and Facebook app icons on a smartphone in New York. WhatsApp, the Internet messaging service owned by Facebook, announced in February 2016 that it now has 1 billion users worldwide. That's both a milestone and a potential turning point: Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said he thinks Internet services are ready to become money-making businesses when they hit that mark. (AP Photo/Patrick Sison, File)

If a half-hour comedy is too long, how about a 15-second thriller?

A group of independent filmmakers from Britain are rolling out a daily, 28-episode series on Instagram. "Shield 5" is about the hunt for John Swift, who after three episodes appears to be a security worker who ends up bloodied and wanted for murder after having an affair with his female superior.

Director Anthony Wilcox says the roughly $21,500 production isn't meant to make money. Rather, it's an experiment in gathering an audience in a new medium and a showcase for his work. As of Wednesday, the account had 13,500 followers.

He hopes the series gets the attention of a producer who might turn it into a feature film. "My motivation was always what 'Shield 5' could become," Wilcox says.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Business Writer

The billion-user club used to be exclusive, but it keeps growing.

WhatsApp, the Internet messaging service owned by Facebook, announced this week that it now has 1 billion users worldwide.

That's both a milestone and a potential turning point: Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said he thinks Internet services are ready to become money-making businesses when they hit that mark. WhatsApp recently announced it's suspending the nominal fee it charged some users, but it's exploring new ways that other businesses can use WhatsApp to reach their customers.

Meanwhile, Google CEO Sundar Pichai said this week that the popular Gmail service now has 1 billion users, too. Gmail, which is supported by advertising, joins other Google services with 1 billion or more users—including Search, Android, YouTube, Maps and Chrome.

Not to be left out, Apple announced last week that there are 1 billion "active devices" in its ecosystem, which it defines as iPhone, iPad, Mac, iPod Touch, Apple TV and Apple Watch devices that have used the company's online services in the previous 90 days.

Facebook joined the billion-user club in 2012 and now claims 1.59 billion active users a month. Facebook's Messenger service is getting close, with 800 million active users at the end of December, while Facebook's Instagram lags at 400
As for Twitter, it's still struggling with slower growth. The micro-blogging service reports 320 million active users.

— Brandon Bailey, AP Technology Writer

Fitbit wants its latest entry-level fitness tracker to be fashionable, as it offers bands made with leather or stainless steel, rather than traditional, rubber-like material.

The fancier styles for the new Fitbit Alta will cost extra—$60 for leather and $100 for stainless steel, for instance. The base model, with standard material, will cost $130.

New features include reminders to move if you've been sitting down too long. Many competing fitness devices already have this feature, but the Fitbit hasn't had it until now.

The Alta follows last month's unveiling of the Blaze, a mid-level model. Unlike the Blaze, the Alta won't have a heart-rate monitor or a color screen. The Alta and Blaze will both start shipping next month. The Blaze is expected to get the move reminders in a future software update.

Fitbit is the market leader in fitness-tracking devices, though it's still an emerging business, with questions about how long people actively use devices once they get them. Competitors include smartwatches from Apple and others.

— Anick Jesdanun, AP Technology Writer

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