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

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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 to 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

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While technology has changed almost every aspect of our lives, it can also be incredibly daunting. I firmly believe that technology is for everyone, and here I will be writing about the hardware and software that should matter to you. I am a technology journalist and author who has devoted nearly two decade to examining technological

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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

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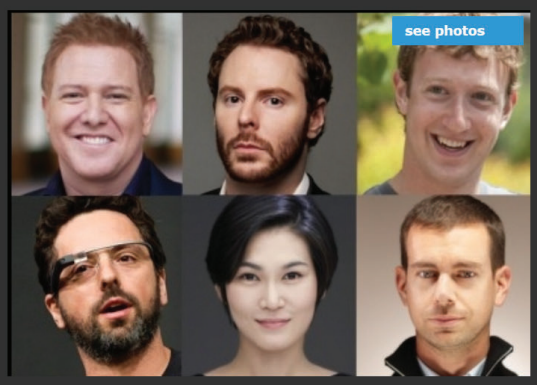

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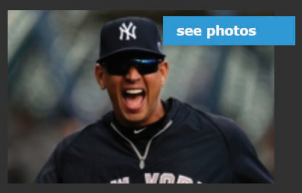
With $119 billion between them, these 29 billionaires under 40 years old have it made.



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REVIEWS

AirDrop review:

AirDrop is Apple's new technology for transferring files between iOS devices. We look at how easy it is to share photos and documents between an iPad and iPhone.

By Lucy Hattersley
Macworld | SEP 19, 2013 12:00 AM PDT

At a Glance

Expert's Rating

★★★★☆

Pros

- Incredibly easy to set up and use
- clever use of Bluetooth and Wi-Fi
- file sharing makes iOS a much better work tool

Cons

- Can't share music or video files
- limited to apps that support it
- Mac OS X integration waiting upon Mavericks
- limited to more recent iOS devices

Our Verdict

AirDrop is part of the iOS 7 update so you'll probably already have it on your iPhone, iPad or iPod touch. It's well worth using on a regular basis though for sharing files between your devices and with other people. It's a great solution for bouncing files around the local vicinity, although we'd still keep using services like Dropbox and Google Drive for storing files in the cloud and sharing them globally.

AirDrop is Apple's new technology for sharing files and documents wirelessly between devices. First introduced with Mac OS X 10.7 Lion it has now made it to the iPhone, iPad and iPod touch as part of the iOS 7

update.

AirDrop sits alongside AirPlay as your new go-to feature for bouncing a file from one place to another. If you have multiple iOS devices you can use it to move a file from one device to the other, and you can share files with friends in the same location as you.

AirDrop in Control Centre

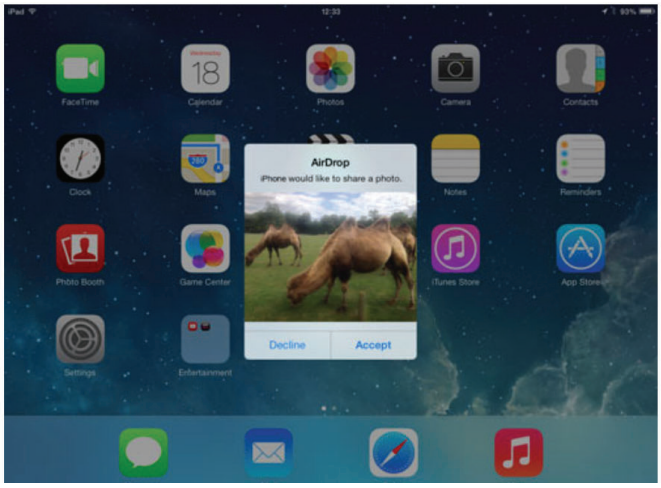
How does AirDrop work

On the technical side of things, AirDrop uses a mixture of Bluetooth 4.0LE and Wi-Fi so you'll need to have both enabled on both devices. AirDrop uses Bluetooth to talk to iOS devices in the local area and then transfers files using Wi-Fi. The files are – according to Apple – transmitted securely (although Apple hasn't confirmed which security system it is using).

From the user side of things AirDrop displays Apple's usual seamless usability. In iOS 7 you Turn on AirDrop using the new Control Centre (slide your finger up from the bottom of the display) and tap AirDrop. Users are given the choice between Off Contacts Only and Everyone. Contacts Only restricts AirDrop files sharing to people in the Contacts list (useful in busy places) or Everyone, which enables anybody within range to share files with you.

