Google

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Google buys smartphone file-swapping app Bump as sharing grows

Impending launch of Apple's AirDrop on iOS 7 could make Bump unnecessary on its own platform, while Google beefs up file-transfer capabilities for Android

A Samsung Galaxy S4 ad in New York: its phones already include a Bump-style capability. Photograph: youngsam Yoon/Samsung/Young Sam-yoon

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Google is buying Bump, an app which allows smartphone users to send pictures, contacts or other files to each other by bumping them together.

Bump was initially made available on Apple's iPhone as a substitute for NFC - Near Field Communications - technology which enables the same functionality on Android and other NFC-equipped smartphones.

The decision to buy Bump seems to have been partly driven by the impending release of Apple's iOS 7, the latest version of its iPhone software. That introduces a technology called AirDrop which could be used to transfer similar data types - including photos or web addresses - using a combination of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth to multiple devices at once without requiring the phones to touch. "There's no bumping your phone," said Apple's iOS software chief Craig Federighi when he showed the feature off to developers in June at Apple's Worldwide Developer

InterDigital Exhibit 2032, p. 1
Microsoft v. InterDigital
IPR2024-00305

Conference. Apple already implements AirDrop on its desktop and laptop computers.

For Bump, that could mean that its biggest platform, iOS, would become less useful if people begin using AirDrop instead of its app.

Google also has its own NFC project, called Beam, announced in October 2011. And Samsung has implemented its own "bump" technology using NFC to move files between devices.

The price of the sale hasn't been disclosed, though AllThingsDigital reported sources putting the price at between $30m and $60m, compared to venture capital investment of $20m.

Bump was founded in 2008 and first released its app on Apple's App Store in March 2009. It has had a total of more than 125m downloads for both iPhone and Android, and been used to send more than 1bn photos. The company had 25 staff in March. The app was seeing fast growth among users, and had recently implemented a system which let users "bump" files to desktop or laptop computers.

Writing on the Bump blog, its chief executive and cofounder David Lieb said that

> *Our mission at Bump has always been to build the simplest tools for sharing the information you care about with other people and devices. We strive to create experiences that feel like magic, enabled behind the scene with innovations in math, data processing, and algorithms. So we couldn't be more thrilled to join Google, a company that shares our belief that the application of computing to difficult problems can fundamentally change the way that we interact with one another and the world.*

He said that Bump and the Flock app, which allows people to create shared photo albums, "will continue to work as they always have for now".

Bump uses a combination of apps running on the devices which "bump", and the company's own servers. In an FAQ, the company explains that "The app on your phone uses the phone's sensors to literally "feel" the bump, and it sends that info up to the cloud. The matching algorithm listens to the bumps from phones around the world and pairs up phones that felt the same bump. Then we just route information between the two phones in each pair." The app uses location information and sensor detail to determine which two devices which have sent a "bump" are in direct contact.

By contrast, Apple's Airdrop is an ad-hoc peer-to-peer Wi-Fi network with encrypted file transfers, which does not route through outside servers, and so doesn't need an internet connection.

InterDigital Exhibit 2032, p. 2
Microsoft v. InterDigital
IPR2024-00305

A message from Betsy Reed, editor of the Guardian US

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InterDigital Exhibit 2032, p. 3
Microsoft v. InterDigital
IPR2024-00305

InterDigital Exhibit 2032, p. 4
Microsoft v. InterDigital
IPR2024-00305

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InterDigital Exhibit 2032, p. 5
Microsoft v. InterDigital
IPR2024-00305