

Facebook unveils two new video-calling devices



Facebook has announced two new Portal video-calling devices.

The 10-inch Portal Go is an all-new, portable form factor wrapped in fabric with a standalone battery. The updated Portal Plus replaces the 14-inch device that first debuted three years ago. New software updates put even more of an emphasis on video calls in a remote work setting.

The Portal Go and Portal Plus cost \$199 and \$349, respectively.

The new Portal Plus is similar to its predecessor in terms of functionality, but Facebook has removed the swivel display that could rotate from portrait to landscape mode. Both Portals, like previous versions, have a physical shutter to cover the camera.

The Portal is almost entirely dedicated to video calling. A new calendar app syncs with Outlook or Google to display upcoming meetings and allow you to jump into calls directly from the Portal home screen.

All Portal devices now support Zoom, Cisco's Webex, BlueJeans, and GoToMeeting, in addition to Facebook-owned Messenger and WhatsApp.

In December, Portal will add Microsoft Teams support, reports The Verge.

Differently-abled people can now operate Android phones with face gestures

Using a raised eyebrow or smile, people with speech or physical disabilities can now operate their Android-powered smartphones hands-free, Google said Thursday. Two new tools put machine learning and front-facing cameras on smartphones to work detecting face and eye movements.

Users can scan their phone screen and select a task by smiling, raising eyebrows, opening their mouth, or looking to the left, right or up. "To make Android more accessible for everyone, we're launching new tools that make it easier to control your phone and communicate using facial gestures," Google said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 61 million adults in the United States live with disabilities, which has pushed Google and rivals Apple and Microsoft to make products and services more accessible to them. "Every day, people use voice commands, like 'Hey Google', or their hands to navigate their phones," the tech giant said in a blog post. "However, that's not always possible for people with severe motor and speech disabilities."

The changes are the result of two new features, one is called "Camera Switches," which lets people use their faces instead of swipes and taps to interact with smartphones. The other is Project Activate, a new Android application that allows people to use those gestures to trigger an action, like having a phone play a recorded phrase, send a text, or make a call.



"Now it's possible for anyone to use eye movements and facial gestures that are customized to their range of movement to navigate their phone - sans hands and voice," Google said. The free Activate app is available in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States at the Google Play shop.

Apple, Google and Microsoft have consistently rolled out innovations that make internet technology more accessible to people with disabilities or who find that age has made some tasks, such as reading, more difficult. Voice-commanded digital assistants built into speakers and smartphones can enable people with sight or movement challenges to tell computers what to do. There is software that identifies text on web pages or in images and then reads it aloud, as well as automatic generation of captions that display what is said in videos.

An "Assistive Touch" feature that Apple built into the software powering its smartwatch lets touchscreen displays be controlled by sensing movements such as finger pinches or hand clenches. "This feature also works with VoiceOver so you can navigate Apple Watch with one hand while using a cane or leading a service animal," Apple said in a post.

Computing colossus Microsoft describes accessibility as essential to empowering everyone with technology tools. "To enable transformative change accessibility needs to be a priority," Microsoft said in a post. "We aim to build it into what we design for every team, organisation, classroom, and home".



Here's everything Microsoft announced at its 2021 surface event

ARFIN KAZI

Microsoft, this Wednesday, got done with their Fall Surface keynote event where they announced seven new products which ship with Windows 11 from the factory, including the Surface 8 Pro, Surface Go 3, the new, refreshed Surface Duo 2 and much more.

Keep reading to find out what more got announced by the end of the event.

The event started with the announcement of the much-awaited Surface 8 Pro which comes with a 120Hz high refresh rate display that is brighter and has narrower bezels from last year. Also comes with Intel's new 11th generation quad-core processor and Windows 11 by default.

Microsoft also announced the new Surface Go 3, which primarily will be competing against the 9th generation

Apple iPads; the Surface Duo 2, Microsoft's take in making a dual-screen phone; a new Surface Studio which succeeds the Surface book lineup and a Surface X refresh where nothing much changes from the older model apart from 64-bit ARM support and comes with Windows 11 out of the box.

Apart from the computers, Microsoft also announced the 'Ocean Mouse'-- a new eco-friendly mouse made of 20% recycled plastic from the ocean. The packaging that the mouse will be shipped on will also be made of 100% recycled material.

Microsoft also introduced the Surface Adaptive Kit that assists people with disabilities. The kit includes a lanyard opener for the stand which makes it easier to pull the tab and stickers to help visually impaired users to identify keys and other items.



EDITOR'S NOTE

It's been a good run, but have I been a good manager?

This issue's feature talks about being a good manager. As I was editing the piece, I couldn't help but think, have I been a good manager to my absolutely wonderful team of writers without whose support this publication would fall in an instance?

As I write my last editor's note for this wonderful publication that I have been a part of since its very beginning, I look back at this journey that has been nothing less of a roller coaster ride in every sense. I can't tell if I was a good manager or not, but I have had the privilege of working with the two most brilliantly wonderful bosses, who allowed me to make horrifying mistakes and learn from them, and an amazing team that helped me to grow every step of the way.

As I step into my next endeavour, I take with me everything that these people have given me, the guidance, the warmth and the unexpected amount of love and patience that I'll be forever grateful for.

It's been quite a long run, and a great one.

Nahaly Nafisa Khan,
Sub-editor, signing off

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