

Facebook rolling out central location for apps

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There's more to Facebook apps than "Angry Birds" and Pinterest, but many users wouldn't know that because there hasn't been a good, central way to find them.

Facebook Inc. is trying to change that. On Thursday, Facebook is beginning to roll out its App Center to its nearly 1 billion users, so they can find games and other applications with social components more easily.

The App Center, available on Facebook's website and on Apple and Android mobile devices, will recommend apps to users based on their interests, the types of apps their friends like, or the apps they have liked in the past.

Many people are introduced to Facebook apps in the form of sometimes-annoying requests from their friends for poker partners, Scrabble buddies or neighbors on virtual farms. Those requests haven't necessarily matched a user's specific interests.

The new App Center will initially feature about 600 Facebook apps, mostly games, reviewed by the company to meet its quality standards. Games, such as Zynga's "CityVille" and Electronic Arts' "The Sims," are the most popular types of apps on Facebook.

But the company is betting that by personalizing recommendations to users, people will find new types of applications beyond games, along with games that are more interesting to them. There are all sorts of social apps that use Facebook, from music-listening services such as Spotify to what-you-just-ate tools such as Foodspotting.

"We spend all day, every day building a platform (so that) great social games and apps can exist," said Matt Wyndowe, product manager for apps and games at Facebook. But a common question has long been where to find them. "Up until now, we haven't had a great answer to that question."

Facebook said that on mobile devices, the App Center won't compete with other app stores, such as Apple's or Google's. Rather, the App Center will send users to those other stores to download the programs. People can also get mobile apps from their regular computers by using a feature called "send to mobile."

Among the roughly 600 applications included in the App Center at launch will be the Nike Plus GPS running app, which lets users track their runs and broadcast it to their Facebook feed. Ricky Engelberg, whose title at Nike is experience director at digital sport, said having a place where apps are showcased will "let more people be part of the Nike Plus community."

The App Center, which Facebook announced last month, will be rolled out to U.S.

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users beginning Thursday night and to everyone else over the coming weeks.

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