

# TECHNOLOGY



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## Zynga Creates Gamers' Hub

Maker of 'FarmVille' is Trying to Connect More Players on Multiple Devices

By IAN SHERR

SAN FRANCISCO—Zynga Inc. wants to get many more people playing online games together.

The company, known largely for casual games such as "FarmVille" and "Words With Friends," on Tuesday laid out plans to offer a central hub for players of online games.

Zynga, stepping up efforts to grow beyond its beginnings on Facebook Inc.'s service, said the new offering it calls "Zynga With Friends" will connect players of multiple game titles on different websites or mobile devices.

On Facebook, for example, users will more easily be able to play against other interested gamers—not just their existing friends on that social network. Zynga gamers will eventually be able to maintain lists of friends they play with and access them on any of the company's games.

By expanding gaming-related friendships across its website, Facebook and mobile devices, people will want to play for lon-

ger periods of time, Zynga said, which could increase sales of virtual goods within the game.

"It's not about the number of friends you have, it's how many friends you have actively playing the game you're playing," said Manuel Bronstein, who heads Zynga's consumer network products.

Zynga has been working to lessen its reliance on Facebook's social network. In March, the company launched its own website, Zynga.com, as a way for gamers to play its popular titles in addition to Facebook. Gamers were also able to connect through this website, but those connections didn't show up in Facebook or mobile devices.

More than 253 million people per month have played at least one game through Zynga.com, Facebook or mobile games that allow people to connect the game to their Facebook accounts, according to industry researcher AppData.

The Zynga effort comes amid general concerns about social

networking, exacerbated by Facebook's troubled initial public offering, and a sharp slide in Zynga's stock price, which fell nearly 5% more after the event Tuesday to close at \$5.76, well below its initial public offering price of \$10 in December.

Investors have expressed concern that Zynga's portfolio of games is too narrow, focusing too heavily on casual and casino-type games, while eschewing war simulation shooting games like Activision Blizzard Inc.'s popular "Call of Duty" franchise.

Mark Pincus, Zynga's chief executive, said he is focused on making games that reach the largest set of users, and that as the games get more advanced, they will inevitably begin to attract more discriminating players used to playing games on a videogame console.

"It's not about diversifying," Mr. Pincus said. "It's about taking the path to get our games in front of the largest possible audience and then deepen the value."

To get ahead, Zynga plans to

give game developers access to tools that allow them to both tap into the company's pool of active players, keep track of their highest scores and use Zynga's new head-to-head gaming features. That collaboration should help increase the number of people actively playing games and paying for social goods, Mr. Pincus said.

"The value to you as a consumer is liquidity of friends and other interesting people," he added. "The value to us as a business and soon third parties is a ready audience for the next great game we release."

Zynga said the new network is an example of the next wave of social technology, moving beyond friendships to personal networks built around people's interests. Activity within those networks tends to be higher than in a generalized setting, such as Facebook, said Zynga.

Zynga also said it would also be releasing new games like "ChefVille," a food and recipe-related game, and "Matching With Friends," a mobile puzzle game.

## Facebook Raises Hackles on Email

By JOHN LETZING

Facebook Inc. acknowledged that it could have made a better effort to educate the social network's users about changes to the way email addresses are displayed with profiles.

Facebook users began to notice on Monday that the email address shown in their profiles had been switched to an @facebook.com address, and many started complaining. Apparent shortcomings in the company's communication of the changes appeared to aggravate what may otherwise have been a minor issue.

The company said users had been notified of the impending move. In April, the company announced it would start updating addresses "to make them consistent across our site." The announcement, however, failed to mention how the company planned to implement the change.

A Facebook spokeswoman said Tuesday that "in hindsight" the company probably should have better explained the email switchover. Asked if the move was made to bolster Facebook's own messaging and email presence, she said, "We want people to use whatever service is most effective for them," adding that the move was made to add consistency to the site once every user was assigned an @facebook.com address. The change also affected all Facebook employees, she said.

Still, Facebook's move spawned an array of angry online comments. Blog posts began to appear almost immediately after the email change was implemented, advising users how to undo it.

"Clearly, their notification leaves a lot to be desired," said Ray Valdes, an analyst at Gartner Inc. He said Facebook is likely banking on the notion that many users won't bother to reverse the change to their displayed email, thereby leaving a Facebook address in place.

