

Facebook Acquires ‘Mobile Technologies’, Developer Of Speech Translation App Jibbigo



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Facebook’s latest acquisition could help it connect users across language barriers. It has just announced that [it’s acquired](https://www.facebook.com/tstocky/posts/10100115269490818) (<https://www.facebook.com/tstocky/posts/10100115269490818>) the team and technology of Pittsburgh’s [Mobile Technologies](http://www.jibbigo.com/website/) (<http://www.jibbigo.com/website/>), a speech recognition and machine translation startup that developed the app [Jibbigo](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/jibbigo-translator/id528691646?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/jibbigo-translator/id528691646?mt=8>). From voice search to translated News Feed posts, Facebook could do a lot with this technology.

Facebook tells me “We’ll continue to support the [Jibbigo] app for the time being.” Jibbigo launched in 2009, and allows you to select from over 25 languages, record a voice snippet in that language or type in some text, and then get a translation displayed on screen and read aloud to you in a language of your choosing.

This made [Jibbigo’s iOS](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/jibbigo-translator/id528691646?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/jibbigo-translator/id528691646?mt=8>) and [Android apps](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.jibbigo.player&hl=en) (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.jibbigo.player&hl=en>) useful companions for travelers and international health care workers. Why fumble with a phrase book when you could just bring an app with you? Through purchasable offline translator packs, Jibbigo made money by letting users understand foreign speech without the need for a data or wifi connection.

“Members of the MT team will join our engineering teams here in Menlo Park” Facebook tells me, implying some might not be joining the social network’s ranks. Facebook refused to specify exactly how many people were joining it from

Mobile Technologies which was founded in 2001, or the terms of the deal. Considering it had never raised outside funding, the acquisition is likely a sizable financial win for Mobile Technology's founders.



Facebook's Tom Stocky wrote in a [Facebook post \(https://www.facebook.com/tstocky/posts/10100115269490818\)](https://www.facebook.com/tstocky/posts/10100115269490818) "I'm excited to announce that we've agreed to acquire Mobile Technologies, a company with an amazing team that's behind some of the world's leading speech recognition and machine translation technology."

The Jibbigo team writes "Facebook, with its mission to make the world more open and connected, provides the perfect platform to apply our technology at a truly global scale."

Facebook could do big things with this new tech. It could one day power cross-language chat, voice translation for traveling Facebook users, or help it take News Feed posts written in one language and display them in another. Another possibility is that Facebook wants to offer voice Graph Search, considering [Stocky recently headed up Facebook's search efforts \(http://techcrunch.com/2013/01/15/here-is-the-ex-googler-dream-team-that-led-facebooks-new-graph-search-tool/\)](http://techcrunch.com/2013/01/15/here-is-the-ex-googler-dream-team-that-led-facebooks-new-graph-search-tool/). Facebook is currently trying to expand the feature beyond English, and could probably use a little help.

Facebook previously worked on translating News Feed posts and comments thanks to help from [Microsoft's Bing \(http://www.insidefacebook.com/2011/10/05/bing-translate-pages/\)](http://www.insidefacebook.com/2011/10/05/bing-translate-pages/), which also [powers translation for Twitter \(http://techcrunch.com/2013/07/03/new-twitter-tool-translates-the-last-desperate-tweets-of-egypts-fallen-president/\)](http://techcrunch.com/2013/07/03/new-twitter-tool-translates-the-last-desperate-tweets-of-egypts-fallen-president/). Bringing translation technology in-house could give it the control needed to make translation a more core part of the Facebook experience.

Part of Facebook's mission has long been making the world more connected. A huge obstacle to that connection is the

diversity of languages we speak and type. If Facebook can find a way to surmount this hurdle and allow us to communicate despite our different tongues, it could promote greater racial and international tolerance. It could also help advertisers reach a much wider audience without doing extra work.

Doctor Who author Andrew Smith once said “People fear what they don’t understand.” Thanks to Mobile Technologies, Facebook could be one step closer to turning science fiction into a reality while helping us grow closer as a species.

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