

# Struggling Meta showcases new AI tools at company meeting

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Facebook's owner, Meta, announced new artificial intelligence-focused tools in an internal company meeting on Thursday and outlined its plan after months of financial struggle. The company confirmed a New York Times report that employees were given a sneak peek of new products it has been building, including ChatGPT-like chatbots planned for Messenger and WhatsApp that could converse using different personas. The all-hands meeting, which took place at the company's headquarters in Menlo Park and was streamed to its global offices, included commentary from the chief technology officer, Andrew Bosworth, chief product officer, Chris Cox, and founder and chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg. Meta also revealed a new Instagram feature that could modify user photos via text prompts and another that could create emoji stickers for messaging services, according to a summary of the session provided to Reuters by a company spokesperson. The announcements come after a difficult few years for Meta, which in recent months has laid off tens of thousands of workers and saw \$80bn wiped from its value overnight in 2022 after a disappointing earnings report. The company has struggled with an identity crisis after changing its name from Facebook to Meta and throwing all of its weight behind an ambitious plan to pivot its core business from social media to the metaverse – its virtual reality project. While Meta has continued to struggle, devoting more than \$10bn a year to develop the metaverse, its competitors including Google, Microsoft and Snapchat have garnered a flurry of investor attention after announcing launches of generative AI products – leaving the company to play catch-up. Meta has yet to roll out any consumer-facing generative AI products, although it announced last month that it was working with a small group of advertisers to test tools that use AI to generate image backgrounds and variations of written copy for its ad campaigns. "It's difficult to see Meta's predicament as anything other than a desperate scramble to catch up with its rivals on a number of fronts," said Paul Barrett, the deputy director of New York University's Stern Center for Business and Human Rights. The company has been reorganizing its AI divisions and spending heavily to whip its infrastructure into shape, after determining early last year that it lacked the hardware and software capacity to support its AI product needs. Zuckerberg told employees at the session on Thursday that advancements in generative AI in the last year had now made it possible for the company to build the technology "into every single one of our products". In addition to the consumer-facing tools, executives at the meeting also announced a productivity assistant for employees called Metamate that could answer queries and perform tasks based on information gleaned from internal company systems. Many of the tools being developed by Meta will be built around open-source models, which allow users to build their own artificial intelligence-powered chatbots and other technology – a decision critics and competitors have criticized as opening up the tools to be used to spread misinformation and hate speech at a larger scale. "For better or worse, many people who want

access to Facebook's data have malicious intent," said Ari Lightman, a professor of digital media at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College. "We need policies, procedures and protocols on board so we're not rushing into something that might be deleterious for society in the future." According to the New York Times report on Thursday's meeting, Zuckerberg addressed concerns about Meta's open-source approach to AI, saying that "democratizing access to this has a bunch of value". He reportedly stated that he hoped in the future users could build AI programs on their own without relying on framework from a handful of large technology companies. Despite the new focus on AI, the New York Times reported Zuckerberg stated the company would not be abandoning its plans for the metaverse, echoing past statements he has made that the technology could be used to expand the virtual world. "We've been focusing on both AI and the metaverse for years now, and we will continue to focus on both," Zuckerberg said on the tech firm's latest quarterly earnings call. Reuters contributed to this report