

Oculus unveils standalone virtual reality headset

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Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg, seen in a 2016 file picture with an Oculus headset, has unveiled new virtual reality gear which does not need to be tethered to a phone or computer

Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday unveiled a new Oculus virtual reality headset untethered from computers as part of a vision to bring the new technology to the masses.

Oculus Go headsets will be priced at \$199 when they begin shipping early next year, Zuckerberg said during a keynote presentation at an annual developers conference in the Silicon Valley city of San Jose.

Zuckerberg touted Oculus Go as the first product in a "sweet spot" between virtual experiences using smartphones and those handled by powerful desktop computers.

"It's an all-new, standalone headset that doesn't require you to snap in a phone or plug in a cable," Zuckerberg said.

Oculus Go uses internal cameras, sensors and software to track movements that are translated into corresponding motion in virtual worlds rendered in headsets.

Facebook stressed its commitment to virtual reality, despite less than stellar adoption of headsets such as Oculus Rift which need to be plugged into computers.

"We want to get a billion people in virtual reality," Zuckerberg said.

"The road ahead won't be easy, but virtual reality will change the way we see the world and will make all of our lives a whole lot better."

Rift price cut

Oculus on Wednesday lopped \$100 off the price of a package bundling Rift headset with touch controllers, citing successful discounts during a summer-long promotion.

The Rift-plus-Touch bundle price was reduced to \$399, said Hugo Barra, who recently left Chinese electronics firm Xiaomi to lead virtual reality efforts at Facebook.

The new Rift price is priced cheaper than competing HTC headsets and on par with similarly bundled PlayStation VR gear.

"We want to continue getting VR into more people's hands, so we're permanently lowering the price of Rift," Oculus said in a blog post.

"And more people in VR means more people to play, connect, and share with."

Oculus also provided a look at progress being made on a "Santa Cruz" stand-alone virtual reality headset prototype revealed at the company's developers conference here a year ago.

The ability to track hand-held controllers was added to Santa Cruz, letting people reach into virtual worlds and interact in what Oculus described as an "important, industry-first milestone."

Sony, HTC and Facebook-owned Oculus are the top players in virtual reality head gear, each striving to stake out territory in the budding market.

While Sony's VR headsets work with PS 4 consoles, competing gear requires computers that can handle the demand of processing rich, immersive graphics in real time.

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