The iPhone and iPad Spotify app now includes home screen widgets

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- The two sizes of the Spotify widget in iOS 14.
  Samuel Axon
- To use the widget, you have to update Spotify to the latest version, then open the app.
  Samuel Axon
- Once that’s done, you can tap the widget gallery button in the top-left corner…
  Samuel Axon
- You’ll find it in the widget gallery like this.
  Samuel Axon

Spotify—one of Apple’s main rivals in both the latter’s services strategy and in antitrust investigations—has released a new version of its iPhone app that supports home screen widgets, one of the flagship features of iOS 14.

Last month’s release of iOS 14 brought home screen widgets—previously only the domain of iPads and Android phones—to iPhones. As we noted in our iOS 14 review, the value of the feature depends entirely on strong adoption and clever uses by third-party app developers.

Releases of widget-supporting apps from developers have been slow. Part of that was because Apple launched iOS 14 with less notice to developers than usual, meaning many were racing to play catch-up. But even now, a month later, the roster of widget-supporting apps has only grown a little.

Spotify is one of the most high-profile apps on the App Store, and it finally made the jump with version 8.5.80 of its iOS app. Unfortunately, the new widget isn't all that powerful or useful. It essentially does the exact same thing the Music widget does: it shows a list of recently played songs or playlists that you can tap into from the home screen.

Tapping an entry doesn't just take you to the song in the app—it starts playing it right away, saving you an extra tap. Many users will wish they could customize what appears in the list or that they could control playback, as they currently can in the Android widget. As the setup stands now, the widget offers no customization options at all.

Some app developers (like Spark) have found creative ways to use the somewhat limited iOS widgets API (WidgetKit) to offer multiple, flexible uses of that precious home screen real estate. But users have said a lot of widgets just aren't that useful at the moment.

Those same users might wonder why we're not seeing essentially fully working slices of apps appearing on the home screen. Apple is likely to expand what developers can do with WidgetKit in future software releases, but there will always be some big limitations because of an emphasis on maintaining battery life.

Lots of interactivity and live data from multiple apps on the home screen could have a negative impact there—that's probably why Apple and many devs have generally been conservative in terms of making widgets ultra-powerful.

By contrast, the Android Spotify widget offers playback

control. But Spotify actually removed that comparatively powerful widget in August of last year, only to reintroduce an improved version of it shortly afterward when users complained. The brief removal led to a plethora of user-made widgets to replace the lost functionality.

But at least Spotify is supporting widgets on iPhones at all—that wasn't a foregone conclusion.

Listing image by Samuel Axon

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