

- Social networking

LOVE IT OR NOT, FB TO PLAY MATCHMAKER

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NEW YORK— Facebook doesn't think hookups are meaningful and doesn't want you to date your friends—but it's known for a long time that its vast map of human connections could help people find long-term partners.



At least that's the takeaway from a new dating feature that the social networking giant is launching because, well, why not?

After all, Facebook already lets you “poke”

people, whatever that means, and lets you broadcast your relationship status.

If you ever download all the data Facebook has on you, you'll see it even keeps track of all the past partners you've listed on Facebook, even if this isn't visible on your profile.

A dating tool has always seemed the next logical step, as Chris Cox, Facebook's chief product officer, said on Tuesday at Facebook's f8 conference for app developers in San Jose, California.

Fourteen years after Facebook's launch, it's finally coming.

‘Not just for hookups’

CEO Mark Zuckerberg said the new dating feature was “not just for hookups” but to build “meaningful, long-term relationships.”

That seems a direct swipe at Tinder, which is still best known for hooking people up with people they find attractive by showing their photo, age and first name.

Shares of Match.com, which owns Tinder, tumbled on Facebook's announcement.

Of course, Tinder itself uses Facebook data to act as a digital matchmaker (as do many other dating apps), and Facebook's dating feature seems to borrow some ideas from one of the world's most popular dating apps.

Facebook's feature will be opt-in, meaning you have to choose to use it. Like Tinder, it'll use just your first name.

Separate profiles

The Facebook dating profile that you'll create will be separate from your regular Facebook profile. It won't suggest your friends as people you might want to date, even if your 500-plus "friends" include random acquaintances—or crushes. Your dating profile won't show up on your news feed or be visible to friends; it's only for others using the dating service. Zuckerberg said the dating feature was built with privacy and security in mind from the start. The company has been under fire recently for possibly not doing this with its other features over the years.

Yet timing seemed odd: As Facebook is still recovering from its worst privacy crisis in history, is this really the time to start tracking something as private about people as their dating habits?

For 'single' and 'married'

There were also some online rumblings that the dating feature might be open only to people who list themselves as "single" and not those who are "married" or "in a relationship," ignoring the subset of people who are in nonmonogamous relationships.

But Facebook said this was not the case. After all, people often don't keep their relationship status up to date, don't use it in a serious way (in a complicated relationship with pizza, anyone?), or simply leave it blank.

After setting up a dating profile, you can browse events and groups based on location and interests. After you "unlock" an event you're attending or considering going to, you can view the profiles of others who have also unlocked that event.

Users can chat with each other through a private messaging feature that won't be connected to Facebook's other messaging services, Messenger or WhatsApp.