



Facebook in the office, for the office

*The world's largest social media company wants in on
your workplace communication.*

 Lauren Kate Rawlins

The way we communicate in our personal lives has changed drastically over the last few years. An email or SMS to invite a friend or family member to dinner seems outdated, when you can WhatsApp message or nudge them on Facebook Messenger.

The same isn't necessarily true for business, however. Most organisations are still

entangled in email threads that date back months and often don't include all the relevant parties, or company announcements made on clunky intranets that only half the staff know how to use.

There are a few companies out there trying to change the ways corporations interact internally, unifying all communication channels into one amalgamated secure experience – a bit like social media.

In fact, one of the biggest players in the game is social media giant Facebook. Workplace by Facebook is a reskinned version of the Facebook everyone's familiar with, but with a closed network filled with only people within an organisation. It's separate from Facebook proper, as users don't have their Workplace and personal Facebook pages linked and they'll need login details provided by their company to

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access their Workplace profile. It features a newsfeed, messenger, groups, events, and live-streaming video – all adapted for business.

There's a free version and a paid-for version. The free version doesn't include any of the enterprise level features such as monitoring tools for IT teams, IT support, APIs for custom integrations and bots, and integrations with e-discovery and compliance providers. The paid-for version costs businesses \$3 per user, with discounts for more than 5 000 users.

Locally landed

The platform was first launched in the US in 2016, and in October last year, local ICT solutions provider Datacentrix was appointed the first South African Facebook Workplace reseller.

Rudie Raath, chief digital officer of Enterprise Advisory Services at Datacentrix, says Facebook Workplace disrupts the current paradigm of unified communication in the workplace. “Having an engaged workforce that uses the corporate communications platform as the preferred method of communication, as opposed to email, is just one of the immediate quick wins provided by this solution.

“Facebook Workplace offers a platform that's familiar to most corporate users, which ensures adoption,” he says.

“It delivers a personalised experience for each employee, with an information feed relevant to the company through a news feed portal. There's also a chat application for instant messaging, VoIP calling, in both audio and video formats, for one-to-one or multi-party.”

The platform also integrates with other business solutions such as SurveyMonkey, Microsoft OneDrive, SharePoint, HubSpot, Salesforce, and Box.

Businesses around the world are finding a number of different ways to make use of the platform to streamline procedures.

Vedanta Resources, a mining company headquartered in the UK, but with operations across the globe, including South Africa, is using Facebook Workplace to simplify its procurement process. The procurement team uses a chatbot, created by Workplace partner Leena.ai, to clarify queries related to taxation, documents, and detailed profiles of people, which means the team members don't have to wade through lengthy documents and can easily find the right expertise in the organisation.

Miroglio, an Italian high fashion retailer, created a group on Facebook Workplace to bring together its employees as well as external design consultants to conduct design-related discussions.

The marketing team at IIFL, an integrated financial services group in India, uses the platform to test adverts in-house first, leveraging its 12 000 strong internal audience to get feedback on planned campaigns before scaling up and spending on external channels.

Raath says Datacentrix has seen a broad uptake of Facebook Workplace by larger companies.

Unable to give exact numbers, he says one of the largest local banks has adopted it, with a number of other medium to large organisations currently in process. There's a broad mix of local companies using the

platform, such as Multichoice, Jumia, Starbucks SA, and Vodacom (as part of the Vodafone Group).

Datacentrix has itself deployed Workplace internally to 1 350 users.

Facebook Workplace competes with the more established collaboration platforms such as Slack, Asana, Microsoft Teams, and Monday.com.

“Workplace challenges other platforms, not on features, but on user adoption, security, compliance and integration,” he says.

Should it be trusted?

While Facebook proper is used by 38% of all South Africans, according to the latest data from research firm World Wide Worx, it hasn't shown itself to be a platform that users can trust implicitly to safeguard their personal data.

Early last year, it came to light that private information from 50 million Facebook users worldwide was harvested by data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica to develop techniques to support president Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign.

The social media company also had to pull a VPN app, Onavo, from Apple and Android's app stores after it was discovered that it was being used to monitor a user's behaviour outside of the Facebook app.

Raath says that all data on the paid-for version of Facebook Workplace is solely owned, entirely controlled and monitored by the business and not Facebook. Companies using Facebook Workplace will have to decide for themselves if they believe this and are willing to have all their internal company communication potentially exposed to Facebook. ■