

Exclusive

Meta Pursues AI Talent With Quick Offers, Emails From Zuckerberg

Company has made job offers without interviewing candidates and relaxed its longstanding practice of not increasing compensation for employees threatening to leave.



Art by Mike Sullivan



By Kalley Huang

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To better compete for artificial intelligence researchers, Meta Platforms is making unconventional moves, including extending job offers to candidates without interviewing them and relaxing a longstanding practice of not increasing compensation for employees threatening to leave.

In a sign of how seriously the social media company is taking the competition for AI talent, CEO Mark Zuckerberg has personally written to researchers at Google's DeepMind unit to recruit them, according to two people who viewed the emails. In some notes, Zuckerberg emphasized the importance of AI to Meta and said he hopes the recipient and the company will work together, one of those people said.

The Takeaway

- Meta has offered jobs to AI researchers without interviewing them
- The company has relaxed its practice of not raising compensation for employees with job offers
- CEO Mark Zuckerberg has written to researchers to recruit them

Meta's intense efforts to recruit and retain employees come as it ramps up investment in AI and after several researchers who developed its large language models left for rivals, including DeepMind, OpenAI and French startup Mistral, two of whose founders came from Meta.

Zuckerberg's interventions have helped with recruiting. In announcing his move to Meta as a principal Llama engineer in the generative AI group last week, former DeepMind researcher Michal Valko gave "massive thanks for a very personal involvement" to Meta's senior AI leaders—and "Mark," referring to Zuckerberg. Valko declined to comment. Zuckerberg typically isn't involved in hiring individual contributors, a classification for most research scientists and engineers, a former employee said. Meta declined to comment.

Meta still faces hurdles in hiring and keeping highly coveted AI researchers, including that its pay packages often aren't as rich as those at DeepMind and OpenAI. Meta's top AI researchers, particularly those hired into senior roles from outside the company, earn total annual compensation of around \$1 million to \$2 million, three former employees said. Meanwhile, OpenAI recruiters told some Google AI researchers last fall that their annual compensation, mostly in the form of stock, would range from \$5 million to \$10 million after OpenAI completed a then-pending share sale, [The Information previously reported](#). And DeepMind has given some researchers large grants of restricted stock worth [millions of dollars](#).

For AI researchers who join Meta early in their careers and advance through the company, it is more difficult to receive compensation exceeding \$1 million, a former employee said. That can make employees receptive to other offers, this person said.

Some key researchers have left over the past year. At least 10 of the 68 authors of Meta's July 2023 paper describing Llama 2, the latest version of its flagship LLM, no longer work at the company, according to people who worked with them and their LinkedIn profiles; and at least seven of the 14 authors of Meta's paper about the original Llama model, published in February 2023, have also departed. Researchers who worked on the forthcoming Llama 3 have also left Meta, including Louis Martin, who oversaw safety, and Kevin Stone, who led reinforcement learning.

Now Meta is intensifying efforts to replace them and bolster its AI credentials, as it adds an AI assistant and other AI features to its apps and AI tools for its advertisers. About a tenth of the company's roughly 1,500 open jobs relate to AI, generative AI, AI research or AI infrastructure, according to its job postings. [Meta's generative AI group](#), which is developing Llama 3 and other AI products, wants to hire around 100 more people, a current employee said. Around 500 people already report up to the group's vice president, Ahmad Al-Dahle.

AI and machine learning were among the few areas where Meta hired in 2022 and 2023, when it generally froze hiring and laid off nearly 20,000 employees, a former employee said. "We're used to there being pretty intense talent wars," Zuckerberg told The Verge [in an interview](#) published in January. "But there are different dynamics here with multiple companies going for the same profile, [and] a lot of [venture capitalists] and folks throwing money at different projects, making it easy for people to start different things externally."

At Meta, that means changes to some longstanding practices. The company has offered jobs to DeepMind researchers without interviewing them, according to two people told about the offers. Meta has also proposed higher compensation to researchers threatening to leave—both to join rivals and to found their own companies—two former employees said. That contrasted with what five former employees said was a longstanding practice of not raising compensation in such situations.

In February, Chief Financial Officer Susan Li told analysts the company expected its payroll expenses to grow as it added “incremental talent to support priority areas in 2024, which we expect will further shift our workforce composition toward higher-cost technical roles.”

Meta is recruiting with a thinner staff than in previous years—particularly during the pandemic, when the company went on a hiring binge—after it laid off hundreds of recruiters in 2022 and 2023, a former employee said. In October, Meta started hiring recruiters and sourcers, who identify job candidates, on short-term contracts without equity, including some recruiters who had been laid off previously, according to a LinkedIn post by a Meta employee and another former employee.

Meta’s challenges in recruiting and retaining AI talent may ease as some AI startups struggle to gain traction with users and raise additional funds. This month, Microsoft hired two of Inflection AI’s co-founders and most of its employees.

In conversations with potential employees, recruiters emphasize that Meta has long invested in AI, including open-source software like PyTorch, and that the company’s AI products will reach many people—for example, through its apps, which have billions of users—a former employee said.

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