



## Facebook Home

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**O**n April 4, Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg introduced Facebook Home, a new mobile interface/application/service. How should those of us in tech ministry think about Home? Is it a blessing or a curse?

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### What is Facebook Home?

Technically, Home is a wrapper around Android. It's not the first such wrapper. Many cellphone manufacturers have created their own "improved" interface for Android – for example Samsung's phones run TouchWiz and HTC's phones run Sense. But Facebook Home goes further than previous wrappers to make the phone not seem like a phone but rather like a small dedicated Facebook mobile computer. The lock screen and home screen are dominated by Facebook activity (most notably photos posted by friends), eliminating traditional informational elements including time, battery life indicator and network signal strength.

Home consists of three main features – Coverfeed, Chat Heads, and App Launcher.

Coverfeed replaces your phone's home screen. It displays activity from your friends and appears to be biased towards posts that include photos. In

the future, Coverfeed will also provide new billboard space for Facebook advertisers.

Chat Heads is an application for chatting – or instant messaging – with your friends. In Facebook's takeover of your Android experience, Chat Heads can pop up at any time while you're using any application. You can interact with your Facebook friends without leaving whatever app you were running.

App Launcher is exactly what it sounds like. It's Facebook's way to make it easy for you to launch your regular apps. Before Home, most of us arranged our phone's home screens to hold the apps we use most often. Home replaces the traditional "home" screen with Coverfeed, but App Launcher is pulled up easily from Coverfeed to quickly launch your favorite apps.

### Why is Home attractive to us?

In the early-to-mid 1990s, when I was first

actively developing for the Internet, it was frustrating that so many Internet newcomers equated the World Wide Web with the Internet. Until the Mosaic browser (which spawned Netscape which forced Microsoft to bring Internet Explorer to market), the vast majority of folks had never heard of the Internet. As millions connected for the first time, the only two applications they used were E-mail and the Web. Even now, that's largely the case.

Today, as the number of Facebook users reaches into the billions, for many, the Internet means Facebook, especially when they are mobile. I'm a Facebook user, but not a Facebook fan, and yet even I find that, for an increasing number of my contacts, I no longer try to keep track of their e-mail address or phone number, because I can always reach them through Facebook.

Christian ministry is relational. We are to go where the people we are called to serve are gathered, and increasingly, that's on social networks like Facebook. If the mobile Internet, to you, is Facebook, and if Facebook is the main way that you stay connected to those you serve, then Facebook Home may be an efficient (and visually pleasing) way to advance your ministry.

#### **What should we be concerned about?**

Facebook has a long history of pushing the limits of privacy. According to their website, "Facebook's mission is to make the world more open and connected." Within this definition of "open" is the concept that privacy is an old-fashioned concept whose time has passed. The company has repeatedly pushed the service into areas

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of information sharing that initially generated significant resistance, but later became accepted as normal and reasonable. Facebook's founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg celebrates when this happens as reflected in a quote from 2010: "People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people. That social norm is just something that's evolved over time."

Facebook doesn't charge for its service, but bears huge costs in maintaining a high speed, well connected web infrastructure hosting huge amounts of data and delivering that data to hundreds of millions of users around the world. How can this be? Facebook has become a data collection and dissemination machine. The data that is being collected is all about each of its users. Who they are. Who their friends are. What they like. What sites they visit on the web. What videos they watch. What pictures they view. What music they listen to. What news articles they read. Where they are (geographically). Who is in their family. When is their birthday. Where were they born.

Are you getting concerned yet? You should be.

What does Facebook do with this information? The biggest revenue driver in their business model is advertising. Advertisers want to spend their ad dollars to reach people most likely to buy their products and they want to customize the pitch to those prospects to have the greatest impact. With all of the data that Facebook is collecting, the company can uniquely deliver this capability to marketers. To some extent, maybe we should be okay with this. I actually would rather see ads for products I'm in-



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terested in than ads for products I don't care about. Well placed promos have helped me discover products I love that I previously had been unaware of. Perhaps more efficient advertising will even lead companies to make more compelling offers to me for the things I will love (better discount, freebies, etc.).

However, even if you're comfortable with Facebook's advertising program, Facebook has also embraced an open application platform. They enable hundreds of thousands of independent developers to tap into your private information (once you click "okay" because it looks like a cool app) for whatever purposes they have in mind. [A year ago](#) I shared a scary example of this.

So what does any of this have to do with Facebook Home? This new interface inserts itself between you and your mobile experience. It gains insight into everything you do on your mobile device. In short, it gains even more information about you. What apps do you use? What games do you play? How do you spend your time? Does this concern you?

Beyond privacy, reviewers have identified a number of other problems with Facebook Home that may keep you from adopting it. Two of the most significant complaints are that it appears to drain the battery quickly, and that Home hides traditional cellphone functions, making it hard to do everyday tasks such as make a phone call. Although I imagine that Facebook will address these concerns relatively quickly, Facebook's mission ensures that the company will not back off far, or for long, on privacy concerns.

Our Lord values privacy – that some things are only for a limited audience – do you?

"Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.'" (Luke 10:23-24)

*Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is CXfriends (<http://cxfriends.com>), a social network for Christian families which is being built and run by four homeschooled students under Russ' direction.*