Five features to hope for at WWDC

On Monday, Apple will kick off its annual developer conference in the strangest and most contentious climate it has faced in many years. Not only does Apple have to hold all of its presentations online, it's doing so to a developer audience that has become aware of a collective, unspoken discontent.

Chaim Gartenberg has posted our long list of features you should expect to come to Apple's operating systems this year. The short version: what's most likely is a smattering of feature updates for the iOS-based platforms like iPadOS, tvOS, watchOS, and iOS and then a potentially massive shift for macOS from Intel to ARM.

That's what you should *expect*, but there are five things that I've been *wanting* Apple to deliver for years. Some of these have actually been rumored for this year, some are things I think Apple ought to do simply because they're necessary. Do I truly believe any of these five things will happen? In truth, I think that most of these are unlikely. I hope they happen, but I think they won't. My best guess is I'll get at least one, I'd be happy with two, and I'd be elated by three or more.

But everything on this list is something that users or developers have been wanting for years. At a certain point, it's just time. Here's hoping 2020 is that time.

Apple changes its App Store

policies

Apple’s 30 percent App Store cut has come under heavy fire in the last week, and though Apple could probably weather the storm of discontent, it will have a harder time recovering from the sense that developers *fear* Apple. Ben Thompson, John Gruber, and many others have reported that developers big and small are just as unhappy as Hey and Spotify are with Apple’s terms — but are afraid to speak out.

Politicians have to proclaim their support for small business — and hope to receive support back from them. It’s a sacrosanct group and anybody perceived to be taking advantage of them is not long for their office, regardless of party. It is the same way with tech companies and developers. It’s fun to joke about the old Steve Ballmer’s “Developers! Developers! Developers! Developers!” chant, but he did it for good reason.

What to hope for here? There are many ways it could go. The simplest would be for Apple to drop its cut down to something less than the 30 percent (15 percent for long-term subscriptions) it currently charges and then see if that appeases everybody. It could allow side-loading, as Android does. It could simply give up and allow apps to use non-Apple payment systems — or it could follow Google and say only games have to use Apple’s payment system. There are lots of options.

But I don’t think Apple will take any of them at WWDC. This event is about unveiling new features and the ARM transition for the Mac. This is one that I don’t expect Apple to directly address, because that’s not generally how Apple rolls in the Tim Cook era. Especially with this scandal, everything Apple has said points to the company believing it’s in the right. There won’t be a conference hall full of developers ready to grumble at each other if it doesn’t come up — though there will be Twitter.

Choose your own default apps

There have been rumblings that Apple might finally allow you to set non-Apple apps as the defaults for certain core features. Click on an email and perhaps it could open up Outlook instead of Apple's Mail app — or maybe Gmail or Hey (OK, not Hey). Same with regular links to web pages.

That's the idea, but Apple has very much stood against allowing it for many, many versions of iOS. It hasn't really ruined the iPhone experience, but it does mean a lot more cutting and pasting than would otherwise be required.

I'd put this one at 50/50, given the rumors. But I wouldn't expect Apple to budge on some other policies — like all web browsers being required to use Apple's webkit web rendering engine. My secret hope, by the way, is that there would be a system-wide setting for banning in-app browsers and/or letting those browsers share cookies (as they do on Android). Imagine not having to re-log-in to the same sites in every single app where you happen to click a link.

Home screen customization

Apparently there will be some kind of list view of all your apps — perhaps similar to how Android offers a separate app drawer. You might also be able to add widgets to home screens. Ironically, while I have asked for precisely that since 2012 (!), I'm less eager for it now. Apple's left-of-home-screen widget tool is better than the way Android handles the home screen.

But if I could put a weather or calendar widget on the main home screen, I probably would. That's all well and good. But what I *really* want is the ability to move icons down to the bottom of the home screen while leaving blank spaces at the top. Our phones are HUGE now, our icons should be a little

easier to reach. Forcing them to fill in from the top left is as annoying today as it was in 2012. It’s time, Apple!

True multi-user support on the iPad

For me, this is the most important feature. It’s flatly ridiculous that the iPad only allows for one primary user account. I am aware that there are ways to set up multi-user in an education context, but that doesn’t matter for the average consumer.

My frustration over this issue isn’t borne of a personal need, by the way. I do not have kids and am lucky that both I and my partner can afford our own iPads. But it seems like Apple wants that to be the solution for every household, and that’s just not right.

