Elon Musk is pushing scams and lies

BY**KALI HAYS**

Elon Musk has asked staffers at X to explore removing dates from posts displayed in the main timeline, one of several changes under consideration that could fundamentally alter the social media platform's core functionality, *Fortune* has learned.

Musk has floated the idea of nixing date and time stamps from the timeline to X to employees in recent weeks, a person familiar with internal conversations told *Fortune*. The suggestion, which has raised worries among some staffers for its potential to exacerbate misinformation, comes as X is moving ahead with a separate plan to begin charging new users an $8 fee to sign up and begin posting on the platform, two sources told *Fortune*.

The moves would represent some of the most significant changes yet to the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, which Musk acquired for $44 billion in late 2022. Since then, Musk has eliminated more than three-quarters of the company's staff, including members of the trust and safety team tasked with policing the site's content, and loosened rules around the types of content that can be shared.

The proposal of removing date stamps would be limited to the timeline of posts on X, according to the source: If a user clicked through to the post, the date the post was created would then be visible. Musk has told staffers he believes the change will improve the user interface of X. Musk's common refrain when it comes to the overall look of X is "Every pixel counts," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the deliberations.

Still, some X staffers believe removing the dates will make the platform needlessly "confusing" and will likely make issues of misinformation on the platform worse, the person noted. Historically, most users of Twitter, and now X, only casually scroll on the platform, rarely clicking through to individual posts. The absence of dates from the timeline would likely leave most users without vital context about information they are seeing.

Showing users when a post was created has been a basic aspect of Twitter since it was created, with tweets organized in a chronological timeline long before the company offered a separate, algorithm-driven feed.

A representative of X did not respond to requests for comment.

The news of potential changes to X comes amid a heated debate about the responsibility of social media companies to fight misinformation on their platforms. On Tuesday, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg stunned the world by announcing that his company's various sites, including Facebook, Instagram, and Threads, would no longer fact-check content and would instead rely on feedback from users. Meta cited Musk's changes to X as the model for its change.

While Musk has framed his loosening of X's moderation rules as driven by his devotion to "free speech," his ideas for design changes are often professed to be in the interest of

aesthetics. Musk can become "obsessed" with such tweaks to the platform, another person familiar with the company told *Fortune,* which he often demands on aesthetic grounds or claims of combatting bots.

A comparable idea from Musk came in 2023, when he demanded all headline text that appeared in link previews on X posts be removed, as *Fortune* [reported](#) at the time. Not long after that change was implemented, it was [reversed](#), with headlines again appearing in link preview cards, although the font size and positioning has since changed more than once. As with headlines, the removal of date stamps from posts could ultimately not be implemented, or it may roll out as a brief test and be reversed or abandoned. Nevertheless, there is active discussion and planning around the change going on inside the company, the person familiar said.

Pay to play

Another planned change for X is the implementation of a one-time fee for all new users who sign up. Under the plan, which could be implemented as soon as February, new users would pay $8 to sign up for X, and would also receive one free month of X Premium, a $7-per-month subscription offering that gives users a "verified" check mark badge. The move comes as many large brand advertisers have fled X amid reports that hate speech and other offensive content has spread on the platform under Musk's stewardship.

Such a sign-up fee has been in the works at X for months, one of the sources explained, with the company positioning it as a move to combat bots on the platform. Musk put in place a year ago a sort of test run of the fee, set at a [nominal $1](#) in only the Philippines and New Zealand. Although X said at that time such a fee was not intended to be a revenue driver, the new plan for charging users is exactly that, the other person familiar said. Musk has said internally that forcing more users to pay for the platform is "the only way" X will be profitable, the person added.

While the goal may be to eke out any bit of revenue X can, as its advertising business is reportedly [less than half](#) of what it was prior to Musk's takeover and [users continue to flee](#) the platform, requiring new users to pay to use a social media platform is extremely rare. While services like Google's [YouTube](#) offer premium tiers, internet companies like Alphabet and Meta have attained massive, trillion-dollar-plus valuations by offering their services to users for free and generating the bulk of their revenue through advertising.

X still shows some ads, and it recently made [explicit](#) its use of all users' posts for the training of artificial intelligence models, among other things. Yet new users will be required to pay X for the privilege.