

MARKETING

Facebook cautiously tests ads on Facebook Messenger

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Photo courtesy of Estée Lauder

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Facebook is testing out a lightweight, non-intrusive ad model for Facebook Messenger, setting the stage for better brand engagement on the popular messaging platform.

While the platform has become increasingly brand-friendly, many still desire more. Facebook is meeting their concerns with a test of the boundary between intrusive and non-intrusive Messenger ads.

"Businesses have long been telling us that they are very excited about the potential of the Messenger platform to reach their customers and help them to drive sales, build brand awareness and increase customer satisfaction," said Eddie Zhang, product manager at Facebook. "Our current offerings like ads that take people to Messenger conversations from their Facebook News Feed and sponsored messages have demonstrated that people are interested in hearing from and interacting with business and brands on Messenger.

"In fact, people are already regularly messaging businesses with over 1 billion messages sent between people and businesses on Messenger each month."

Messaging ads

While Facebook has been a powerhouse in terms of connecting brands with consumers on a more personal level for years now, it is only recently that one specific area of the Facebook platform has emerged as a powerful tool for brands.

Facebook Messenger was originally just an extension of Facebook's messaging service, with minimal features beyond sending messages.

In the past year or so, Facebook Messenger has taken on a life of its own, becoming more robust in its abilities to compete with other popular messaging services such as Kik and Viber.

Now, Facebook Messenger is packed with features and has a sleek new design.

The most important change however has been in the way the Facebook Messenger has begun to embrace brands. Chatbots have taken the platform by storm and many brands now have a much stronger presence on Facebook Messenger than ever before.

Facebook is taking advantage of the desire for more brand integration by running a very small test of integrated ads, with complete control given to the users, to test the viability of advertising directly on Messenger.

We believe this new test for the very small group of people in Thailand and Australia reflects a lightweight, relevant and useful approach to helping people and businesses connect on Messenger. For the Messenger community, it may enhance the discovery of new experiences to make it seamless to interact with businesses on their terms. For businesses, it could offer a new way to surface their products and services to current and potential customers.

Testing the waters

The obvious question Facebook is facing is: how to make this not feel incredibly intrusive?

The idea of advertising on Facebook Messenger is already a bit iffy for some consumers.

Messaging is what many consider a private space, where they can reach out to brands if they would like but remain completely in their control if not.

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Facebook is sensitive to these concerns and is designing the new system around it. The test will likely give them even more information on how best to implement the policy.

Of course, the few people who are in this test are in complete control of their Messenger experience and can choose to hide/report specific ads using the dropdown menu in their Messenger. Advertisers will still not be able to message users directly unless a person starts the interaction and people will not see a message from a business that they didn't initiate.

"We hope to learn a lot from this test, but we will take our time before considering further expansion to ensure that we deliver the very best experience to both advertisers and the 1 billion people who use Messenger every month," Mr. Zhang said.