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This Week's Stories

Facebook Pledges To Clear News Feed Of Misinformation, Again

November 10, 2016

Facebook is promising yet again to tackle the spread of misinformation in your News Feed.

"We value authentic communication, and hear consistently from those who use Facebook that they prefer not to see misinformation," Adam Mosseri, the vice president of product management, said in a statement to TechCrunch Thursday following widespread criticism of the platform's performance as news conduit during the election.

It remains unclear what "authentic communication" means, or why Facebook seems to acknowledge that this is a problem only because its users say "they prefer not to see misinformation" much in the same way that you might prefer not to eat a bologna sandwich covered in sand.

A spokesperson for Facebook referred Mashable to the company's "News Feed Values" page, which defines "authentic stories" as "the ones that resonate most."

Here's the full statement, as published on TechCrunch, with some emphasis added:

"We take misinformation on Facebook very seriously. We value authentic communication, and hear consistently from those who use Facebook that they prefer not to see misinformation. In Newsfeed we use various signals based on community feedback to determine which posts are likely to contain inaccurate information, and reduce their distribution. In Trending we look at a variety of signals to help make sure the topics being shown are reflective of real-world events, and take additional steps to prevent false or misleading content from appearing. Despite these efforts we understand there's so much more we need to do, and that is why it's important that we keep improving our ability to detect misinformation. We're committed to continuing to work on this issue and improve the experiences on our platform."

Facebook says it identifies inaccurate information based on "community feedback," but it's hard to tell what that really means. The social network allows any user to report a piece of content as "false news." To do so, you simply tap an arrow above a story you don't like or perceive to be inaccurate, press "report post," select "I think it shouldn't be on Facebook," then check "It's a false news story."

Given that false information has repeatedly circulated on the social network this election season, it's unclear to what extent that reporting tool is helpful or even being used. And while Facebook says it takes steps to prevent "false or misleading content from appearing" in its Trending topics, several fake stories have done just that over the past few months.

So as Mosseri concedes, there's a lot of work to be done, and we applaud Facebook's pledge to do it. What's slightly worrisome is that this is far from the first time Facebook has pledged to clean up its News Feed.

In August 2014, Facebook said it would combat misleading clickbait: "Today we're announcing some improvements to News Feed to help people find the posts and links from publishers that are most

interesting and relevant, and to continue to weed out stories that people frequently tell us are spammy and that they don't want to see."

In January 2015, the social network acknowledged, as it did Thursday, that hoaxes are an issue: "We've heard from people that they want to see fewer stories that are hoaxes, or misleading news. Today's update to News Feed reduces the distribution of posts that people have reported as hoaxes and adds an annotation to posts that have received many of these types of reports to warn others on Facebook."

In December 2015, it said so again: "One example of a type of viral post that people report they don't enjoy seeing in their News Feed are hoaxes. If there is a viral story about a hoax, it can get a lot of reshares and comments, which would normally help us infer it might be an interesting story. However, we've heard feedback that people don't want to see these stories as much as other posts in their News Feed."

And in August 2016, Facebook referenced the problem once more: "One of our News Feed values is to have authentic communication on our platform. People have told us they like seeing authentic stories the most. That's why we work hard to understand what type of stories and posts people consider genuine, so we can show more of them in News Feed. We also work to understand what kinds of stories people find misleading and spammy to help make sure people see those less."

So, there you have it. Hoaxes and spam are problems on Facebook and the company, once again, is working on it.

mashable.com

Wireless Industry On Uncertain Footing In Wake Of Trump Election

November 9, 2016

The wireless industry, as well as other sectors of the economy, woke Wednesday morning to a world of uncertainty in the way of newly minted President-elect Donald Trump.

The election of either Hillary Clinton or Trump wasn't expected to heal a severely divided United States, nor did many expect the market to come away from the election with any certainties. That said, Trump's shoot-from-the-hip style and lack of definite fiscal policy seemed to leave Wall Street in upheaval. Following the announcement of Trump's victory, the DOW Industrial Average was down 5.5 percent.

