

AirDrop on the iPhone 11 will let you point at people to share photos

One of the understated components of Apple's iPhone 11 and iPhone 11 Pro is the new U1 chip. It didn't get a prominent callout onstage at today's announcement event, but it will underpin what Apple says are "amazing new capabilities" coming to iOS devices in the future, including a more accurate, directional version of AirDrop coming with iOS 13.

The "U" in U1 stands for "ultra-wideband," which is the technology Apple is using to power new location tracking features for its smartphones and, hopefully soon, other accessories, too. The U1 chip effectively lets the newest iPhone locate and communicate with other U1 devices in a more accurate and speedy fashion.

Apple's new U1 chip will enable new location tracking capabilities

Think of ultra-wideband as in the same general ballpark as Bluetooth Low Energy, in that it's also a low-energy, short-range radio technology used for wireless data transmission. But this time, it's packed into a dedicated chip on Apple's new phones, and it has some nifty location tracking benefits, like improved spatial awareness and more precise pinpointing of fellow U1 chips.

In that sense, the U1 can be considered part of the chip family that includes the W1 and the newer H1 chip found in Apple's AirPods, which allow for the company's wireless earbuds to better manage Bluetooth connections with iOS devices. Apple's goal here is to use its growing chip prowess

and tight ecosystem control to make every one of its devices work better and faster with other Apple-made gadgets. That makes it more convenient to buy Apple, even when there are other hardware makers out there that may make better, cheaper stuff.

Apple didn't promote the U1 onstage, but it does have its own slide in the . There, it's described as underpinning the new directional version of AirDrop that takes into account where you're pointing your phone in relation to the device with which you're trying to share files. "Think GPS at the scale of your living room," Apple writes. "So if you want to share a file with someone using AirDrop, just point your iPhone at theirs and they'll be first on the list."

One of those possibilities that eager Apple fans were hoping for was the all-but-confirmed Apple Tag, a Tile-like locator device for keeping track of your keys, wallet, and other easy-to-lose items. Code buried in the iOS 13 beta showed that the product and its companion feature were on the way, pitting Apple against Tile and other similar hardware makers that have been selling Bluetooth-based versions of similar locator products for years. But Apple Tag was a no-show at today's event, which means it may show up at the annual October iPad event.

As for Tile, the location tracking company is attempting to embed its technology directly into Bluetooth chips in a way that seems similar to how the U1 functions in the new iPhones. Tile has teamed up with Qualcomm, Dialog Semiconductor, Silicon Labs, and Toshiba to include Tile compatibility as an option on future chipsets. Tile has also previously partnered with Boosted and Bose to embed its location tracking network directly into gadgets.

So when Apple Tag does eventually release, the iPhone maker will certainly face some tough competition from Tile's broader reach. But now, at least we know that Apple's secret weapon is

the U1.

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/9/10/20859550/apple-iphone-11-pro-airdrop-u1-locator-chip-tag-tile-bluetooth-tracking>