

BuzzFeed Inc. Logo

Inside BuzzFeed's Secret Lab: Three Apps, a New Company, and a Bet on the Future of the Internet

March 13, 2026

For the past year, a small team has been quietly developing a new kind of company. Today at SXSW, Branch Office came out of stealth to preview the first two of many apps.

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AUSTIN, Texas--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Mar. 13, 2026-- BuzzFeed, Inc. (Nasdaq: BZFD) today unveiled **Branch Office**, a new spinoff company that has been secretly developing a slate of apps designed to reinvent how people connect on the internet. The first two are launching now. More are coming this year.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20260313571948/en/>



BRANCH OFFICE

Branch Office operates independently, with its own founders, its own mandate, and a product philosophy built for a world where AI has blurred the lines between software and content. BuzzFeed saw a gap no one

else was filling, and built a dedicated company, quietly, to move fast enough to actually fill it.

*"We're accelerating into an era of infinite fake news, slop, personalization bubbles, and cuts at the organizations that actually care about content," said **Jonah Peretti**. "We need a solution. Branch Office is that solution."*

IN THE LAB

BuzzFeed has been running AI experiments for years – a game where you raised a nepo baby, a chatbot that lets you attempt to talk a Karen down in a Starbucks line. Through hundreds of projects the team learned what AI could do when it wasn't trying to replicate existing models of static content production, but building totally new experiences that would not have been possible before the advent of GenAI.

While most social media companies are using AI to keep people isolated in their own algorithmic feeds, BuzzFeed's projects were built on the premise that creativity and engagement can bring people closer together, help them connect with their friends.

THE PHILOSOPHY: NINTENDO, NOT BIG TECH

Led by founder **Bill Shouldis**, Branch Office operates with a clear vision: treat software as a creative medium. Build fast. Iterate constantly. Let real communities, real culture, and genuine taste shape what gets made.

The guiding philosophy comes from an unlikely place: Nintendo. The gaming giant's principle of "lateral thinking with withered technology," taking maximum creativity out of what already exists, is Branch Office's north star. We don't need to build our own foundational models or compete with Big Tech. We just ask one question: what's already here, and how do we make it genuinely fun?

When Branch Office looked at the market, they saw two camps: companies building AI to replace humans, and companies building AI to simulate them. Branch Office is doing neither.

*"Most companies are using AI to replace human creativity," said **Bill Shouldis**, Founder, Branch Office. "We're leveraging it to connect people."*

THE APPS

1. CONJURE — COMING SOON (iOS APP STORE, US & JAPAN)

Every day, Conjure sends you a summons: a subject to go photograph. You submit your photo as an offering. Something on the other end accepts it. Or it doesn't. No explanation. The lore builds over time, and entirely unlike anything else in the App Store – a daily ritual designed to pull people out of their feeds and into the world.

As **Shouldis** said on stage, "It solves the eternal problem for people who wanted BeReal to be in the X-Files universe."

2. BF ISLAND — IN PRIVATE BETA NOW (iOS APP STORE, US)

Your group chat has its own language, the callbacks, the bits, the references that only land with the seven people in the thread. BF Island lets you visualize all of it, drop in a photo, riff on it, spin it into something that makes your friends lose it. No algorithm. No followers. Just your people.

3. QUIZ PARTY — COMING SOON

A social quiz app. You find a quiz, you take it, you get your result, and then you share it with your friends. Everyone in the 'quiz party' sees each other's results and you roast each other in the chat. People have been doing this with BuzzFeed quizzes for years – screenshotting, texting, posting – but now we're building that behavior directly into the product, so it's easier, it's tighter, and it brings more people in.

THE BET AGAINST THE ALGORITHM

"The Internet disrupted distribution. Now AI is disrupting production," said Peretti. "When you don't have a vision for the content, you get a feed of slop. The value has moved – it's about community, culture, and taste. That's what Big Tech can't automate. Software is the new content."

Branch Office: branchoffice.studio/email

Conjure: whatwillyouconjure.com

BF Island: bfisland.com

About BuzzFeed, Inc.

BuzzFeed, Inc. is home to the best of the Internet. Across pop culture, entertainment, shopping, food and news, our brands drive conversation and

inspire what audiences watch, read, and buy now – and into the future. Born on the Internet in 2006, BuzzFeed is committed to making it better: providing trusted, quality, brand-safe news and entertainment to hundreds of millions of people; making content on the Internet more inclusive, empathetic, and creative; and inspiring our audience to live better lives.

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Source: BuzzFeed, Inc.