Apple will launch a journaling app in iOS 17, but that’s bad news for some devs

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Apple plans to unveil a personal journaling app at the Worldwide Developers Conference in June, according to a Wall Street Journal report. The app will be pre-installed on all iPhones that run iOS 17, and it will deeply integrate with location services, contacts, and more on the user’s phone.

The WSJ based its reporting on analysis of internal Apple documents about the product. Apple plans to position the app (which is codenamed “Jurassic”) as a mental health tool, noting research that shows regular journaling can help with depression and anxiety.

Jurassic (the name will surely be changed before launch) will be able to look at data stored locally on your phone to determine what a typical day looks like, with access to your contacts, your location, workouts, and more. It will make recommendations to users about what they might journal about that, including when the app detects behavior that is outside of the normal routine.

It will even offer “All Day People Discovery,” which will track the user’s proximity to others, drawing distinctions between work colleagues and friends.

This kind of integration with other pre-installed apps and user data will set the app apart from other journaling options on the iPhone, potentially making it difficult for them to compete. The WSJ report includes quotes from Paul Mayne, founder of the popular third-party iPhone journaling app Day One, which was acquired by Auttomatic in 2021.

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Mayne echoes the sentiment of several app developers who have been frustrated when Apple launched in-house competitors to the apps they have introduced to the ecosystem, often copying features those apps innovated and adding functionality that only Apple can offer, per the iPhone’s privacy and security policies and APIs.

Apple’s documentation for Jurassic is careful to put user privacy and security at the center of the design, and most or all of the user tracking data the app uses will stay locally on each user’s iPhone and, at least in some cases, will not be retained for more than a few weeks.

Apple’s privacy-focused policies and messaging seem altruistic—the company has left money on the table in its commitment to pro-privacy policies before. But the policies serve Apple in two key ways beyond happy customers: they provide a clear differentiation from competitors like Google and Meta in the battle for public opinion in marketing and public relations, and they keep third-party apps from having the same kind of access to user data that Apple does.

When Apple seeks to replace or compete with a third-party app, it may sometimes have greater access to user data to fuel features than those third-party developers.

The documents seen by the Journal’s reporters did not specify

whether Apple would charge for the app. It’s unlikely to be a premium downloaded or ad-supported, but Apple has charged users recurring subscription fees for some features and services in the past.

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