"What Facebook is doing is basically trying to weave itself into the fabric of every user's online experience. They have a

history of basically making changes to their services that bring users to the edge of their comfort zone—and sometimes beyond that," Mr. Valdes said.

Facebook has made clear that users can reverse the switch and restore their previously listed email as a default address. They also have the option of not publicly listing any email address.

The firestorm over a relatively minor change to user profiles illustrates the palpable influence of Facebook on its audience of more than 900 million users.

It also demonstrates the fine line Facebook must walk as a high-profile—and now public—company likely to absorb criticism as it updates its services and aims for an even broader sphere of influence on the Web.

Facebook first announced its internal messaging service, which involved distributing an

### Facebook's email switchover spawned an array of angry online comments.

@facebook.com email address to users, in late 2010. The Menlo Park, Calif., company touted its service as a more evolved form of email that could reduce clutter while focusing on messages sent among social contacts connected on the site.

But Facebook's initiative generally attracted scant attention from users mostly content to maintain their profiles on the site, while separately keeping their email services from providers such as Google Inc., Yahoo Inc. or Microsoft Corp.

According to the most recent available data from comScore, Microsoft's Hotmail was the most popular Internet-based email service globally as of May, with about 325 million unique visitors. Yahoo's service ranked second, with roughly 298 million users, while Google's Gmail garnered about 289 million users.

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## Golf Ball Eliminates Slicing Panned By USGA for Tournament Play

By Leonard Finkel

Imagine the unbridled joy of consistently hitting fairways. The ability to hit the ball straighter makes playing golf faster, less expensive and much more fun: fewer lost balls to replace, less time searching and hunting for wayward drives and above all, greater enjoyment and the improved self respect and satisfaction that comes with shooting lower scores. The Polara self-correcting ball does all of that by reducing hooks and slices up to 75%. A unique, asymmetrical dimple pattern positions shallow dimples around the ball's equator and deeper dimples at the poles. One glance and you clearly see the Polara difference. Try them and you'll undoubtedly experience the self-correcting effect. Golf Tips Magazine reported, "If you're a recreational golfer who tends to find the rough more than the fairway, your fast track to straighter shots has arrived. No, it's not a new training aid, oversized driver or magic swing tip. It's a golf ball that flies straight, even when you pull a slice swing on it."

### Robotic Testing Validates Claims

Polara went to Golf Labs in San Diego to validate their self-correcting ball's performance and the results were eye-opening. During robotic testing where a significant slice was induced, on average, Polara balls reduced the slicing effect by 75% over traditional balls including premium brands. Golf Labs director Gene Parente states, "We set up the Golf Labs robot to simulate a 90 foot slice based on launch conditions of an average golfer. With the nonconforming Polara Ultimate Straight golf ball we found that compared to several popular conforming golf balls, which all sliced about 90 feet, the Polara ball corrected up to 70 feet of the 90 foot slice."

### Garnering National Acclaim!

Bill Pennington (New York Times) wrote, "The design of the (Polara) ball corrects slices and hooks by 75 percent. When I took the ball to a New Jersey driving range, regular golfers and the occasional pro could not slice or hook the ball with any regularity."

Veteran journalist Ron Claiborne (ABC News, Good Morning America) reported, "I carefully teed up a Polara ball, arrow on top, as instructed. I reared back and let it rip. The ball soared high into the sky, arched and landed on the fairway about 250 yards away. It had flown straight and true from tee to landing. I was in shock. "No slicing," I exclaimed. I hit another Polara. The same thing. And another. I simply could not hit a bad shot. It was a miracle."

Polara balls are designed for the vast majority of golfers who are recreational players, ones who want to take advantage of technology improvements; those who want to have fun playing golf. "We're not trying to remove the skill from the game," said Polara's director of R&D, David Felker. "We're just trying to remove the frustration."

Since switching to the Polara ball several months ago, I almost always shoot in the 70's. Last week I recorded a 71, three strokes lower than my previous best, though I've only been playing for 25 years. There were shots I knew I missed, but the Polara corrected my mistakes. Shooting lower scores makes playing golf more fun and far less frustrating. Coincidentally, I'm eager to play more.

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