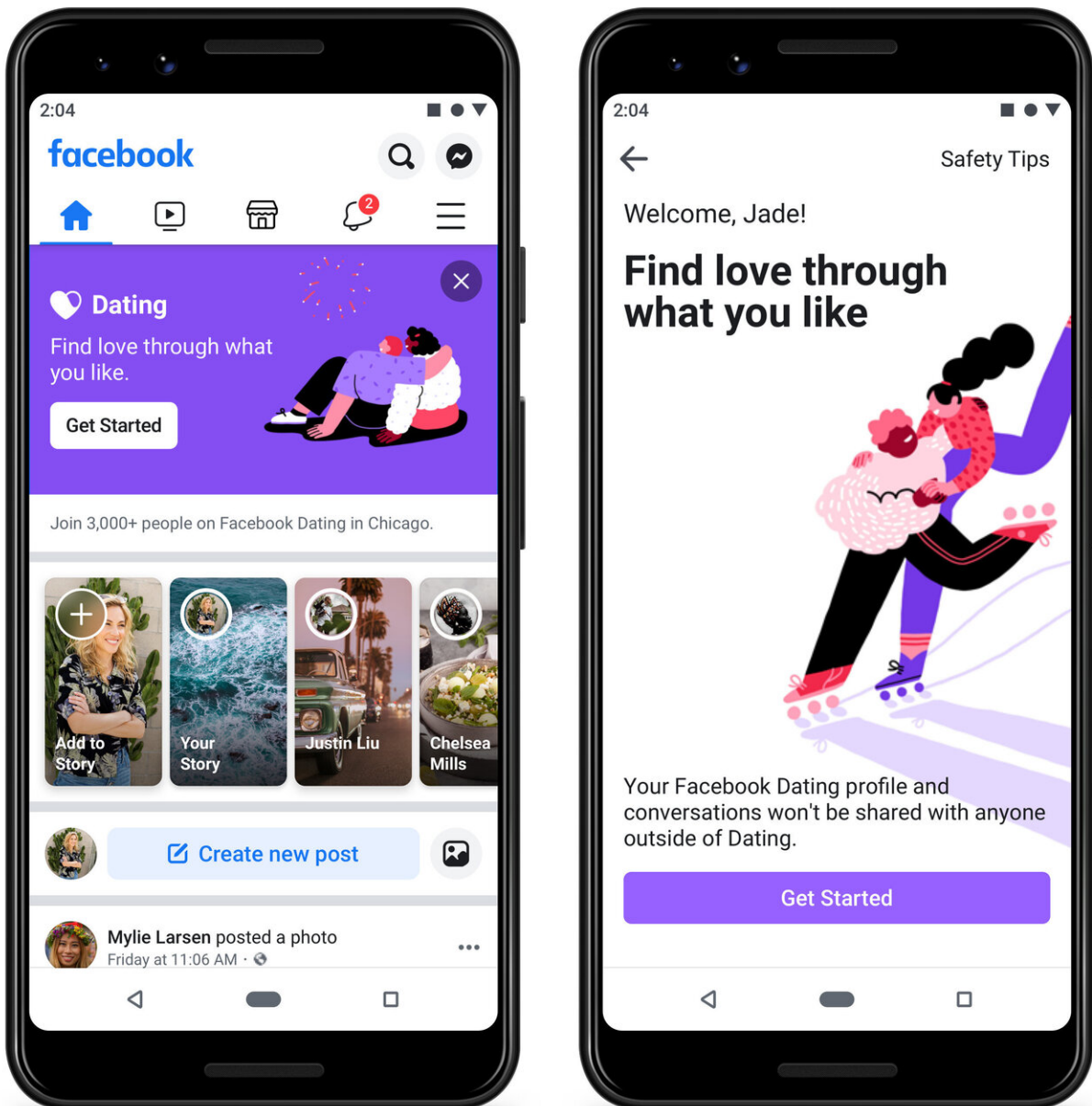


Friends with benefits: Can Facebook tackle your love life?

September 5 2019, by Barbara Ortutay



This undated product image provide by Facebook shows screenshots of Facebook Dating, a mobile-only matchmaking service. On Thursday, Sept. 5, 2019, the service will launch in the U.S. (Facebook via AP)

Facebook is tackling a new frontier: love.

Facebook Dating, a matchmaking service the company already offers in Brazil, Canada and 17 other countries, arrives in the U.S. on Thursday. But after years of privacy missteps by the social network, will people trust it with their love lives?

For a company that's also developing its own digital currency and dabbling in e-commerce, love is another step toward reaching into all aspects of human existence.

Although many features resemble what other matchmaking services offer, Facebook's version promises to be different, just as Tinder brought swiping and Bumble brought female-first messaging. Your Facebook Dating profile will be separate from your main one, but it will let you tap your network of friends to identify "secret crushes."

Facebook Dating, a mobile-only service that's free to use and free of ads, can still help Facebook make money if it keeps people glued to its other services longer.

