

**Memo published by Tom Alison, the head of Facebook, internally to employees on April 27th, 2022:**

## **Building the Discovery Engine**

In this note I want to introduce the concept of Facebook as a “discovery engine,” which is a helpful mental model to frame the current focus of our long-term strategy. It also helps contextualize our product priorities, which we’ll continue to evolve over time to emphasize our near-term focus areas.

I encourage you to read the entire note, but if you just want the TL:DR here it is:

Our vision is for Facebook to be a place where everyone can belong, through the power of community. We define our four durable strategic pillars to accomplish this by helping people:

- Find, enjoy and create interesting content.
- Strengthen their relationships.
- Create communities - both big and small.
- Realize economic opportunities.

While our strategy is designed to stand the test of time, our execution and focus must be responsive to the needs of the current moment. Today we see a shift towards social media products serving as “discovery engines.” We’re sharing an updated articulation of our near-term priorities that are aimed at strengthening the Facebook discovery engine. These are:

- Make Reels successful.
- Build world class recommendations technology.
- Unlock messaging-based sharing.

Ed Note: in other words...

MAKE FACEBOOK BEHAVE  
LIKE TIKTOK

Alongside our product priorities, we’ll continue to prioritize culture changes to support the “Trustworthy, People-Centric, and Unified” approach to product development that we announced in January of this year.

### **The Discovery Engine**

As we discussed our strategy throughout Q1 with Mark, different leaders across Meta, and teams within Facebook, the word “discovery” came up over and over. Through these conversations, the term “discovery engine” emerged as a helpful way to capture the evolution of modern social media products and frame our work to advance our strategy in 2022.

Building products that facilitate discovery has been part of Facebook’s DNA for a long time. Giving people a voice is one of our core principles, and throughout our history we’ve built tools to support communication and personal expression to audiences both large and small. Serendipitous discovery has also been a mainstay of why people use Facebook. While people

frequently open our app to connect with friends, family and communities, they also often open our app without an explicit intention. This use case and the motivation behind it was eloquently captured in our 2018/2019 research around “socially powered possibility.” WTF!

Historically, Facebook has taken an entity-centric approach to discovery. We help you connect with the friends, groups, and pages you care about most. Then updates from those connections are ranked in Feed. Unconnected content in Feed was surfaced via reshares from the friends, groups, and pages you follow, but unconnected recommendations weren't historically a core part of the Feed experience. However we did invest heavily in unconnected content discovery on adjacent surfaces, i.e. through search queries or recommendations-first products like Watch, News, and Marketplace.

Today this is changing. Social media products - including our own - are delivering value by investing more in discovery engines that help people find and enjoy interesting content regardless of whether it was produced by someone you're connected to or not. We see this both in research as well as in the growth of products like Reels, Watch, and In-Feed Recommendations (IFR).

As we lean into public content and recommendations and evolve our discovery engine, a natural question to ask is whether this will dilute our focus on connecting people. Facebook is - and will continue to be - a product known for creating and strengthening connections. We state this directly in our strategy through our intention to help people strengthen relationships, as well as create communities - both big and small. If executed well, investing in our discovery engine will enhance people's ability to connect with friends, pages, and communities, and facilitate new connections. Shared interests and identity are often the foundation for friendship and community, and sharing and discussing interesting content you discover on Facebook with your friends and communities can strengthen those bonds - this has come up again and again in our research on the “community journey” toward belonging. That's why our job doesn't stop at helping people create or find great content - it requires us to continue building products that allow people to share with one another and deepen friendships and community connections throughout their journey on Facebook.

### How this translates into priorities

Much of our work across the organization is already aimed at improving our discovery engine. But there are a smaller set of initiatives that represent big investment areas in 2022 to accelerate progress. These are outlined below, and will be how we communicate our priorities going forward:

1. **Make Reels successful.** It's critical to ensure people have great ways to create content and express themselves. Today's genre of public short-form video opens up new ways for people to create and discover content. While Facebook's discovery engine is designed to support many different formats (text, photos, video, and eventually

i.e. let's  
take the  
data  
we've got  
and  
rewrite  
the AI to  
be like  
TikTok

Metaverse experiences), our biggest gap today is around short-form video and that's why we're focused on integrating Reels in Home, Watch, IFR, and Groups.