Cooler heads prevailed by Wednesday morning, with the Dow picking up most of the previous night's losses. By 3:37 ET, the DOW was actually up 1.5 percent.

In a statement released Wednesday, Verizon Chairman and CEO Lowell McAdam asserted that the United States had "spent the last 18 months destructively searching for things to divide us."

McAdam called for unity, asking that the United States focus on "building and rebuilding infrastructure and promoting the deployment of a digital superhighway to support game-changing innovation that makes lives better."

McAdam has shown little love for either candidate, saying at one point that the election made him feel like putting his head through a wall, complaining that Trump would be "unpredictable" and Clinton would be more of the same.

AT&T may be feeling the uncertainty of Trump's election as it considers a way forward for its proposed \$106 billion acquisition of Time Warner.

Trump has been outspoken about his opposition to the deal.

"Donald Trump would never approve such a deal because it concentrates too much power in the hands of the too and powerful few," the statement said.

A report from S&P Global Intelligence posited that Trump's stance on media mega-deals could inhibit some companies from striking deals.

But not everyone was pessimistic about Trump's stance on mergers and acquisitions.

According to a report on the Kansas City Star's website, investors seemed to be speculating that a possible merger of Sprint and T-Mobile could be in the cards again.

Shares of Sprint jumped more than 11 percent Wednesday to \$7 in mid-day trading.

Sprint CEO Marcelo Claure was a strong supporter of Clinton. Claure held fundraisers for Clinton and called Trump simply too risky.

T-Mobile CEO John Legere likely isn't in any better graces with the incoming Commander In Chief. Legere and Trump had a war of words last year when then candidate Trump took Legere to task for T-Mobile customers getting poor service in Trump's apartment buildings.

Things will likely come into better focus in the coming weeks and months leading up to Trump's January 20 inauguration. Until then, the only certainty appears to be uncertainty.

wirelessweek.com

Products & Services

Pinterest Is Making It Easier To Track Project Ideas You've Tried

November 10, 2016

"Users can add a checkmark at the top of posts to mark them as being done in addition to viewing and leaving comments. A list of checked off projects can be found in users' profiles."

There's now a "Tried it" button. Pinterest wants to be more helpful.

The online pin board has introduced a "Tried it" button that lets users mark recipes and projects posted on the service that they've tried. For example, users who try a new cake recipe that they found on Pinterest can check it off after finishing their baking along with leaving a note to share that sifting the flour really does make a difference in how fluffy the dessert turns out.

Users can add a checkmark at the top of posts to mark them as being done in addition to viewing and leaving comments. A list of checked off projects can be found in users' profiles.

While Pinterest is best known as a digital tool to collect images, it's also frequently used for creating lists of ideas for home decorations, weddings, and travel. The new features are intended to help users keep track of the ones that they've actually used and to let them share helpful hints with others.

Pinterest's latest additions are intended to encourage users to use the service more often as the company focuses on creating more ways to make money, mostly through advertising and online commerce. Last month, Pinterest said it had 150 million monthly active users, with many of them coming from outside of the U.S.

Pinterest is rolling out the feature to all users over the coming weeks.

[fortune.com](#)

You Can Tell Apple's Siri To Send Money To PayPal

November 10, 2016

You can now tell Siri to send money to contacts in 30 countries.

PayPal just made it a lot easier to send money on your iPhone. On Thursday, the payments giant debuted an integration with Apple's voice assistant Siri to allow users to send money to contacts via voice commands.

PayPal previously unveiled a similar integration with Siri and its Venmo app, which allows people to send money to one another. Venmo and PayPal competitor Square Cash also debuted a voice-controlled feature with Siri earlier this year.

It's not surprising that PayPal is tapping into voice commands to send money. Tapping into voice-based assistants, like Siri, is becoming a more intense battle for tech giants, including Amazon and Google.

PayPal is also potentially gearing up for a busy holiday season with payments. The company predicts that people will use its services to send 17 million transactions in December alone. Last year, the company processed \$41 billion in transactions sent from one contact to another using PayPal, Venmo, and Xoom.

