

WhatsApp out to make money from business messages

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Facebook announces plans for a "WhatsApp Business" tool designed to connect businesses with their customers

Facebook on Wednesday set out to make money from WhatsApp with a scheme to connect businesses with customers via the smartphone

messaging service.

Facebook said it has been testing a "WhatsApp Business" tool for months with more than 90 companies including Uber and Singapore Airlines.

"We're introducing a solution for businesses that require more powerful tools to chat on WhatsApp and a new way for people to quickly start a WhatsApp conversation from an ad on Facebook," the leading social network said in an online post.

WhatsApp Business lets companies send "non-promotional" content such as shipping information, charging for confirmed deliveries.

Companies will be able to respond free to questions or comments sent to them on WhatsApp, as long as the responses are fired off within 24 hours. Tardy responses by businesses will incur costs.

Some Facebook ads will also feature an easy way to initiate WhatsApp conversations with the businesses.

"Facebook Ads that click to WhatsApp help people discover your [business](#), help you engage with them to explain your product or service and grow a relationship," the social network's team said.

Facebook has long been testing ways to make money from WhatsApp, which it bought in early 2014 in a deal valued at \$19 billion.

Growth has been the priority at WhatsApp, which now boasts some 1.5 billion users around the world.

"You will continue to have full control over the messages you receive," Facebook promised WhatsApp users.

"Businesses will pay to send certain messages so they are selective and your chats don't get cluttered."

Messages will remain encrypted end-to-end, with people able to block businesses if they wish. Facebook planned to gradually make the new tool available to more businesses, focusing first on companies with strong need to manage customer communications.

Facebook shares plummeted last week on disappointing results.

Sentiment was also dented by the downcast outlook for Facebook, which signaled it expects slower user growth, partly due to the effect of data privacy scandals. Profits will also likely be hit by costly investments to address the problems.

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