2. **Build world-class recommendations technology.** While we frequently talk about products people can see and use, the quality of what's under the hood powering these experiences is more important than ever. Building a world-class recommendations system that is responsive to your interests, can identify trending content and original creators, and makes responsible recommendations while evaluating billions of pieces of content produced across Meta is an incredibly challenging technical problem. It's a different problem than ranking the top content from the people, groups, or businesses you're connected to and requires state-of-the-art technical innovation to succeed. We're investing heavily in our Modern Recommendation Systems initiative with partners across the company to accelerate our work here.

**Unlock messaging-based sharing.** Messaging apps have become an important venue for people to share and have conversations with smaller groups of friends and sub-communities. We're also seeing shifts away from resharing content broadly via Feed and towards resharing content to smaller audiences in messaging apps. Given how much sharing and social interactions take place on messaging apps, it's important that we integrate messaging experiences more fundamentally into how we enable people to connect and share on Facebook. To that end, we're partnering with the Messenger team to enable an integrated inbox for more people on Facebook, revamping our sharing flows to enable better sharing to messaging apps across the board, and building community messaging experiences across Facebook and Messenger.

While the efforts above are called out as priorities, it does not mean that other work across the organization isn't important. Advancing all pillars of our strategy, ensuring Facebook is safe and enjoyable, supporting our revenue and engagement goals, and contributing to the broader set of Meta-level priorities require a strong portfolio of work across our organization. The reason the priorities above are highlighted is that these efforts represent the near-term, high-lift investments that we must accelerate to unlock foundational changes to how people will use Facebook over the next few years. They also represent some of the biggest - but also most challenging - opportunities for us to succeed with Young Adults. As top product priorities, we'll communicate regularly about these and ensure that these areas and their dependencies receive the level of focus and investment required to succeed.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that in January we shared an aspiration to approach building products that are "Trustworthy," "People-Centric," and "Unified." Rather than call these out as a discrete product priority, I want to emphasize that these are values we want to infuse into everything we build as part of the cultural change we're making throughout the organization. I'll continue to advocate for and highlight progress here across all of our teams.

Below are answers to a few common questions that I've been asked in recent Facebook Q&As and other forums.

## **FAQs**

### ***Q: How is this different from our previous product priorities?***

A:

Our previous priorities:

- Mix-shifting from long-form to short-form video.
- Strengthening product market fit for Creators.
- Bridging large and small communities.
- Reducing negative experiences.

Our updated priorities:

- Make Reels successful.
- Build world-class recommendations technology.
- Unlock messaging-based sharing.

Changes:

- We've simplified #1 to "Make Reels successful."
- Our work to support and cultivate a healthy creator ecosystem and incentive original content continues to be important. It's embedded in our work to make Reels successful across IG and Facebook, and more broadly in cultivating content and community across formats. But the quality and caliber of our recommendations technology will be a limiting factor in how successful we are, so the updated priorities emphasize our need to invest and focus there.
- "Bridging large and small communities" has been modified to "Unlock message-based sharing." There are several important projects to bridge large and small communities, but the updated priority is designed to emphasize the importance of sharing and recognize the opportunity to message more specifically.
- "Reducing negative experiences" has been removed as a product priority since it's more aptly tied to the product culture we are trying to build throughout our approach of being "Trustworthy," "People-Centric," and "Unified." Our focus is doing this holistically across all of our products as a permanent part of our culture as opposed to a short-term priority.

