

Facebook, Instagram roll out paid subscription in Australia, New Zealand

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Meta has started a pilot rollout of its first paid verification service on Facebook and Instagram in Australia and New Zealand.

Facebook and Instagram began a week-long rollout of their first paid verification service on Friday, testing users' willingness to pay for social

media features that until now have been free.

Facing a drop in advertising revenues, parent company Meta is piloting a subscription in Australia and New Zealand before it appears in larger markets. The service will cost US\$11.99 on the web and US\$14.99 on the iOS and Android [mobile platforms](#).

From Friday, subscribers Down Under who provide government-issued IDs can start applying for a verified badge, offering protection against impersonation, [direct access](#) to [customer support](#) and more visibility, according to the company.

"We'll be gradually rolling out access to Meta Verified on Facebook and Instagram and expect to reach 100 percent availability within the first 7 days of the rollout," a Meta spokesperson told AFP.

Some attempts to join Meta Verified from Sydney found the service was not available on the first day of the rollout.

"This new feature is about increasing authenticity and security across our services," Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg wrote in a statement posted on Facebook and Instagram.

Crucially, the move also provides Meta with a way of mining more revenue from its two billion [users](#).

The swelling army of creators, influencers and pseudo-celebrities who make a living online could be obvious [users](#) of verification, according to experts.

Many of them complain that it can be difficult to smooth technical and administrative problems, causing delays and lost revenue.

'Slow-burning strategy'

Jonathon Hutchinson, a lecturer in online communication at the University of Sydney, said a kind of "VIP service" could be "quite a valuable proposition for a content creator".

But ahead of the launch, ordinary users seemed less than keen to hand over money to a company that already makes vast sums from their data.

"I think most of my friends would laugh at it," said Ainsley Jade, a 35-year-old [social media](#) user in Sydney.

She sees a trend toward more casual use of [social media](#) and a shift away from a time when you "put your whole life on there".

"I think people are sort of moving away from that... but definitely, definitely wouldn't pay for it—no way!

Some commentators have expressed puzzlement at why Facebook and Instagram would adopt a verification-subscription strategy that rival Twitter tried just weeks ago—with less than stellar results.

But Hutchinson said Meta has often shown a willingness to try new, and at times risky models, only to drop what does not work.

He sees this latest gambit as part of a broader effort to condition users to pay for social media.

"I think it's part of a slow-burning strategy to move toward a model that is not free, where more and more services and functionality will be a paid or subscription-based service," he told AFP.

"I think over the long-term the functionality that we have now—joining

groups, selling things on 'Marketplace'- all of these add-ons that have emerged on Facebook over the years will eventually become subscription-based services."

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