With AirDrop switched on you can head into an app like Photos and tap the Share icon. Above the usual Message, Mail, Twitter options you'll now see an AirDrop space. Any users with AirDrop turned on will appear as an icon in this window. Simply tap their icon and they'll get a message saying that you want to share the file with them. They tap okay, and it's bounced over the WiFi network.

It's clever stuff, and an extremely practical way to share files that solves a lot of the problems inherent with using locked-down devices like the iPhone and iPad. With no USB ports or access to the iOS Finder this offers a neat and elegant solution to file sharing. It's going to be particularly useful for people who find cloud services like Dropbox a pain, and sharing by Mail is fiddly and cumbersome.



What files can you share with AirDrop

AirDrop is fairly universally distributed throughout iOS. Here are some of the files we've found compatible with AirDrop:

- Photos
- Contacts
- Camera videos
- Web pages
- Map points and directions
- Evernote notes
- Passbook cards

What files can't you share with AirDrop

- Videos
- Music
- Calendar events
- Reminders
- iWork documents

The notable omission is Pages, Numbers and Keynote documents. Although we are expecting updates to the these apps pretty shortly and don't think they'll be off the sharing list for long. Unless Apple has some other iWork sharing mechanism in mind, which given the lack of collaborative editing in iWork is also on the cards.

Of course, its inability to share video and music files is less surprising, but needs addressing. It's a disappointing move on the part of Apple. We get that file sharing is an issue in these areas, and that Apple has vested interests in guiding people towards the iTunes Store. But even so the block on music and video sharing throws Apple's "walled garden" approach in your face. At least with Music Apple has an iTunes Match services, although this only shares audio files to devices with your own iTunes User ID and costs £21.99 per year.

See: Guide to using iTunes Match

What devices are compatible with AirDrop

AirDrop doesn't work on all iOS devices. You need an iPad 4, iPhone 5, 5S, or 5C, iPad mini or iPod touch 5th generation. The iPad 3 and

iPhone 4S are both fairly popular devices excluded from this list, so you might find support limited for a few years while people pick up new iOS devices.

Another rather major omission is Mac OS X, which is currently incompatible with AirDrop. So we can't test how easy it is to transfer files wirelessly from a Mac computer to an iOS device. This feature is set to be introduced in Mac OS X Mavericks, at which point AirDrop will become instantly more useful. You can still transfer files wirelessly by clicking the "Sync this device over Wi-Fi" feature and using File Sharing inside the Apps tab.

What does AirDrop mean for Apple?

On the whole it's worth noting that AirDrop is a fantastic technological implementation of frictionless file sharing. We've never encountered any system that makes it so easy to pass a file from one device to another. There are limits to it, in particular you can't share certain file types, and you can only share files with people in the same location as you. But there are other services like Dropbox, Google Drive and, of course, Mail for sharing over longer distances.

AirDrop is also a big step in the direction of turning iOS devices into a more effective replacement for the laptop. While it still doesn't offer the same level of freedom as a laptop, it's increasingly moving towards being a suitable replacement for most people. AirDrop takes us further down that path. And as we walk along we're starting to see Apple's idea of file storage and sharing come to fruition. There is no more Finder, instead documents are stored locally in apps and shared with iCloud, and can be shared between apps and, now, other people. It's an interesting new vision of the future: but the fact that Apple restricts it to the kind of documents it wants you to share makes us as wary as we are excited.

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Macworld is your best source for all things Apple. We give you the scoop on what's new, what's best and how to make the most out of the products you love.

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How iOS 7's AirDrop Could Transform The Way We Share

Brian s hall / Jun 28, 2013 / Mobile

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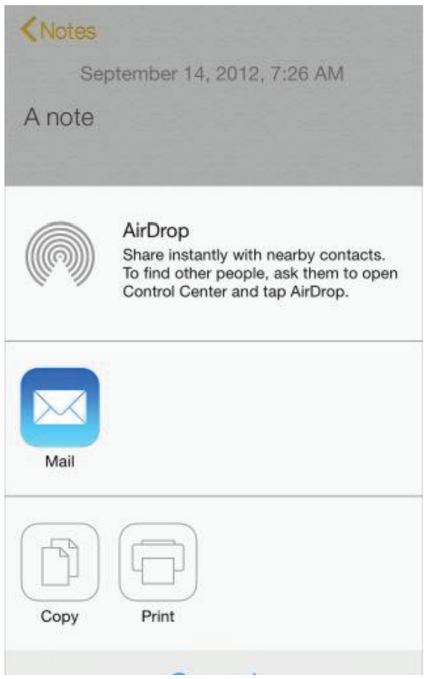

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Despite the persistent gnashing of teeth over Jony Ive's re-making of iPhone's apps, colors and iconography in the upcoming iOS 7, the real story is the many new features that Apple is incorporating into its highly lucrative mobile platform.

