

SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY

Too soon to tell impact of Facebook's mounting departures

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Balmain is one of the luxury brands partnering with Facebook on virtual reality. Image credit: Balmain

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Social network Facebook is undergoing more internal changes, as one of the key players on its virtual reality team has departed the company.

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Brendan Iribe, the cofounder and former CEO of Oculus, announced via a Facebook post on Oct. 22 that he was leaving the company. The news was revealed just weeks after the founders of Instagram stepped down from their roles at Facebook, indicating potential changes to how Facebook's business operates.

"The upheaval doesn't affect the brand directly, but Facebook's ability to innovate might be compromised," said Ian Wishingrad, founder and creative director of **BigEyedWish**, New York. "They need to keep an eye on stagnation.

"Facebook is 15 years old and in the tech world, that's old," he said. "They need to make sure they are disrupting themselves without compromising their bottom line."

Mr. Wishingrad is not affiliated with **Facebook**, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Virtual push

Facebook acquired Oculus, a technology company specializing in virtual reality hardware and software, in March 2014. A virtual reality headset, the Oculus Rift, was released to consumers two years later.

However, the tech giant recently shelved plans for the PC-powered Rift 2, according to **TechCrunch**. Mr. Iribe had been leading the project's development.



The Oculus Quest will be released in 2019. Image credit: Facebook

Earlier this year, Facebook began selling Oculus headsets for \$199, looking to open up AR and VR to a greater population of consumers ([see story](#)).

In September, Facebook announced the Oculus Quest headset, an all-in-one VR system, which will become available in spring 2019 for \$399.



Dior is among the luxury brands that have partnered with Facebook. Image credit: Dior

Augmented and virtual reality are the backbone of new partnerships between Facebook and luxury brands.

Facebook worked with Dior to build an augmented reality sunglass try-on experience, allowing shoppers to see what they would look like in frames in a virtual format.

Balmain also worked with Facebook's Oculus to live-stream its runway show during Paris Fashion Week. On Sept. 28, consumers with Oculus headsets were able to watch the show in 360 degrees ([see story](#)).

Growing pains?

Palmer Luckey, who cofounded Oculus with Mr. Iribe, left Facebook in early 2017. Jan Koum, cofounder of WhatsApp, also departed the company earlier this year.

In one of the most notable departures, Instagram founders Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger confirmed their split with Facebook on Sept. 25.

While previously Instagram was able to remain a separate entity that could take advantage of Facebook's significant infrastructure, the Instagram business will likely become more intertwined with Facebook after the founders' departure ([see story](#)).

Aside from the founders of its businesses, Facebook has faced other significant departures.

Alex Stamos, Facebook's chief security officer, left at the end of August to take a job as a professor at Stanford University.

Despite facing intense scrutiny over the past few months for its data and security practices, Facebook decided to leave the position of chief security officer vacant. Facebook's decision not to hire a replacement was a bold move for a company that has already dealt with numerous security scandals in the past year alone ([see story](#)).

"The mass exodus is probably the transition from fun, hot, indestructible startup to bureaucratic, controversial,

lawyered up, overly cautious corporation," Mr. Wishingrad said.

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