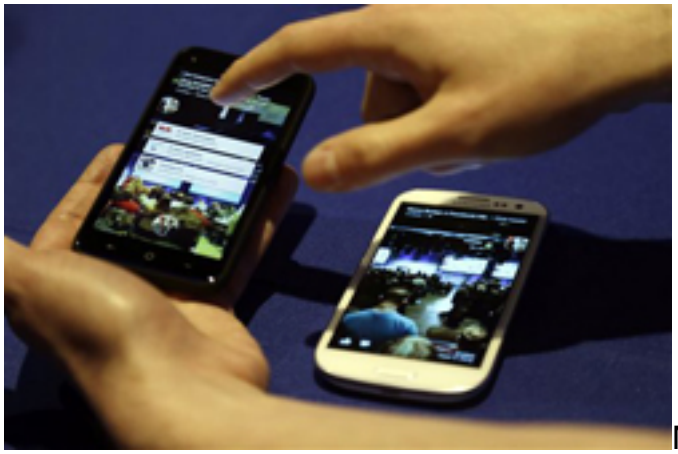
Facebook Barges into Google Turf with Home

PETER SVENSSON, AP Technology Writer



NEW YORK (AP) — Facebook Home, the new application that takes over the front screen of a smartphone, is a bit of a corporate home invasion. Facebook is essentially moving into Google's turf, taking advantage of software the search giant and competitor created.

Facebook Home will operate on phones running Google Inc.'s Android software and present Facebook status updates, messages and other content on the home screen, rather than making the user fire up Facebook's app. The software will be available for users to download on April 12 and will come preloaded on a new phone from HTC Corp., sold by AT&T Inc. in the U.S.

Google gives away Android, the most popular smartphone software in the world, in the hope that it will steer phone users toward Google services, such as Maps and Gmail, and the ads it sells. Compared to ads targeting PC surfers, mobile ads are a small market, but it's growing quickly. Research firm eMarketer expects U.S. mobile ad spending to grow 77 percent this year to $7.29 billion.

With Home, Facebook is inserting itself between users and Google, diverting them to the social network's own ads and services. It's taking advantage of the fact that Google places few restrictions on how phone manufacturers and software developers modify Android. By contrast, Facebook Home would not work on the iPhone without approval from Apple Inc., and close collaboration with the company.

"Facebook Home can only reside on Android because only Google was daft enough to allow it," said independent phone analyst Horace Dediu, via Twitter.

At the launch event Thursday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said Google was aware of the project, but Facebook didn't work them to create Home. Asked if he believed Google could change tactics and restrict apps like Home, he said it was theoretically possible, but highly unlikely for Google to do a "180-degree change" in its stance on Android's openness.

It's not the first time a big Internet company has co-opted Android: Amazon.com has gone much farther with its Kindle Fire tablets. They run a version of Android that strips out all Google services, replacing them with Amazon's equivalents. Barnes & Noble Inc. does the same thing with its Nook tablets. These devices lie outside the Google system, whereas phones running Facebook Home still come with Google apps like Maps and the Play Store for music, movies and applications.

The Play Store has many examples of downloadable applications that modify the Android home screen — so-called "launchers." Home, however, represents the first time a major Internet company and Google competitor has created a downloadable launcher.

J.P. Morgan analyst Doug Anmuth said Home may increase the pressure on Google to find ways to get people to spend more time on its Plus social network, which so far hasn't been as magnetic as Facebook's hangout. Anmuth also thinks the communication tools built into Home could decrease usage of Google's Gmail and Gchat services.

But Zuckerberg said the app will help Google.

"I think this is really good for Android," he told the audience at the launch event in Menlo Park, Calif. Developers do their best work on the iPhone first, but with Home, Facebook is putting Android first. If consumers want the Facebook Home experience, they'll have to get an Android phone.

In a statement, Google seemed to agree. "This latest device demonstrates the openness and flexibility that has made Android so popular," it said.

___

AP Technology Writers Barbara Ortutay and Michael Liedtke contributed to this report.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/23/2014 - 4:53am*):
http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/news/2013/04/facebook-barges-google-turf-home?qt-most_popular=0