Apple won’t let Stadia or xCloud into iOS, citing App Store guidelines

Enlarge / Androids only.

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Cloud gaming is increasingly becoming *a thing*, one that lets you play AAA games on a device regardless of the hardware specs. If your device can stream a video, it can probably play *Red Dead Redemption* on Google Stadia or *Halo* on Microsoft’s xCloud (which is now technically called “Cloud gaming (Beta) with Xbox Game Pass Ultimate“). If your device is an iPhone or iPad, though, you’re out of luck. Apple says these apps violate its App Store policies and will not be allowed into Apple’s walled garden.

Apple sent a statement to Business Insider:

> *The App Store was created to be a safe and trusted place for customers to discover and download apps, and a great business opportunity for all developers. Before they go on our store, all apps are reviewed against the same set of guidelines that are intended to protect customers and provide a fair and level playing field to developers.*
>
> *Our customers enjoy great apps and games from millions of developers, and gaming services can absolutely launch on the App Store as long as they follow the same set of guidelines*

> *applicable to all developers, including submitting games individually for review, and appearing in charts and search. In addition to the App Store, developers can choose to reach all iPhone and iPad users over the web through Safari and other browsers on the App Store.*

Apple's App Store pitch is that it has real, live humans personally review each app for safety and quality, giving users a single, trusted place to get all their apps. Apple wants to approve these games individually and let users rate them individually through the App Store. The guidelines Apple cites flatly ban showing "store-like interfaces" on a remote computer and "thin clients for cloud-based apps," which Stadia and xCloud both run afoul of.

The approval process also makes sure developers adhere to Apple's developer policies, which include things like exclusive rights to all transactions that happen on iOS—Apple wants any payments to run through its own services, where it gets a cut of the revenue. The App Store does have some expenses that need to be paid for, like the salaries of all those human app approvers, developer support, and hosting costs, but estimates put Apple's cut of App Store revenues for 2019 at $15 billion. Apple is making a massive profit.

Microsoft previously had a beta test of xCloud on iOS, and it sounds pretty unhappy about Apple's guidelines. Microsoft sent the following statement to The Verge:

> *Our testing period for the Project xCloud preview app for iOS has expired. Unfortunately, we do not have a path to bring our vision of cloud gaming with Xbox Game Pass Ultimate to gamers on iOS via the Apple App Store. Apple stands alone as the only general purpose platform to deny consumers from cloud gaming and game subscription services like Xbox Game Pass. And it consistently treats gaming apps differently, applying more lenient rules to non-gaming apps even when they*

> *include interactive content. All games available in the Xbox Game Pass catalog are rated for content by independent industry ratings bodies such as the ESRB and regional equivalents. We are committed to finding a path to bring cloud gaming with Xbox Game Pass Ultimate to the iOS platform. We believe that the customer should be at the heart of the gaming experience and gamers tell us they want to play, connect and share anywhere, no matter where they are. We agree.*

Microsoft's claim that Apple "treats gaming apps differently" is a pretty strong argument considering, as an all-you-can-eat gaming subscription, Xbox Game Pass is not all that different from video streaming services like Netflix or Disney+, both of which are allowed on the App Store. Apple's dislike of remote computing could be viewed as a push for more consistent, performant native apps (as well as platform protectionism) but the AAA games being pushed over these services would either not be possible or would be very impractical as native iOS apps. *Red Dead Redemption 2*, for instance, takes up 150GB on PC.

Enlarge / The Xbox Game Pass. Available on the Google Play Store and even the Samsung Galaxy Store, but not Apple’s App Store.

Google, on the other hand, hasn’t responded to Stadia’s iOS ban. Google has less of an argument than Microsoft since Stadia *is* a store—the games cost money in addition to the $10-a-month fee for things like 4K resolution, so it isn’t the “Netflix for games” that xCloud is. Google is also definitely more used to this than Microsoft is, with Google and Apple’s App Store sparing going back to the early days, like when Google Voice was blocked for a year in 2009 for offering an alternative way to make phone calls. There is *technically* a Stadia iOS app, but it is only for Stadia’s strange setup process. Google’s app description specifically says, “You can’t use the Stadia app to play games directly on an iOS

device, but you can use the app to manage Stadia on other devices.”

Apple’s App Store policies have been in the news a lot lately. Developers like Basecamp and Epic Games have criticized the cut the company takes from every App Store sale. In the EU, Complaints from companies like Spotify and Telegram are fueling an anti-trust investigation into Apple App Store policies. The other App Store news today is that the Facebook Gaming app—Facebook’s Twitch.tv clone—has come to iOS with the gaming portion removed. In addition to viewing live streams, Facebook Gaming on Android lets you play HTML games like *Plants versus Zombies*, but Apple blocked the app since it circumvented the App Store. Facebook says it appealed the decision under the new App Store appeals process announced at WWDC, but it never got a response.

Many of Apple’s policies can be defended as pushing developers toward more consistent, user-friendly options or helping to pay costs for the App Store infrastructure and review process. It’s hard to come up with a user-centric defense for banning cloud-gaming, though. Apple doesn’t offer anything like these services, and the games aren’t really possible on iOS through other means. You could say cloud gaming will mean fewer games purchased from Apple’s gaming ecosystem, but the same could be said of Netflix pulling eyeballs away from Apple’s video content.

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