

Apple previews software, new show

The Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Apple executives previewed a large set of privacy and speed-focused changes to the company's phone and computer software Monday, some intended to help it diversify to offset eroding sales of its bedrock product, the iPhone.

Apple CEO Tim Cook began his keynote by recapping services Apple announced earlier this spring, including a news reading service and an arcade service for games. He also previewed one of the original shows Apple is producing for its new video-streaming service, "For All Mankind," set in an alternate history where the Soviets were first to land a man on the moon.

The software showcase is an annual rite. This year, however, Apple is grappling with its biggest challenge since its visionary co-founder, Steve Jobs, died nearly eight years ago.

The iPhone is no longer reliably driving profits as it has for the past decade. Sales have fallen sharply for the past two quarters and could suffer another blow if China's government targets the iPhone in retaliation for the trade war being waged by President Donald Trump.

Apple's keynote focused largely on minor feature updates to its flagship software, but hinted at its shift toward a services-focused company.

Apple emphasized its privacy



CEO Tim Cook speaks at Apple's annual showcase in San Jose, Calif., on Monday. The iPhone is not reliably driving profits as it once did.

protections during the keynote — following along with Facebook, Google and other major tech companies' scripts this year.

Apple also unveiled several new apps for its smartwatch, including independent apps that don't rely on the iPhone. The App Store will be available on the watch, making it possible for people to find and download apps right on their watch — expanding the availability of purchases that generate commissions for Apple.

In its new operating system, iOS 13, the company is introducing "Sign in with Apple" to let users sign into apps without using similar sign-in services from Facebook and Google. The sign-in will let you hide your actual email address if you choose. Apple is also making it easier to only show your location to apps once and not continually.

Another potential problem looms for Apple. Regulatory complaints and a consumer lawsuit both question whether Apple has been abusing the power of its iPhone app store to thwart competition and gouge smaller technology companies that rely on it to attract users and sell their services.

Apple is trying to adapt by squeezing money from digital services tailored for the 900 million iPhones in use.

Of course, the company hasn't

totally abandoned the iPhone. The newest version of Apple's iPhone operating system, iOS 13, will feature a dark mode and faster tools. For instance, the company said a new version of its Face ID system will unlock your phone 30 percent faster.

The biggest remake of a single app is a makeover of Apple Maps, which will debut this fall. It includes more granular street and place data that Apple says it collected with street and aerial footage — tactics its largest mobile app rival Google has been using for years.

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In its laptop and desktop businesses, Apple is breaking up its iTunes software for computers into three apps: Apple Music, Apple Podcasts and Apple TV.

Apple has already phased out the iTunes from the iPhone and iPad, but now it's expected to do the same on the Mac and other personal computers. Instead of iTunes, separate apps for music, video and podcasts are expected to be offered for computers, mirroring how Apple already handles those services on mobile devices.

Russian authorities last year banned messaging app Telegram after it refused to hand over user data. Some top Russian officials had claimed "extremists" used the platform to plot terrorist attacks. Despite authorities' attempt to block Telegram, it is still available in Russia.

Social network LinkedIn has been less fortunate. It refused to comply with requirements that personal data on Russian citizens be stored on servers within Russia. In 2016 a court ordered that LinkedIn be blocked.

A total of 175 online services are on the Russians' list requiring them to hand over user data to Russian authorities. Most are small websites in Russian regions.

Popular messaging services such as WhatsApp or Facebook messengers are not on the list. Russian authorities say that is because law enforcement agencies have not approached them for data from those particular apps, but it is widely understood that blocking Facebook and its apps including WhatsApp or Instagram would be a big step for regulators.

RUSSIA CRACKING DOWN ON TINDER

The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia is requiring dating app Tinder to hand over data on its users — including messages — to the national intelligence agencies, part of a widening crackdown on internet freedoms.

The communications regulator said Monday Tinder was on a list of online services operating in Russia that are required to provide user data on demand to Russian authorities, including the FSB security agency.

Tinder will have to comply or face being completely blocked in the country. The rule would apply to any user's data that goes through Russian servers, including messages to other people on the app.

Tinder was not immediately available for comment.

Russia has adopted a flurry of recent legislation tightening control over online activity. Internet companies are required to store six months' worth of user data and be ready to hand them over to authorities.

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IRS updating W-4 form on withholding amounts

The Associated Press

The IRS has proposed an update to the Form W-4 that it says will increase its accuracy, reduce its complexity and help avoid surprises at tax time.

Experts caution it will feel different to employees and may prove more difficult for some.

Employees currently fill out a one-page form that asks a few questions about their household to help their employer determine how much to withhold from their pay for federal taxes. Any more complex legwork takes place on worksheets that not all workers complete.

Under the proposed update, released Friday, employees would still face a one-page form with a simple default option. But those with dependents, working spouses, second jobs or income

A proposed form update will be more accurate, but also more difficult to fill out, experts say.

from other sources will need to do a bit of legwork that looks different if they want an accurate amount withheld.

"It's going to be a little more work than people are used to," said Pete Isberg, vice president

of governmental affairs at ADP, a payroll services provider.

The form is divided into five steps. Some people will opt to complete only the two-step minimum: personal information and signature. Others will want to run through the other steps to get a more accurate withholding, and that will require a lot of information more akin to what you need to complete your taxes. Several experts said people may want to take it home to complete or get help from the IRS withholding calculator or a tax pro.

The IRS is making the update in the wake of the overhaul of federal tax law. The new tax law did away with the personal exemptions that are essentially the backbone of the current W-4. A new version of the form was needed to better reflect this and other changes to the law so a

more accurate amount is withheld from pay for workers.

The proposed draft is open to public input until July. A final version will take effect in 2020. Existing employees will not have to fill out the new form, but new hires or anyone wanting to update their information will use a new form starting Jan. 1.

The U.S. Treasury and IRS worked closely with the tax and payroll community in developing the form. And several of those involved said this form does reflect an improvement over earlier attempts.

Taxpayers who were unhappy with their refund or amount due this season should do the detailed calculations, said Andy Phillips, a director with the Tax Institute at H&R Block, and they can update their W-4 information at any time.