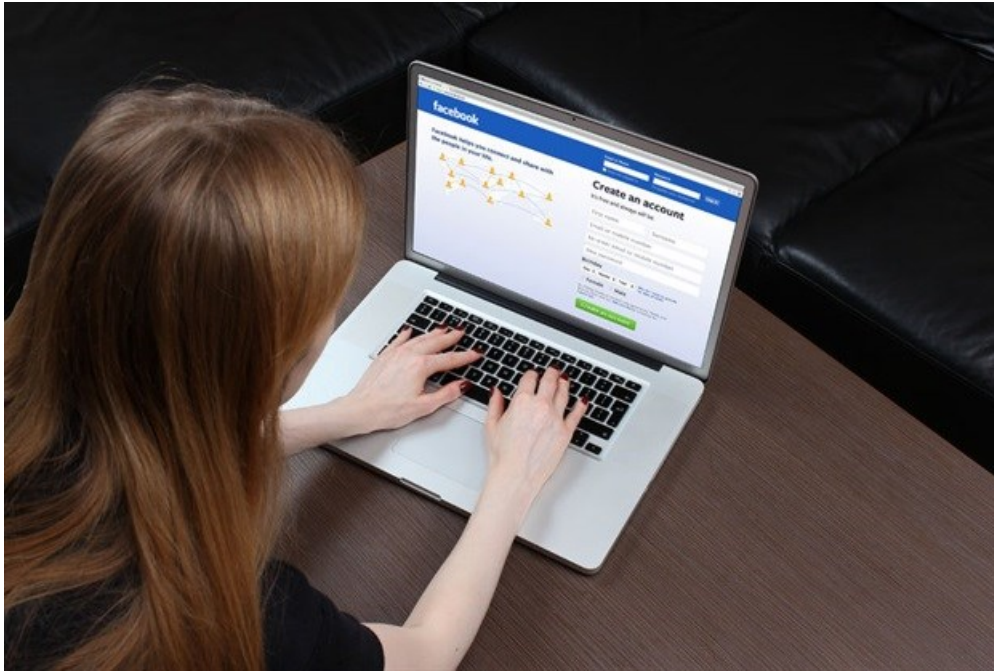


# Facebook knows when teens are vulnerable, then targets them with ads

 By [Andy Walker](#)

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“Don't be evil” is a common phrase uttered by Google executives, but we can't help but think Facebook should perhaps adopt it too.



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A 23-page document, which sheds some light on Facebook's more sinister algorithm and advertising practices, was leaked Monday and obtained by online paper The Australian (paywall).

Later picked up by news.com.au, the document reveals how Facebook Australia and New Zealand employed the hive of user data it gathers to help advertisers better promote campaigns. And no, it's not just talking about age, location or preference in pizza toppings.

The document notes that the social network can target teenagers as young as 14 using the company's weave of data and algorithms. It can also be employed to highlight their more vulnerable, emotional moments.

To be more specific, Facebook can make calculated guesses as to when teenagers on the network are feeling “defeated” or “stupid” or “stressed” or even a self-deemed “failure”. Advertisers can then use this information to better formulate campaigns, ultimately taking advantage of these youthful feelings.

It gets creepier.

Remember Facebook-owned Instagram? The image-heavy social network now boasting 700-million users, is also scoured by image recognition tools to identify when teens are feeling triumphant, or reflective, or when they’re most likely to enjoy a meal.

As for Facebook’s comment regarding the document, it told The Australian that it will “undertake” the necessary processes. It didn’t issue an apology, or suggest that it would cease these processes.

“We have opened an investigation to understand the process failure and improve our oversight. We will undertake disciplinary and other processes as appropriate,” the company vaguely notes.

For those reading this in South Africa or abroad, the document only references Australia and New Zealand. However, it’s particularly pertinent considering Facebook’s larger 1.86-billion user base could possibly receive similar treatment in the future.

And why wouldn’t Facebook extend this programme to a larger audience? Using algorithms and its wealth of accumulated data only makes economic sense in its bid to further inflate profit margins.

The company raked in close to \$26.88-billion in advertising revenue in 2016. 84% of that stemmed from mobile advertising too — namely Instagram and Messenger’s domains.

This isn’t the first time Facebook has toyed with users emotions either.

In June 2014, the company shed light on a questionable 689,000-strong user experiment too understand how the manipulation of users’ news feeds could rouse various emotions. Notably, users had no idea.

It doesn’t seem that users had any idea of this, either.

## ABOUT ANDY WALKER

Camper by day, run-and-gunner by night, Andy is editor at Memeburn and prefers his toast like his coffee -- dark and crunchy. Specialising in spotting the next big Instagram cat star, Andy also dabbles in smartphone and game reviews over on Gearburn.

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