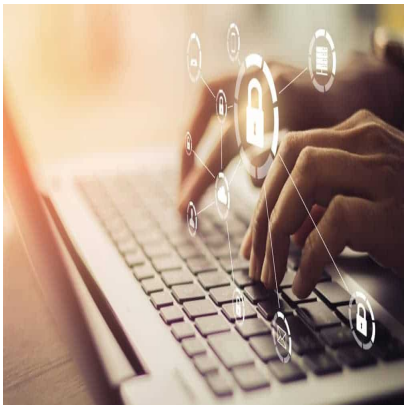

Facebook Makes Another Billion-Dollar Bet on AR/VR

Description

If you thought **Facebook** (NASDAQ: FB) had forgotten about its investment in augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), this week's announcement that it's acquiring CTRL-labs should put that thought to rest. Facebook is reportedly spending approximately $1 billion on the neural interface platform company and will add it to Facebook Reality Labs, where AR/VR technology resides.

The move isn't the biggest acquisition Facebook has made and won't be a headline deal for most investors, but it could change the future of AR and VR.

Facebook's vision for CTRL-labs tech

CTRL-labs technology uses sensors on a bracelet (shown above) to detect what action your brain is trying to send to the muscles in your hand. In simulations, the company can predict how your hand is moving with just the wearable, not by tracking of the hand itself.

In a Facebook post following the CTRL-labs announcement, VP of AR/VR Andrew Bosworth laid out what Facebook is going to do with CTRL-labs technology like wearable devices:

> The vision for this work is a wristband that lets people control their devices as a natural extension of movement. Here's how it'll work: You have neurons in your spinal cord that send electrical signals to your hand muscles telling them to move in specific ways such as to click a mouse or press a button. The wristband will decode those signals and translate them into a digital signal your device can understand, empowering you with control over your digital life. It captures your intention so you can share a photo with a friend using an imperceptible movement or just by, well, intending to.

He went on to say, "This is how our interactions in VR and AR can one day look."

Companies have been trying to find ways to make AR and VR interactions more realistic, originally using a trigger to close a fist and then adding touch interfaces that approximated where fingers were

on a controller. The latest advance is the Valve Index controller, which uses 87 sensors to determine where your fingers and hands are in real life.

CTRL-labs has the ability to take that to the next level by identifying a person's intentions by sensing his or her brain signals. If the method proves successful, wearable devices on our wrists may soon replaced controllers.

What's next for Facebook in AR/VR?

We know that Facebook's Oculus division recently launched the $400 Oculus Quest headset in an aim to make VR accessible to a wider market. But that's likely just the start of the advances.

The company is reportedly working on AR smart glasses that may be more accessible than VR systems because they're an everyday device. Wearables like the CTRL-kit may be an augmentation of AR glasses or VR headsets, and may be just the beginning of technology that is able to sense intention, not just actions.

What we know today is that Facebook is investing heavily in AR and VR, and it's acquiring companies that push the boundaries of the technology. That may keep the company a step ahead of the competition, which will be a great place for Facebook to be if AR and VR become everyday devices.

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