Facebook Messenger starts taking over Instagram Direct messages

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Last year, Facebook announced a plan to merge its three big messaging networks: someday WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram Direct would all be the same service. Late Friday, The Verge spotted the first move toward Facebook’s unified messaging utopia— Facebook Messenger is taking over Instagram messaging.

On Friday, the Instagram app started popping up a message saying, “There’s a new way to message on Instagram.” Besides cross-communication between Instagram and Facebook users, the update promises a “new colorful look,” emoji reactions, and the ability to swipe to reply to messages. Instagram’s messaging icon changes to a Facebook Messenger logo when you update. The update appears to be rolling out across iOS and Android, and for now, the transition is optional.

In a statement to The Verge, Facebook said, “A small set of people were able to update to a new test experience for Instagram messaging. We hope they enjoy the experience and we are looking forward to testing it in other countries so we can keep learning from this.” Anecdotally this rollout seems a lot

bigger than “a small set of people,” but we’ll have to take Facebook’s word for it.

Facebook is the dominant player in the messaging space. The world’s biggest messaging app is Facebook’s WhatsApp, with around two billion monthly active users, according to Statista. Facebook Messenger is the second biggest service in Statista’s list, with 1.3 billion users, followed by China’s WeChat app, with 1.2 billion users.

That list doesn’t include Apple’s iMessage, which should be somewhere in the top four messaging apps worldwide. In 2019, Apple said there were 900 million active iPhone users out there, and 1.4 billion active Apple devices total. Users often have more than one Apple device, so it’s not right to claim each device is one unique user. iMessage is the default iOS texting service, so the iMessage user base is probably close to the total number of iPhone users. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg certainly seems to respect Apple’s messaging game, calling iMessage Facebook’s “biggest competitor by far” in the message space in 2018.

The next big move for Facebook will be merging WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, which would create a 3.3 billion user super network, accounting for about 43 percent of the world’s population on a single messaging service.

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