The feature is now available in 30 countries.

[fortune.com](#)

Google's Driving App Is Now Available To All Android Users

November 7, 2016

Android Auto offers a reduced-distraction mode to help drivers stay focused

Google announced Monday that it's bringing its Android Auto vehicle infotainment system app to every smartphone running Android 5.0 or later.

The smartphone version of Android Auto offers a driver-friendly interface with minimal distractions. Incoming texts are read aloud, while you can choose to quickly reply to messages with an "I'm driving" message. Google will add hands-free voice control "in the coming weeks," the company says. "Whether your phone is connected to a compatible car display, or placed in a car mount on the dashboard, Android Auto brings your favorite apps and services into one place, making them accessible in safer and seamless ways," reads a Google blog post announcing the new app. "You can bring your music with you with apps like Spotify, Pandora or Google Play Music, and make calls or send messages with hands-free voice commands. And of course, get turn-by-turn directions to your next destination with Google Maps."

Apple offers a similar vehicle infotainment system called CarPlay, but it has not announced plans to bring a driving mode to the iPhone itself.

[time.com](#)

Emerging Technology

Google Daydream View VR Headset First Look

November 11, 2016

“Until now, Samsung’s Gear VR, \$80, was the most prominent model. But the Gear VR has new competition: Google’s Daydream View, also about \$80, goes on sale in stores today.”

A virtual reality headset that’s moderately priced and comes with a useful remote control

When it comes to types of VR headsets, most fall into two camps: Either very high-end pricey models connected to a computer or video-game console, like the Oculus Rift or the HTC Vive, or lower-end cheap models, like the Google Cardboard, \$15, that rely on a smartphone.

However, there is a third type that’s cheaper than the Oculus types but more capable than the low-end types.

Until now, Samsung’s Gear VR, \$80, was the most prominent model. But the Gear VR has new competition: Google’s Daydream View, also about \$80, goes on sale in stores today.

The View functions very much like the Samsung Gear. For instance, you can use the headset only with select phones. In this case, the View will work only with Google’s new Android-based phones, the Pixel and Pixel XL.

But there is one important difference: The View includes a small but very useful remote control. It’s about 4 inches long, an inch-and-a-quarter wide, and a half-inch deep, but it’s very lightweight and has just four buttons.

We just got the Google Daydream View VR headset, and using a Google Pixel XL smartphone, here’s what I found:

Comfort and setup. Overall, I found setting up the VR headset and phone to be easy and straightforward. With the phone on, you just place the phone in the headset tray, with the screen toward you, and close the tray’s latch. Then you can put on the headset. You’ll go through a few introductory screens in order to orient both the phone and the remote control to the headset. But the instructions were clear and didn’t take very long to accomplish.

But because the View relies on a phone, I did accidentally hit the phone’s side-panel buttons while adjusting the front of the headset, which locked the phone’s screen. (I had to take off the headset, take out the phone, and unlock my phone’s screen.) But for the most part, it’s easy to set up. I also hooked up a pair of earbuds to the Pixel XL, for a more immersive audio experience.

One thing I particularly liked was that the VR headset has a fabric—instead of plastic—exterior, which has a foamlike texture but feels nice and is comfortable to wear.

The headset is also lightweight and easy to adjust. (Today, the headset is available only in gray, but it will eventually be sold in crimson and light gray.) However, unlike the Samsung Gear VR, there is no diopter type of dial or control to adjust the focus of your smartphone. That would make for a better experience, particularly for those with bad eyes.

Remote control. This is a very useful addition, especially in comparison with the Samsung Gear VR. I found the remote control to be intuitive and very easy to use, no matter what apps I used, including games, videos, and photo-based apps. You can also reset the remote control by hitting the remote’s home button without needing to take off the headset.

Using apps. Visually, I found the experience of using various apps to be very similar to the experience I had when using the Samsung Gear VR. The greatest difference was that I was able to navigate the

interface and the apps via the remote control, which was very easy to use. For instance, I liked that I could easily stop and play videos using the remote.