Features such as wireless content sharing AirDrop could significantly impact user sharing behavior – at home, at work, and everywhere else. It's not particularly revolutionary. Rather, AirDrop smartly leverages the core strengths of Apple's unified ecosystem.

AirDrop, long available on Macs, is being offered with Apple's iOS 7 – the next version of the popular operating system for iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch. According to Apple, AirDrop lets users share photos, videos, web pages, contacts – "and anything else from any app with a Share button."

AirDrop sharing might include:

- A retailer "airdropping" a coupon into your Passbook app.
- Multi-player games with strangers on a train.
- Sharing meeting notes in an office setting.
- Guests sharing their favorite videos of the bride and groom during the ceremony.
- App developers might offer in-app freebies to customers who agree to "airdrop" a trial version of the app from their iPhone onto their friend's iPhone. Advertisers may do the same.
- Families might share a variety of notes, lists, pictures and more across a plethora of "iDevices."

Ecosystem Benefits

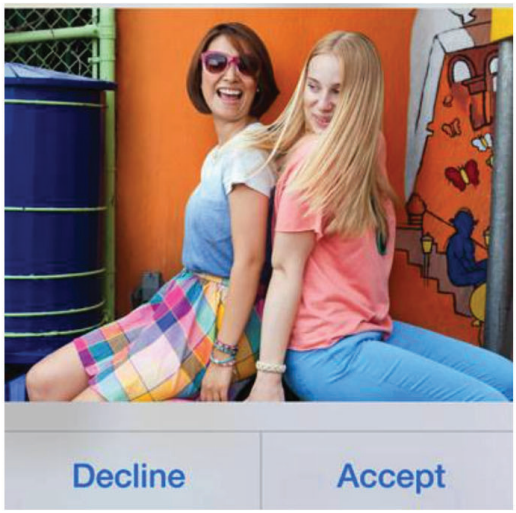
There are some very obvious caveats to all this, of course, despite the potential. Chiefly, in practice, AirDrop may ultimately deliver limited user value.

After all, smartphone-to-smartphone sharing already exists, yet have you ever actually seen people 'bump' their smartphones? This Samsung commercial is clever, but do you know anyone who's actually used this feature that was not on television?

AirDrop, however, has several advantages:

1. It comes pre-installed on iOS 7.
2. Every device with AirDrop will offer the same user experience.
3. It is fully wireless – no physical bumping of devices necessary.

Android Beam, Samsung's S Beam, and apps like Bump, all require the devices touch each other, one-to-one, to initiate a file transfer. Even the more widely available NFC (near field communication) standards require devices physically touch one another or be in very close proximity, typically a few centimeters. AirDrop requires no touching and can transfer files one-to-many.



AirDrop works by moving media through the cloud, via Apple's iCloud. It then establishes a Wi-Fi Direct connection between the devices to move files between points. The use of iCloud allows AirDrop to know other users' locations and theoretically makes file sharing easier. In contrast, Android Beam creates a connection between two devices and then transfers media through Bluetooth. Samsung's S Beam is similar, but uses NFC to establish the connection and then uses Wi-Fi Direct. Samsung's new Galaxy S4 has the ability to share content (such the same song on several different devices with one person acting as a DJ controller) in much the same way as AirDrop works.

AirDrop can assure everyone of its users the same exact steps to expedite the activity. Tap the "Share" icon. AirDrop reveals available users nearby. Tap their avatar and the file is sent.

This is where Apple's ecosystem control delivers enhanced benefits to users. Two users wanting to transfer files will be able to open the same app, at the same time with the same results. While Android Beam (or the very similar S Beam) is present on all Android phones running version 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich or higher, the interface between smartphones from different manufacturers does not lend itself to a common experience.

Analysts estimate that at least 550 million devices are now running iOS 6. If Apple can just as quickly transition them to iOS 7, that's a massive potential user base with which to AirDrop the latest viral video, family photo, office gossip, or hit song.

The Ecosystem Giveth, The Ecosystem Taketh Away

Success will take time, if it is to happen at all. For AirDrop to work, users must have:

- iOS 7
- A *newer* iOS device – iPhone 5, iPad Mini, iPad (4th generation), iPod Touch (5th generation)
- An iCloud account