

Free voice calls for WhatsApp by mid-year

BARCELONA, SPAIN: Fresh from a US\$19bn takeover by Facebook, mobile messaging service WhatsApp said it will launch free voice calls by the middle of this year.



WhatsApp boss, Jan Koum, says the company will remain independent even though it is now owned by Facebook. Image: [Re/Code](#)

The introduction of free calls, revealed on the opening day of the four-day World Mobile Congress in Barcelona, Spain, would match rival application Viber's similar offering.

"We are going to introduce voice on WhatsApp in the second quarter of this year," WhatsApp founder Jan Koum said.

Facebook, whose 29-year-old billionaire creator Mark Zuckerberg was the star speaker on the opening day of the industry fair, announced a stock and cash purchase of WhatsApp last week.

"Five years ago we had no users, no product," said Koum.

"Today we have 465m active users," he said, adding that the company still had no marketing, relying mostly on word of mouth to prosper.

Koum said that WhatsApp had not planned any changes in the light of the Facebook takeover, adding that the company would remain independent despite Facebook's takeover.

Viber, one of WhatsApp's key rivals, offers free voice calls and messaging services.

Japanese online shopping group Rakuten announced this month it would buy Viber's Cyprus-based developer, Viber Media, for US\$900m.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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