One of my favorite parts of using this headset was experiencing my own panorama photos on Google Photos in a VR environment. (Luckily, I had dozens of panoramas already uploaded to my Google Photos.)

After installing the Google Photos app on the phone, I had to sign in. Then, while in the Daydream app (which I had loaded onto the Pixel XL via the Google Play store), I could click on a Google Photos icon and bring up my panoramas.

Even as still photos, the View really gave me a dramatic, immersive sense of being there, whether it was in front of my house, in Disneyland, or at the beaches of Long Island.

Bottom line. Although the Daydream View may not have the sharpness of high-end VR headsets, overall most consumers will find the experience of this headset to be easy to use, captivating, and enjoyable.

consumerreports.com

Snapchat Will Sell Its New Video-Capturing Glasses Via Vending Machines

November 10, 2016

“The Snapbots will also use the same technology the app uses for its face-distorting lenses, so that people can try on different-colored Spectacles before making a final purchase.”

Snap is selling its new futuristic, video-capturing sunglasses in a very old-school way: With vending machines. Snap, formerly Snapchat, says it plans to sell Spectacles, the video-capturing glasses it announced back in September, through Snapbots, which look like giant vending machines.

Snapchat plans to deposit the machines “soon” throughout the U.S., with the first machine coming to Venice Beach. In true Snapchat fashion, the machines are ephemeral — they will only be available for about one day at each location before they’re removed.

The Snapbots will also use the same technology the app uses for its face-distorting lenses, so that people can try on different-colored Spectacles before making a final purchase.

It’s an unorthodox way to bring something like this to market. Most companies selling hardware simply throw up a website. But Snapchat and CEO Evan Spiegel have always liked to do things differently. An ephemeral vending machine that uses the company’s face-recognition technology is incredibly on-brand.

When the glasses were announced, Snap said Spectacles would be available with limited distribution.

Emphasis on limited: People familiar with the company say it will likely only sell a few thousand of these things this fall.

Which makes this more a marketing exercise than a product launch. Not that there’s anything wrong with that.

The company will announce new Snapbot locations just 24 hours before they appear, and you can check the Spectacles website to see when and where new locations will be available. The glasses cost \$129.99.

recode.com

Mergers and Acquisitions

Facebook Acquires Social Analytics Site CrowdTangle

November 11, 2016

Facebook will acquire CrowdTangle, a social analytics service used by publishers to monitor trending stories online, the company revealed Friday.

In a statement, CrowdTangle notes the "full support and resources" of the social media giant as a reason for the deal.

"Our platform is only going to get more powerful," reads a portion of CrowdTangle's statement. "All of our partners can not only expect the same quality of product, level of support, and pace of innovation they have come to expect from us, but they can and should expect even more from us going forward."

Launched in 2011, CrowdTangle is an analytics tool used by publishers to measure how well stories perform on social networks such as Facebook or Twitter. USA TODAY is among the publishers using CrowdTangle.

"Publishers around the world turn to CrowdTangle to surface stories that matter, measure their social performance and identify influencers," reads a statement from Facebook. "We are excited to work with CrowdTangle to deliver these, and more insights to more publishers."

The acquisition follows CEO Mark Zuckerberg defending Facebook's ability to influence public opinion during the 2016 election. Facebook has been criticized for failing to stop the spread of fake news through its social network.

usatoday.com

Round Room Snaps Up Wireless Zone

November 10, 2016

Round Room LLC has acquired Wireless Zone, a franchise of 357 stores selling cell phones and phone service. Round Room's claim to fame is that it is the largest retailer authorized to sell Verizon products.

After the acquisition, Round Room will grow to 1,160 stores under the names Wireless Zone and TCC in 41 states.

That number has grown 33 percent over the past year, the first year of Round Room's operation. TCC itself is Round Room's flagship company, started in 1991.

