

5 Things Apple Needs To Fix In iOS, OS X And iCloud

How times have changed.

Not that long ago I used to spend the majority of my working day in front of a Windows system, be it a desktop, notebook, or even the odd tablet or netbook. But nowadays much of my 'computer time' is spent in front of products emblazoned with a half-bitten apple.

The shift from the Windows environment to one powered by OS X and iOS has highlighted a number of weaknesses in the Apple ecosystems, weaknesses exacerbated by users who work across multiple platforms and those who push the platforms to their limits.

Windows is, by virtue of its background, a mature and very versatile platform. Apple platforms, especially iOS, are younger, and haven't enjoyed years at the heart of the computer industry like Windows has. It's time for iOS and OS X to grow up and join the big boys.

Make iCloud a cross-platform service

One of the key features of iOS that helped propel the iPhone and iPad into the mainstream is Apple's iCloud services, specifically the chat tool iMessage. iCloud is the glue that Apple uses to bind the iPhone, iPad, and Mac together and creates a seamless set of services that are available wherever you are ...

... as long as you happen to be in front of an Apple product. If you're using a Windows-powered PC or Android-powered smartphone or tablet, well, you're out of luck.

It's time for this artificial wall to be smashed.

I'm not suggesting that Apple bring the full iCloud service to Windows and Android – that would remove the advantage that Apple has created for itself – but a subset of the services on offer (perhaps with an upgrade to the full iCloud experience for accounts tied to an Apple product) would be welcomed, and make the service infinitely more usable. This would be hugely beneficial for those migrating to Apple products and for those who work in mixed environments.

Make sharing data between OS X and iOS easier

Apple has a great feature built into OS X called AirDrop. This feature allows files to be sent between Macs that are connected to the same Wi-Fi network. It's a great way to share files between systems, even big ones like video files or Photoshop files. Given that this feature exists for Mac users, why is it that as a Mac owner I'm still emailing files to myself to and from my iOS devices, or relying on third-party services such as Dropbox?

Apple's preferred way to share files between OS X (and, for that matter, Windows) and iOS is to use iTunes, but this is slow and cumbersome. Bringing AirDrop to iOS would make sharing files a snap. This would be especially useful to the BYOD crowd who have chosen to take the Apple route.

Apple needs a DropBox

iCloud gives iOS and OS X users 5GB of free cloud storage, with the ability to pay for more if that's enough. I have iCloud storage, and as it happens, I'm one of those people who pay Apple so I can have 25GB. So why do I also have to use Dropbox, Google Drive, or other third-party providers? Please Apple, let me use the iCloud I'm paying for just as I use my free Dropbox account.

Shared storage space for apps in iOS

I love apps. But they also drive me crazy because of the limitations imposed on them by Apple. One of the worst is the restriction on apps seeing and working with files created in other apps.

Let's say you're working on a word processor document on an iPhone or iPad. I use a number of tools to work on word documents, depending on what I want to do – there's no one app that seems to be able to do everything I want – but I find it annoying that, for example, documents I create or work on in QuickOffice Pro can't be accessed from, say, Documents to Go.

The reason for this is that apps are isolated from one another. This is a security feature that Apple built into iOS to prevent one app from tampering with – or even pilfering data from – other apps, but it also means that the only way to share information between apps is to either email them to myself, or use a cloud service. These are great solutions, assuming I have an Internet connection and have the bandwidth to move these files back and forth.

Apple's own Photos app is a good example of how this shared storage space should work. I can choose to share my photos – along with the folders that contain my photos and videos – with other apps, and all apps to which I've given permission can access the storage space given over to photos, and can open, edit, and save files to that shared location.

Better app management

As I've already said, I love apps. I have hundreds of them installed on my iPhone and iPad. I use them all the time for work, to scratch my photographic itch when I don't feel like being burdened down with cameras and lenses, to read my favorite magazines, and to play a few rounds of Angry Birds when I need to kill a few minutes. And, like most people, I'm always on the look out for the next great app.

Apps are at the core of both iOS and OS X, but everything related to app management is a mess. Finding new apps is painful, updating apps is a semi-manual process, and discovering which apps haven't been updated in ages – or perhaps have even been abandoned by the developer – is virtually impossible.

Apple gets a 30% cut from every app sold through its App Store, so I don't think that it is too much to ask for better tools to manage the apps I've bought, and help me buy more apps.