### ***Q: Can we expect to see these product properties shift again?***

A: The purpose of communicating priorities is to ensure our team has context and clarity on our near-term investments and focus areas, and so we can line up more energy and resources to make progress. We'll update them as these areas mature and make progress, and as we learn and evolve our understanding of the biggest opportunities to fulfill our long-term strategy.

**Q: What tradeoffs are we making to ensure we are successful in achieving these product priorities?**

A: In general, we try to create additional flexibility to slow down other projects and/or reduce other goals to help acerbate staffing, capacity, budget or iteration speed for our priorities. It's important to note that our ability to do this increases as a function of how effectively our broader portfolio of efforts contributes to a healthy app. So even if a team is not part of the subset of investment priorities, focusing on outcomes that contribute to growth, engagement, monetization, safety, and privacy at the app level gives us more flexibility to make trade-offs to advance our near-term priorities.

**Q: What about friend sharing? Is it still important?**

A: Friend and community sharing is important. We're well known as a place to share with your friends and communities and are continuing to invest there. Stories is seeing strong organic growth and we're investing more into making that product better, including **integrating Stories into Feed (for better discoverability)** and improving Stories cross-posting from IG and WA into Facebook. We believe investments like these, plus better ways to share with your friends and communities on Facebook and in messaging apps, will strengthen the sharing use case.

**Q: What about communities? Isn't that one of our key differentiators?**

A: Yes - one of our strategic themes is to help people "create communities - both big and small." Content surfaced in groups is an important feature of the **Discovery Engine**, and we're invested a lot over the last years in tools to make Public Communities easier to manage and discover. Reels will be used in groups as a highly visual way to share and discuss interests, and our bets around Community Messaging and lightweight groups will give people more options to connect with smaller groups of people to discuss, discover, and share.

**Q: What about other forms of video? Do we only care about short-form?**

A: **Our priority is short-form** because we still have a lot of work to do there to even hit table-stakes on product quality and integration. But we believe our support of multiple video formats is a differentiator for both consumers and creators. Formats like Live support original, participatory content from creators and longer-form, video-on-demand (VOD) has good product-market fit and offers additional ways for creators to engage their audience and earn money.

**Q: What about commerce? How does it fit in?**

A: Helping people "realize economic opportunities" is our fourth strategic theme. **Commerce remains a long-term Meta and Facebook priority** that serves a clear need for the businesses and people that use Facebook. It's also strategic for Meta as more on-site commerce experiences help us mitigate the ads signal loss due. Lastly, it's one of our major products that

has good product market fit with YA. We will continue investing in both organic and business-driven commerce products, and there is growing opportunity to integrate delightful commerce experiences into products like Groups, Live, and more as part of our effort to democratize economic opportunity on Facebook.

***Q: If Feed becomes more about recommendations, where will people go to see connected content?***

A: The Home experience will balance both connected content and unconnected content. We're working to clean up top-of-feed and make it just as easy to see Stories from friends as it is to discover new content in Reels. We're also exploring a Community Panel to give direct access to the communities you care about most. Finally, we're testing a product to give you predictable access to your connected Feed, with the ability to sort in chronological order and filter by Groups, Pages, and Friends. Internally we call this "Mr. T" and I'm excited about the progress the team is making.

***Q: What about Creators? Is that still a priority?***

A: Succeeding with Creators is required to succeed with both Reels and recommendations more broadly. While we are not calling out Creators as a discrete priority, we continue to have a number of active work streams to support Creators on both FB and IG. Specifically, we're continuing to invest in creator wellbeing and safety, improving the Profile+ experience, scaling incentives and monetization, and investing in creator growth and network health.

***Q: Are we still trying to build lots of different products and services and grow tabs?***

A: The short answer is that we're not trying to build a lot of new tabs right now - we're focused on making our core products better and more integrated. We want our tabs to complement the content people discover, enjoy, and share on our Home screen. Our personalized tabs system is still very valuable, but we're changing our tab strategy to put more focus on tabs that complement Feed by providing unique experiences that help people find or create content, and that are incremental to our overall app.