Multi-user support for the iPad would mean you could hand it to a child and keep them from getting into your iMessage or work email or whatever else you have installed. It would mean families could set up their iPads as communal devices, something that belongs to everybody instead of to one person.

You can buy a $40 tablet from Amazon that can do what the iPad cannot: handle multi-user accounts, including strong parental controls and loads of cheap or free kids content. It’s past time for Apple to offer something similar (in terms to multi-user support, not price).

If you want to argue that the iPad isn’t technically “a computer” because it’s limited in this way, I’m annoyed enough by this issue to just let you win that argument. I give this one a 25 percent chance of happening, if only because there’s been such a dearth of iPadOS rumors that I don’t know what else they’d have to announce.

iMessage for Android, RCS on the iPhone

Look, I know this is not going to happen. I hope for a lot of things that are never going to happen. I hope I will win the lottery tomorrow.

But I still think that offering iMessage on Android would be the morally correct thing for Apple to do. It would offer a nice way for Android users to get access to encrypted messaging without having to convince their friends to switch to Signal. I will brook no arguments that somehow this would be a security nightmare for Apple: Signal handles it just fine. So does WhatsApp.

As for RCS, well, if not this year then it needs to come next year. Despite the carriers' inevitable keystone kops implementation, it will become the global standard to replace SMS and so Apple should get on board. I'm not *technically* hoping for it this year, though: I'd like Apple to hold out support until there's a standard for encrypting those messages, too.

Policy

 Senate Republicans want to make it easier to sue tech companies for bias. Russell Brandom:

> *Called the Limiting Section 230 Immunity to Good Samaritans Act, the bill would require companies to undertake a "duty of good faith" in order to receive the protections of Section 230, instituting significant penalties for companies who do not uphold that duty. The result would be a major new avenue for users to sue platforms for improper moderation practices.*

 Justice Department asks Congress for a sharp cut to websites' legal protections. Adi Robertson:

> *The Department of Justice has released a proposal for changing Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, urging Congress to pass a dramatic reduction in the law's scope and expose services like apps and websites to greater legal liability. The proposal creates new categories of "egregious content" that wouldn't be covered, makes it potentially easier to sue for content removal, and denies protection if a service "purposefully facilitates or solicits third-party content" that's illegal.*

 K-pop fans and TikTok teens say they reserved tickets for Trump's Tulsa rally to leave seats empty.

Covid-19

 Apple will re-close some stores in Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Arizona due to coronavirus spikes.

 Comcast extends free Xfinity Wi-Fi hotspot access through the end of 2020.

Tech

 Lenovo's IdeaPad Gaming 3 is almost a good $1,000 gaming laptop. Cameron Faulkner reviews:

> *It's easy to dismiss the IdeaPad Gaming 3's faults when you consider its price, but the reality is Lenovo could have done a better job here. It's great that it includes a powerful processor and high refresh rate display, but without a better graphics card, those benefits go to waste.*

 Google's new Chrome extension lets you link directly to specific text on a page.

 Microsoft to upgrade its xCloud servers to Xbox Series X hardware in 2021. Tom Warren:

> *We understand Microsoft is still on track for an xCloud launch later this year on Android mobile devices. Microsoft started testing xCloud on iOS earlier this year, but admitted it can't fully test its service on Apple's platform due to some unspecified App Store restrictions. The software maker has been trying to pressure Apple into adjusting its App Store policies to allow xCloud to launch on iOS, but those discussions are ongoing and it's unlikely the service will launch fully on Apple devices later this year.*

 Fortnite's new season has flooded the map. Andrew Webster:

> *The new season of Fortnite is finally here — and it brought with it a flood. Today Epic Games released the long-delayed third season for Fortnite: Chapter 2, following a massive event earlier in the week which saw the game's battle royale island surrounded by a wall of water. Fittingly, the new season has submerged large areas of the island, creating a bigger focus on aquatic gameplay elements. That includes a new Waterworld-style floating city area, and the ability to water ski — while pulled by a shark.*

 Pokémon Snap is coming to the Nintendo Switch.

 Twitter starts rolling out audio tweets on iOS. These were fun for precisely 30 minutes in my Twitter timeline and then they stopped. I do wonder what the long-term usage will look like. More and more I think Twitter could benefit from a "media feed" in addition to the standard feed.

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