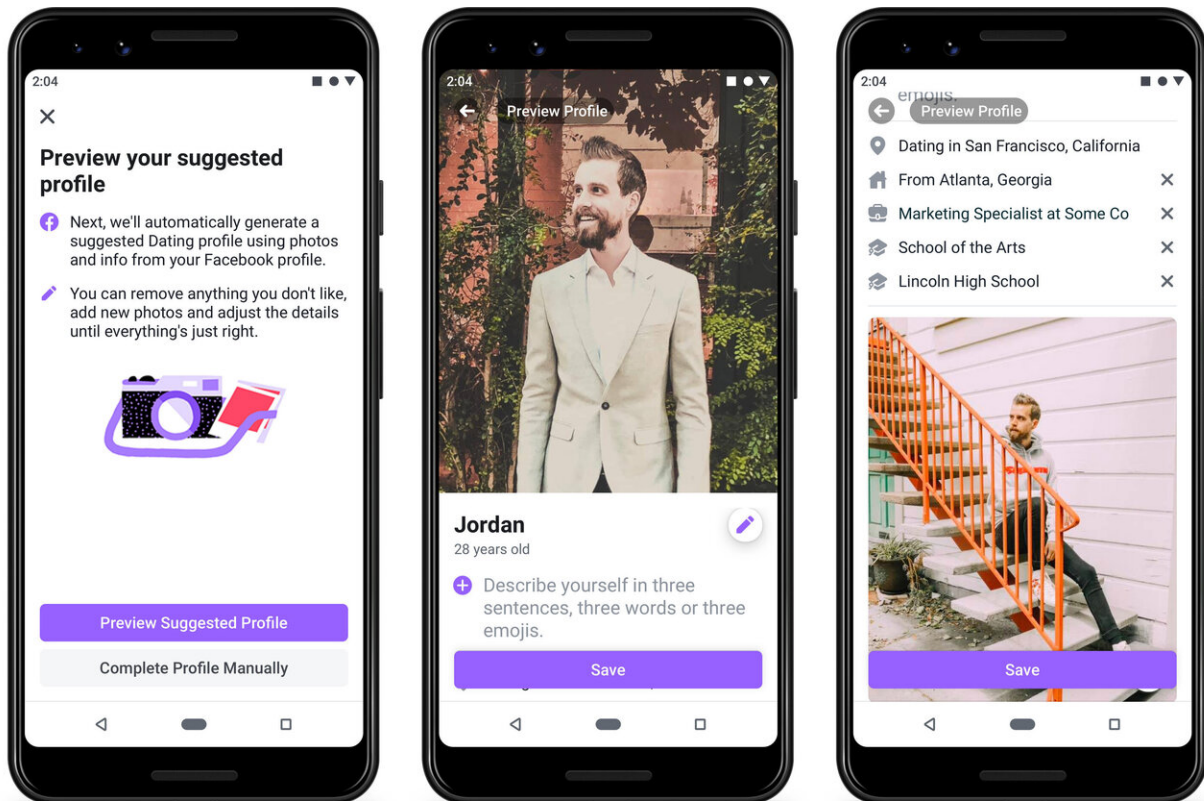
That's if users can get over concerns about privacy.

"A feature on Facebook that people don't trust isn't going to be successful," said Rob Sherman, the company's deputy chief privacy officer. "We built in privacy from the ground up."

Tell that to Seth Carter, 32, an engineer from Terre Haute, Indiana, who tried a host of dating apps ranging from Match to Bumble, Tinder and Christian Mingle prior to his current relationship.

"Facebook is here to make money and I get that," he said. But he worries that Facebook's stated commitment to privacy would ultimately buckle under pressure to make money off the service. "That likely means they're going to sell my dating preferences, which means even more intrusions into my life."

Facebook says it won't be doing any of that. But users like Carter can hardly be blamed for their apprehension, given the company's multiple stumbles over protecting people's private information. Facebook was fined a record \$5 billion this summer by the Federal Trade Commission over privacy violations. It's also under scrutiny for allowing for the spread of election-related misinformation and discrimination in U.S. housing ads.



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Facebook Dating comes as the popularity of online dating grows: In 2016, 15% of all U.S. adults said they had used online dating services, up from virtually none in 2005, according to the Pew Research Center.

The market is crowded. From old school sites like eHarmony to Hinge or The League, a members-only service promising to bring together folks with "ambition and a drive to succeed," there are also apps focused on farmers, religious groups, seniors, the LGBT community and so on.

When he announced the feature last year, Facebook CEO Mark

Zuckerberg said Facebook Dating is "not just for hookups" but to build "meaningful, long-term relationships." That appeared to be a direct swipe at Tinder, a service best known for hooking people up with people they find attractive by showing their photo, age and first name.

With Facebook, you start by creating a dating profile distinct from your Facebook profile. It's easy to bring over details such as your school and job—but you're free to embellish or hide any of that just for Facebook Dating. You can also add up to 36 of your Instagram photos.

You have to be at least 18, rather than 13 with the main Facebook service. The service isn't limited to those who've listed themselves as "single."

Facebook Dating shows your age, but hides your last name. When you see a suggested match, you "like" someone by tapping a heart icon, or tap "X" to dislike. You can't search for mates by interests or other keywords, the way you can with Match. You're limited to what Facebook suggests. As with Tinder, you have to decide whether or not you like someone before seeing the next match.

Facebook Dating won't suggest friends as matches, nor will your dating profile show up on your main news feed or be visible to friends. Facebook insists it won't use information gleaned from your dating profiles for advertising and says there won't be ads on Facebook Dating.

Facebook won't let lonely hearts—or creeps—send photos or website links, which could help cut down on unsolicited photos. As a safety measure, you can also share your location with friends while you're on a date.

To help you meet offline and share interests, the service will suggest matches based on your existing Facebook groups and events. If you and

a match are both going to a concert, you can make plans to meet up there. (These options require you to intentionally activate them.)

Harbor hidden passions for your existing Facebook friends or Instagram followers? You can pick up to nine as a "secret crush." You'll both be notified if your crush is also on Facebook Dating and has likewise picked you. Otherwise, Facebook says, the crush remains secret.

But based on Facebook's history with users' private information, there's certainly a possibility that it won't, so prepare to be embarrassed.

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