

Timeline:

New Facebook Changes & Your Resort

Presented by The Resort Developers Association
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On March 30, 2012, all Facebook pages got a new design.

Facebook made the announcement, set the date, and now it's time to make it work for your resort.

There are some cool new features that come with the change to Timeline and plenty of opportunities for creativity. That being said, there have also been some changes that may not entirely thrill you.

Arguably, the biggest change in the new design is the inability to create a custom default landing tab, or welcome tab. Many businesses use default landing tabs to not only welcome users to their page, but also, to gate information, to gather prospect data or encourage new likes. Now, they're gone. All visitors will land directly on the Timeline, no exceptions. You can still have your tabs and apps, but they will appear below the cover photo (the new featured image at the top of the page).

I'll warn you now, if you think that since you can't have a welcome tab you'll just incorporate the same information into your cover photo you're in for a surprise. Facebook has set out some very specific rules for the cover image. So there's no confusion, let's go straight to the source. Here are the exact rules stated in the Facebook Help Center:

“Cover images must be at least 399 pixels wide and may not contain:

- Price or purchase information, such as '40% off' or 'Download it at our website'
- Contact information, such as web address, email, mailing address or other information intended for your Page's About section
- References to user interface element, such as Like or Share, or any other Facebook site features
- Calls to action, such as 'Get it now' or 'Tell your friends'”

That means the contests to encourage Likes, the extra info in exchange for opt-ins, the linking back to your website, and the fun graphics pointing at the Like button are all out the window.

Don't get too discouraged though. The new cover photo is your opportunity to really get creative. The cover photo can create a huge visual impact. Embrace it. The dimensions are 850 pixels by 315 pixels. That gives you plenty of room to design.

Some companies, and even individual users, are doing some really cool things with cover photos, such as incorporating their profile picture into the design. The new dimensions for the profile picture are 180 pixels by 180 pixels, and it appears at the bottom left corner of the cover photo. Do a quick Google search for Timeline covers or just spend some time looking around Facebook. You'll see some really dynamic stuff.

Let's move down the page a little and take a look at the summary box. The summary box is the space under the profile picture and to the left of the apps. This space gives you a brief space to describe your business. The information displayed here is pulled from your business's About page, but you don't get to decide what's pulled. Facebook displays different information depending on which category your business is classified under. For example, a restaurant will have price range, address, phone number, and hours of operation displayed in the summary box of its page. As you browse pages, you'll notice however that many categories simply pull from the About field. Fill in all the fields on your About page and then return to the Timeline and see how it shows up. A little trick: include your company's website in the About field. It's an easy way to get a direct link featured on your Timeline.

To the right of the summary box, you'll find your apps. You can feature up to twelve applications on your page, but only four will appear prominently on the top row. There is a drop-down arrow to the far right that will reveal the other nine. Of the four apps on the top row, you can rearrange all except one. Until they change it, photos will be displayed first. At the moment you have no control over it so just accept it and move on.

When you're designing the overall look of your page, don't forget about your app photos. Keep your design consistent from your cover to your profile picture to your apps. Many apps will let you upload a custom tab image. The dimensions for that are 111 pixels by 74 pixels. As for the applications themselves, your choices are practically endless. Look around and figure out what you can utilize to best engage your fans.

Between the apps and the cover photo, you may or may not notice a Message button. This is a new feature that you can turn on or off from the Manage Permissions area of the Admin Panel. Having the Message button enabled allows fans to directly contact you through your page. Once a fan messages you, you will have the ability to reply to the message. Contact cannot be initiated, however, by you via your page to the fan. It's set up this way of course to prevent businesses from spamming their fans. For resorts, giving users the opportunity to message you can go a long way in building brand loyalty.

As for the posts themselves, you'll notice that your pictures and videos are now larger to better catch the eyes of your fans. This is a huge new benefit. If there is a particular post that you want to emphasize, you can star it by clicking the star icon in the top right corner of the post. In Timeline, posts are generally arranged in two columns, but by starring a post, it will span the entire width of the page, thus making it stand out much more. If for instance you have a special promotion coming up like a family memorial day party or some other exciting news like the winner of a big member contest, you can pin the story to the top of your Timeline, so that successive posts don't bump it down your page. Pinned stories can stay at the top of your Timeline for up to a week. To pin a post, click on the little pencil at the top of the post (right next to the star) and select "Pin to Top" from the drop-down menu. While these are both excellent features to use, be careful that you don't overuse them. Fans that come to your page will get bored if they constantly see the same or similar stories pinned to the top of your page. Likewise, a full-span starred story won't stand out very much if every-other post is full span too.

One of the more fun features of the new design is the ability to create company Milestones. If you're familiar with Timeline for profiles, you'll notice that Milestones are basically the business version of Life Events in profiles. For each Milestone, you can add the event, location, date, brief story, and a photo. For resorts that have been around for many years, this can be a fun way to show your fans the history of your resort over the years. People love to see things as they were, compared to how they are now. If you're a newer resort, use Milestones to share your successes with your fans. Open a new resort location? Build a new track of cabins? Hit a thousand members? Share your excitement!

So that's the gist of the current changes. Now, go make it happen!