Apple’s September 15 “Time Flies” event: What to expect

Enlarge / Two identical stairwells at the Steve Jobs Theater at Apple’s Cupertino campus, where the company now hosts many of its product reveals.
Samuel Axon

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Every September, Apple unveils its new lineup of iPhone and Apple Watch devices in a live event with press, influencers, and industry figures present—or does it? This year, we’re not quite certain.

Last week, the northern California tech giant put out invitations to a video stream from the Steve Jobs Theater (the location on the company’s new campus where it normally hosts people in person) to announce some new products. The tagline was “Time Flies”—and we’ll get into some interpretations of that in a moment—but time sure isn’t flying for most onlookers, as we move into the ninth month of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And because of that pandemic’s effect on Apple’s operations, there have been a few scattered reports that the company may not manage to ship its new iPhones in the September window it usually targets, even as there are other conflicting rumors indicating that yes, iPhones are indeed coming this month.

On top of that, there are numerous other products that Apple

might announce either this month, or at an event in October or November. The only one the company has previously confirmed is some kind of Apple Silicon Mac—the first commercially released Mac to ditch Intel's CPUs in favor of Apple's own design. Beyond that, there are many possibilities.

Let's consider a few of them.

iPhone 12 and iPhone 12 Pro

As noted above, Apple usually announces new iPhones at an event in September around this time—but there has been some speculation it won't. We don't know one way or the other, but we probably *do* know quite a bit about what those iPhones will look like when they are announced.

This is thanks to a variety of reports and leaks over the past several months—not just supply line leaks or analyst speculation, which are often misleading—but from usually credible journalistic publications with sources they say are directly familiar with Apple's plans, among other things. These reports aren't a sure thing, but they generally have come from sources who have accurately called Apple product details in the past, like Bloomberg's Mark Gurman and Debby Wu.

According to those sources and reports, Apple will announce *four* iPhones: two successors to the iPhone 11 in two different sizes, and a successor each to the iPhone 11 Pro and iPhone 11 Pro Max. All signs point to a major redesign across the board—the first since the iPhone X was introduced in 2017—that would include, among other things, flattened metallic edges similar to those on the recent iPad Pro models, or the iPhone 4 and 5.

These phones will come in three different sizes. The largest of the iPhone 11 successors and the smallest of the iPhone 11 Pro successors would have 6.1-inch screens, whereas the

smallest iPhone 11 successor would have a 5.4-inch screen—the smallest iPhone since the iPhone 5S and original iPhone SE. Finally, an iPhone 11 Pro Max successor would have a very large 6.7-inch screen.

The reports claim that the two cheaper models will have aluminum edges, while the two pricier ones will feature stainless steel.

Below: The iPhone 11 Pro Max from last year. The new iPhones will probably look quite different.

- The iPhone 11 Pro Max, 2019's highest-cost iPhone.
  Samuel Axon
- Here's the front.
  Samuel Axon
- And the back, with that new, matte finish and prominent camera setup.
  Samuel Axon
- Still Lightning.
  Samuel Axon
- The volume controls side.
  Samuel Axon
- The SIM tray side.
  Samuel Axon
- The featureless top.
  Samuel Axon
- The three camera lenses.
  Samuel Axon

All four phones will feature 5G modems—an investment in longevity, perhaps, as 5G networks aren't very robust yet. They would also feature the A14 chipset, Apple's latest system-on-a-chip that will presumably be faster than the already zippy A13 found in the iPhone 11 and 11 Pro family.

Finally, some (but maybe not all) of the iPhones would see a time-of-flight sensor added to their rear camera

arrays—something similar to what we saw in the most recent iPad Pro, to facilitate augmented reality apps and new camera features.

We don't know what to expect in terms of pricing for the new iPhones, and as was written above: it's *possible* these will come later in the year. Normally reliable sources have conflicted about whether they're slated for this month or not.

That sensor could be the impetus for Apple's "Time Flies" tagline for the event. Or alternatively, the same kind of sensor could make its way to the iPad Air, which we'll discuss momentarily. (Or the tagline could just be a play on the Apple Watch.)

Apple Watch Series 6

We know a little less about the next Apple Watch—or maybe there's just less to know, and it won't be as big a year for the Watch as it's likely to be for the iPhone. Apple is expected to continue to offer two different sizes, and the new Watch would sport speedier internals (especially for wireless speeds) as well as blood oxygen level tracking, a new health tracking feature.

Below: The Apple Watch Series 5, last year's Watch. We're not expecting anything too radically different in terms of design this year, but you never know.

- The Apple Watch Series 5.
  Valentina Palladino
- California, one of the new watch faces in watchOS 6.
  Valentina Palladino
- The Apple Watch series 5.
- External changes in hardware are almost nonexistent.
  Valentina Palladino
- The new Compass app uses the new magnetometer to show

your direction, and it integrates with Maps to help you get around.
Valentina Palladino

- The new on-Watch app store lets you download apps directly from the Watch.
  Valentina Palladino
- Developers can now make independent watchOS apps as well, eliminating the need for companion iOS apps.
  Valentina Palladino
- Wearing the Series 5 will feel almost identical to wearing the Series 4.
  Valentina Palladino
- But the always-on display makes the Apple Watch a much better traditional timepiece than it was before.
  Valentina Palladino

Additionally, Apple may introduce a new, cheaper model of the Apple Watch meant to compete with lower-cost fitness devices like some of those from Fitbit. We don’t know what compromises might be made to deliver this, though.

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