"By bringing two of the wireless industry's most respected and tenured brands under a single owner, Round Room is able to enhance the wireless experience for customers nationwide," said Scott Moorehead, CEO of Round Room.

"This acquisition affords us the opportunity to bring the knowledge and experience we've gained with TCC over the past 25 years to another successful wireless agent."

Along with TCC's Wireless locations (previously known as Moorehead Communications) the Indiana-based Round Room also owns the Redux cell phone drying patent process and Culture of Good, a company that advises organizations on ways to improve both communities and profit.

"Launched in 2011, CrowdTangle is an analytics tool used by publishers to measure how well stories perform on social networks such as Facebook or Twitter."

Round Room CEO Scott Moorehead will also serve as CEO of Wireless Zone.

“Increasing its wireless footprint so significantly in a single transaction while remaining closely aligned with Verizon is an opportunity that doesn't often present itself,” a Round Room representative told Wireless Week via email.

TCC made more than \$1 billion in revenue in 2015. Glentel, Wireless Zone's parent company, was acquired by Bell Canada for \$586 million in November 2014.

wirelessweek.com

Industry Reports

Sprint, T-Mobile Stocks Soar After Election, But Don't Expect A Merger Yet

November 10, 2016

Sprint Corp.'s stock soared after Tuesday's election, spurred by speculation about the possibility of a merger with T-Mobile US Inc. under a new administration.

At market close Tuesday, the Overland Park-based carrier's stock was at \$6.265, quickly accelerating past \$7 a share by Wednesday morning. As of Thursday, it peaked at \$7.425 at 10 a.m.

If Sprint can raise its stock to \$8 a share, CEO Marcelo Claure will get 10 million shares of Sprint stock, per his contract. The catch: For Claure to earn 100 percent of that, Sprint's stock has to stay above \$8 for 150 consecutive days. The stock hasn't reached that level since July 2014.

“It had quite the move, as did T-Mobile,” CFRA Research equity analyst Angelo Zino said. “It looked like it was those two names more so than any real trend in the (telecommunications) sector that was moving it.”

Zino said the rise in the two competitors' stocks probably was driven by coming changes to the Federal Communications Commission after Donald Trump's victory. Although it's too early to tell, a Republican-controlled FCC board could reopen the door to merger discussions.

“You're going to see a changing of the guard next year,” Zino said. “(The merger) may get revisited. If it were to get revisited, I wouldn't necessarily expect something to transpire from that.”

Masayoshi Son, CEO of Sprint parent SoftBank Group Corp., had discussed buying T-Mobile back in 2014, but the company withdrew efforts in the face of several steep FCC hurdles.

Sprint declined to comment on merger speculation. T-Mobile parent company Deutsche Telekom's CEO, Tim Hoettges, told investors it was “far too early” to speculate how a reconstituted FCC would act, Reuters reported.

bizjournals.com

Fiber for 5G Is At The Heart Of Recent Telecom M&A Madness

November 7, 2016

Yesterday's announcement that Windstream will purchase EarthLink for \$1.1 billion – thus gaining EarthLink's 29,000 route miles of fiber – is just the latest in a series of high-profile, fiber-related

“Fiber is a critical component of 4G densification and 5G network deployment.”

telecom mergers and acquisitions. And 5G and wireless network densification sits near the heart of many of these transactions.

“Fiber is a critical component of 4G densification and 5G network deployment. Specifically, denser networks will be needed to support the expected rise in mobile data, a dramatically broader array of connected devices, and increased machine-to-machine transactions, all at materially lower latency and at higher quality of service levels. Thus, fiber will be a critical component of next gen network infrastructures,” noted the analysts at Barclays in an evaluation of the recent blockbuster \$34 billion purchase of Level 3 by CenturyLink – a transaction that would give CenturyLink an additional 200,000 route miles of fiber.

Indeed, the Windstream/EarthLink and CenturyLink/Level 3 tie-ups are just two of several recent major actions on the fiber front. Just last week, Crown Castle said it will acquire FPL FiberNet from NextEra Energy for about \$1.5 billion in cash, giving it 11,500 route miles of fiber. Separately, Google announced it would halt its own fiber buildout efforts, news that coincided with the departure of Google Fiber CEO Craig Barratt.

