

History of Facebook





Source: Facebook

What do a Harvard dorm room, the words “like” and “friend request” and **3 billion** people all have in common? The answer is Facebook: the social media platform that changed the way we distribute information. Facebook Inc. also owns Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp and other apps, making it the largest communication platform in human history.

In addition to hosting messages, Facebook also hosts the most precise advertising system ever created. Using Facebook Audience Insights, businesses can “dial” their audience by age, location, interest, prior purchases, and more.

Before Facebook, companies had to spend billions of dollars flooding airwaves, buying network television ad space and dropping flyers from planes to reach their target audience.. Now, businesses can market to customers with such precision that they can send Labor Day vacation packages to people messaging about taking Labor Day vacations. Facebook changed the way we advertise—and it all started less than **20** years ago.

How it all began

Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in a Harvard dorm room in 2004. At Harvard, campus dormitories were divided into different student houses. Each house possessed an online directory called “face-books” which included the names and a photo of every student living in that house.

Zuckerberg and his friends decided to combine all of these separate “face-books” into one common directory. Thus, the idea for the world’s largest social media platform was born.

On February 4, 2004, Mark Zuckerberg and co-founders Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes launched a website then called thefacebook.com.



Mark Zuckerberg in 2003
Source: [Business Insider](#)



Old version of “thefacebook”
Source: [ABC News](#)

The original site was initially available only to Harvard students. It allowed users to create a profile with their name, photo and other personal information. It also let them put in their interests, birthday or relationship status. Crucially, it also let students “friend” each other—not unlike the site that exists today.

Zuckerberg dropped out of Harvard and moved the company to Palo Alto, California that same summer. In September of 2006, they opened Facebook registration to everyone. By 2012, the company had over a billion users.

Facebook Ads

On November 6, 2007, Facebook debuted Facebook Ads—which altered the course of advertising forever.

Prior to Facebook, television shows and magazines existed to create audiences for advertisers. “You write skits mocking our presidents to fill time between car commercials,” 30 Rock’s Jack Donaghy told TV writer Liz Lemon. The goal was simple: create a product that would draw a target audience. Then make sure they saw the ad while their eyes were there.

Advertisers quickly noticed that Facebook’s user base was made up of primarily college students—a notoriously difficult group to reach. Also, the site gained millions of users a year, which was a larger audience than even popular television programs could muster. Early ads on Facebook followed the old-school strategy, in the form of banners or “Flyers” that appeared on the website’s homepage. But Zuckerberg and the Facebook team quickly figured out they could use their data to go farther.

In 2007, Facebook developed a system through which marketers could narrow down their target audience using profile information. Every “like” or comment became data that could be used to create an audience. If you “liked” the TV show *Sons of Anarchy*? You became part of an audience. If you said something negative about Nike products? A different audience. Facebook also used data about users’ age, gender, which university they attended, and other demographic markers to create a system so precise that it could actually start to predict, rather than just track, consumer behavior.

As Facebook’s user base grew, its data corpus did too. Facebook has the most sophisticated targeted advertising system in the world now—and it’s proved to be a gamechanger for startups and small businesses.



Source: [Slate](#)

Facebook Audience Insights disrupted a prior century's status quo, creating ad platforms for startups like Bonobos, Casper, Peloton, and more. Small businesses can finally go to bat with companies that have massive ad budgets, now that they can target customers with scalpel-like precision. Smaller niche brands can now pinpoint their exact audience without breaking their budgets.

Facebook and its products



Source: [Facebook](#)

After 2007, Facebook began to grow and make acquisitions. In 2008, Facebook launched Messenger, an application that replaced Facebook's previous chat function. Facebook then acquired Instagram in 2012.

Two years later, Facebook purchased the popular mobile messaging application WhatsApp for \$19 billion. WhatsApp was most popular in South America and Asia and expanded Facebook across the world. Facebook now owns the 4 most downloaded apps of the last decade: Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram.

Shortly after purchasing WhatsApp, Facebook acquired Oculus VR, a leader in immersive virtual reality technology. Their product is the Oculus Rift headset, which transports people into virtual reality settings. "Oculus has the chance to create the most social platform ever, and change the way we work, play and communicate," Zuckerberg said upon acquisition.

Lastly, in 2019, Facebook introduced Novi, a digital wallet that enables people to hold and send libra, their digital currency. Novi's purpose is to streamline sending money into a process as simple as sending a message.

Facebook started as an online college directory and became the largest communication forum and most powerful advertising platform in human history. It's brought new meaning to the words: *social media*.

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