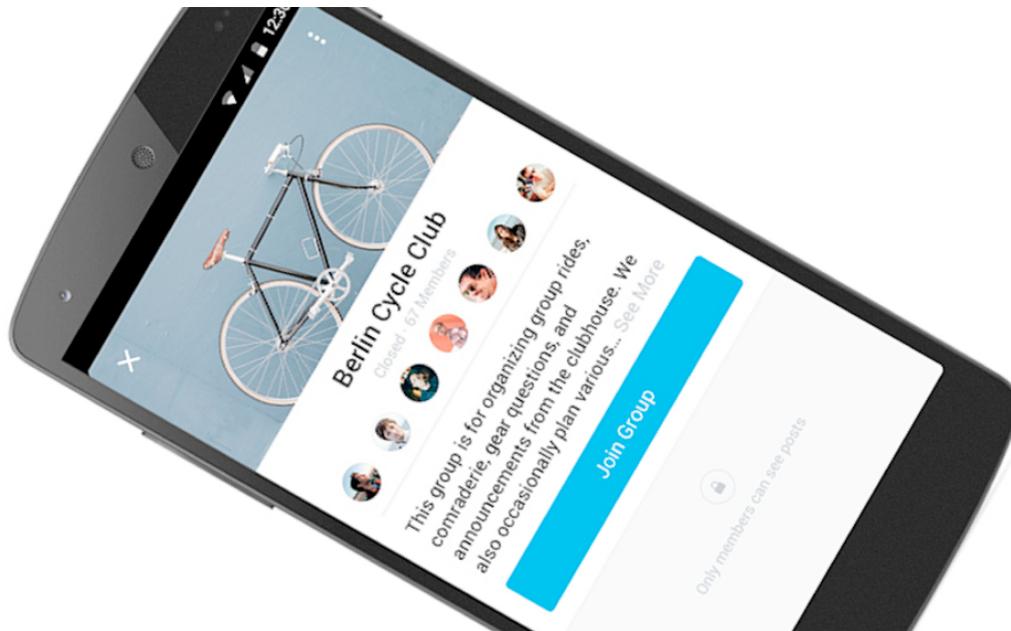# This Is How Facebook's Groups App Will Dominate And Win The Group Chat Market

Earlier this week Facebook launched a new application. Facebook Groups gives you access to the groups you manage or are a member of. As well as resurfacing an old community mainstay, the return of Groups as a standalone app can be seen as a defensive move for Facebook, ensuing that start-ups in a similar field gain less traction.

Groups on Facebook used to be a really (really) big thing, but they were somewhat overtaken by Pages. Groups never went away, but they remained a touch more inaccessible than more popular features. In part the Groups app (available on iOS and Android) will help expose the feature to Facebook users and potentially introduce it to millions more.

It will also act as fire-break between Facebook and other group-messaging applications. Through a mix of Facebook's size, limited space on a smartphone's screen, and doing everything possible to be thought of as 'first' in the consumer's brain, Mark Zuckerberg's social network is going to bring Groups back to life and diminish the prospect of other start-ups and software clients getting a foothold.

Let's start with the idea of limited space on a smartphone. By this I don't mean installation size or use of memory in a smartphone, but on icon and widget space. With space for just twenty-four applications on the first screen of an iPhone and a similar number of shortcuts on the primary Android home screens, any application that can reach these first screens will be opened more frequently than those installed at the far end of the app launcher screens.

The trick for Facebook will be to get its app moved up by the user, and this is where the brand name of Facebook will come in useful. It only took me a few days with the standalone Messaging app to move it so it was next to the Facebook app icon on that first screen. I'm sure

that Groups will be just as easily promoted (although unlike Messaging, Facebook Groups will continue to be accessible via the main Facebook smartphone app).

Because of its size and user base, Facebook has a number of inherent advantages. The chances are your friends and colleagues are already using Facebook and you have them as contacts. Everyone is familiar with the Facebook interface on the web and navigating through a Group will be second nature. The learning curve is minimal, and Groups works on the desktop and in the web browser just as easily as the connected app. It's just finding Groups initially in Facebook is hard – after setting it up the 'Search' bar will list your groups as well when you type in the name.

The easiest decision to make when faced with choosing and setting up a group messaging apps is to go with Facebook's solution.

This leads me to the crush in cognitive space. There are a number of group messaging apps out there already and the number is growing. It would be fair to say that in most circumstances, Facebook will be launching a new app and service to consumers, and the majority of consumers will be new to the 'group messaging' space. When a new group messaging app comes into their social circle (be it through an existing user or someone finding a new client to try out) the question that will dominate many people will be "why do I need another group messaging app when I have Facebook?"

Mission accomplished.

This looks remarkably like that Facebook made when it spun the Messenger IM client out of the monolithic Facebook app. And while there was some grumbling online, Facebook has made that transition successfully, so why not try it again with the added bonus of resurfacing an older feature that presumably still has high engagement when people discover it?

Group Messaging has never been on the A-List of applications for investment or development, but it does have many champions. It appears that Facebook has decided that after imaging and instant messaging, group messaging will be the next battleground. Not only is it setting out its stall, it's already building up the defences against the upcoming wave of apps that must surely be on their way.

By Ewan Spence