

Facebook's smartniks come up with Flicks unit of time

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Developers aiming to have all video effects in sync just got a real boost.

The helpful shot is called Flicks, from Facebook, and it gives programmers a way to measure the time between media frames without the use of fractions.

Tech-watching sites are calling the Facebook unit of time amazing. London-based Anthony [Cuthbertson](#) at *Newsweek* said the unveiling was from the virtual reality division Oculus. He said Flicks was slightly longer than a nanosecond.

The BBC pointed out that flick, derived from "frame-tick", is $1/705,600,000$ of a second—the [next](#) unit of time after a nanosecond.

A flick (frame-tick) is a very small unit of time. It is $1/705600000$ of a second, exactly, according to its "Basics" definition on GitHub.

So, why should Facebook step up to present the measurement of time? Well, Cuthbertson said, there was good reason for Flicks.

Futurism spelled it out. "Facebook has announced a new unit of time: the flick. The unit is intended to make it easier for programmers to sync up the refresh rate of a device's display with the content being [viewed](#)." It would allow video and audio producers to better edit content.

So did Chris Smith, in *BGR*: He called it a brilliant time unit "meant to fix time problems for people and computers who deal with video and audio content production and distribution on a regular [basis](#)."

Devin Coldewey elaborated on the wow factor in *TechCrunch*. He said, "having dabbled in video and audio editing and effects, timing and frame rate stuff was always a pain (though thankfully we've mostly left behind interlacing and other legacy cruft) and I would welcome [harmonization](#) really of any sort."

Coldewey complimented "genius self-starters" for creating a "potentially super-useful time unit."

Matt Hammond, lead research engineer at BBC Research and Development, said this can reduce errors because "When the numbers used are not integers, errors can gradually creep into computer calculations." Over time, errors can build up and cause inaccuracies that can be noticed.

So what motivated these self starters to do this in the first place?

The team said, "This time [unit](#) began as a [technical](#) question posted publicly on Facebook by Christopher Horvath in early 2017."

They talked about numbers and framerates. "When [working](#) creating visual effects for film, television, and other media, it is common to run simulations or other time-integrating processes which subdivide a single frame of time into a fixed, integer number of subdivisions. It is handy to be able to accumulate these subdivisions to create exact 1-frame and

1-second intervals, for a variety of reasons." Nanoseconds, the highest usable resolution, does not evenly divide common film and media framerates, they said. "This was the genesis of this unit."

Facebook's invented flick, said Coldewey, turned out to be "a very clever way of dividing time that theoretically could make video and audio production much more harmonious."

By accessing GitHub, you can check out the flicks format and code: github.com/OculusVR/Flicks

The BBC reminded readers that this is not the very first time a group has played with time. Swatch came up with Internet Time in 1998, designed to eliminate [time zones](#), which divides the day into 1,000 ".beats," the report said.

Why? "For example, if a New York web-supporter makes a date for a chat with a cyber friend in Rome, they can simply agree to meet at an "@ time—because internet [time](#) is the same all over the [world](#)."

More information: github.com/OculusVR/Flicks

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