

Facebook's plan to take over the news business

By Will Oremus, Slate

Facebook's plan to take over the media was first articulated in October, by the *New York Times*' David Carr. The social network had become a dominant source of online news for its billion-plus users. But it found that those users were frustrated by the experience of reading news on Facebook, especially on their phones. It required clicking links to third-party media websites, whose pages were slow to load, riddled with ads, and often failed to match the promise of their clickbait headlines.

Facebook has tried to solve this problem from a number of angles, many of which I've written about in the past. But the ultimate solution was the one Carr laid out: Facebook would simply host news' sites content on its own platform, then share a slice of the ad revenue that resulted.

I wrote in depth in January about Facebook's plan to cut out the middle man, explaining how it might work and why publishers would feel compelled to participate. At the time, Facebook had just published a blog post encouraging publishers to post videos natively on its platform, so that they could play automatically in users' feeds. (Facebook's algorithms heavily prioritize native video posts over, say, YouTube videos.) But I predicted that we'd eventually see Facebook nudge media outlets to post full news stories directly to Facebook as well – perhaps by “late 2016.”

That prediction suddenly looks far too conservative. The *Times* reported earlier this month that Facebook “has been quietly holding talks with at least half a dozen media companies about hosting their content inside Facebook rather than making users

tap a link to go to an external site.” And it will start testing the new scheme “in the next several months,” with the *New York Times*, *National Geographic*, and BuzzFeed among the likely partners at launch. No doubt others will be lined up to follow their lead.

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