Yes, Amazon Luna dodges Apple's cloud gaming rules – when will Nvidia and Google?

You might be wondering: "Did Amazon just break Apple's App Store guidelines by bringing a cloud gaming service to iPhone?" And I can understand why, given that I told you just last week how Apple doesn't permit Google Stadia in anything close to its current form, and Amazon's just-announced Luna is a lot like Stadia. Wouldn't the same rules apply?

But the truth is that Amazon has a simple way to get around Apple's App Store rules entirely – and it's making me wonder how long it'll be before Google, Nvidia, Microsoft and others follow suit.

Hello, PWA

The short version: Amazon Luna on iOS is not a traditional app. It'll never appear in the App Store, and it doesn't need to. As *Engadget* reports, it's a progressive web app (PWA), which is mostly a fancy name for a website that you can launch and run separately from the rest of your web browser. *Engadget* says it can even appear as an icon on your home screen, making it look like a normal app before you tap it.

Being a web app makes it exempt from Apple's App Store rules, a fact that Apple itself is well aware of – because two weeks ago, Apple actually mentioned this idea in its updated rules. I've bolded the important part:

> *4.9 Streaming games*
>
> *Streaming games are permitted so long as they adhere to all guidelines – for example, each game update must be submitted for review, developers must provide appropriate metadata for search, games must use in-app purchase to unlock features or*

> *functionality, etc.* ***Of course, there is always the open Internet and web browser apps to reach all users outside of the App Store.***

Amazon making use of the workaround? Not so surprising. What's surprising is that Google, Nvidia, Microsoft and others have waited this long.

Some of Luna's first confirmed games.
Image: Amazon

We've known for a decade that you can play a top-shelf game in a web browser. If I'm exaggerating, it's only by three months: in December 2010, I wrote about streaming *Mass Effect 2* in the web browser on an original Atom-powered netbook, using the service that would later morph into Sony's PlayStation Now.

And Google has known for eight of those past ten years that a web browser can *natively* stream those games, too: before he graduated to run the whole company, Sundar Pichai was the one to demonstrate that exact thing on a Google stage. Stadia launched with support for Chromebooks and the Chrome web browser, too — but also launched with an app on Android, and an app that can't play games on iOS.

Meanwhile, Nvidia's GeForce Now recently made the leap to Chromebooks by creating a WebRTC version of its app, which potentially opened the door to a web browser version on top of its apps for Mac, Windows and Android — a door so wide that it apparently already works if you really try. Some Redditors have recently reported that Stadia, too, works on iOS if you can trick it into thinking you're using a supported web browser:

[embedded content]

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There were questions about how well these services ran on the web, of course, particularly around controller support. And sure, perhaps Google, Nvidia, and Microsoft could optimize performance and quality if they had a native app instead of relying on web standards — and, in the case of iOS, relying on the WebKit browser engine Apple requires all iOS browsers to be based on. (That's also part of the App Store rules, too; see 2.5.6.)

But run it does — well enough, apparently, that Amazon is willing to hang part of the success of its new Luna platform on iOS web browsers.

With Apple unwilling to budge and Amazon showing a way forward, perhaps it's only a matter of time before others do the same. Though I'm not quite sure about Microsoft… I'll explain why in a future story.

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