And of course, Verizon continues to work to acquire XO Communications, which owns around 33,000 route miles of fiber.

What all this news indicates is that putting fiber into the ground is difficult, and that fiber likely will play a critical role in the future of next-generation networks, up and to including 5G.

Why is fiber so critical to 5G? Barclays’ analysts offer this explanation: “Mission critical applications running on 5G will tolerate no more than 1 millisecond of latency, meaning traffic can no longer travel from the terminal to the core and back out to another terminal; more traffic has to initiate and terminate within the edge/access network. The speed of light, at which data traffic travels over an optical network, means 1 m/s of latency has a geographical limit of 50-100km. Given this geographic restriction, the caching of content closer to the user will be required. In order to implement this infrastructure, fiber will need to run between each tower with small cells feeding into a base station, consuming a lot of fiber in the process.”

Historically, wireless networks enjoyed success in part because they didn’t require much in the way of wired support. After all, one macro cell site could blanket miles and miles of geography with LTE. Today, though, the equation is changing because operators are increasingly looking to densify their wireless networks with the addition of small cells and other technologies, which generally require more fiber connections. Further, newer wireless network designs also may require more fiber: For example, a C-RAN network centralizes the baseband functionality of a cellular base station within the network and then connects the baseband functionality via fiber with the distant radio elements, which are located at the cell site.

Tower company Crown Castle has made no secret of its interest in small cells and fiber. In 2014 the company purchased 24/7 Mid-Atlantic and its 800 route miles of fiber, and last year Crown Castle purchased Sunesys, giving it access to 10,000 miles of fiber in major metro markets across the United States. Crown Castle’s recent FiberNet acquisition would give the company another 28,500 route miles of fiber.

In Crown Castle’s latest earnings conference call, company executives offered a real-world look at the company’s return on its fiber and small cell investment. According to a Seeking Alpha transcript of his remarks, CEO Jay Brown explained that in 2013, Crown Castle counted 300 “tenant nodes on air” on approximately 100 miles of fiber in Chicago, or approximately 3 tenant nodes per mile of fiber. “Fast forward to today, we have approximately 1,100 nodes on air and under construction on 250 miles of fiber, with the tenant nodes density at approximately 5 tenant nodes per mile. This results in a yield on our investment in Chicago of about 10%,” he said.

To be clear though, AT&T and Verizon still command the lion's share of fiber in the U.S. market. Last year, in a ranking of metro route miles of fiber, AT&T, Verizon and CenturyLink took first, second and third, respectively, in fiber ownership.

Moreover, it's important to note that owning fiber isn't a prerequisite for launching 5G. For example, the analysts at Barclays noted that Verizon has inked wholesale dark fiber agreements with more than a dozen fiber providers in order to access fiber services in areas where the company doesn't own its own fiber connections. "We agree that as 5G deployments progress, the third party fiber leasing business model should become increasingly more attractive as a means to efficiently and economically increase fiber's reach and breadth. For those that don't have any wireline assets, it will become all the more important to rely on third party providers outside of their footprint," the analysts wrote.

Additionally, access to fiber connections may become cheaper for some players if the FCC decides to rule on the issue. During its open meeting this month, the FCC is scheduled to vote on "business data services," or BDS, which is also called special access. Smaller telecom companies like T-Mobile and Sprint have argued that the FCC needs to set rates in the special access market so that fiber owners like AT&T and Verizon can't place onerous charges on access to fiber and other business-level internet connections.

Nonetheless, it's clear that fiber has become a valuable asset as the wireless industry hurdles toward a 5G future. I expect further fiber-motivated consolidation (potentially involving the likes of Zayo, Lumos Networks, FirstLight Fiber and other smaller players) as Verizon, Comcast, T-Mobile and others work to reinforce their market positions ahead of the rollout of this technology.

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