

IOS 7: THE OPPORTUNITY

Tim Cook calls iOS 7 “the biggest change to iOS since the introduction of the original iPhone.” When it’s released this fall there will be lots of press coverage along with great industry and consumer excitement. We are urging all of our clients to begin getting ready for the opportunities (and threats) associated with iOS 7.

While we have heard a number of people express that they are upset about how much work it will take to move to iOS 7 and how threatened they will be if they don’t, we think this view of iOS 7 is shortsighted. Ultimately, iOS7 will reshuffle the deck – and so presents a great opportunity to gain (or lose) market share and branding value in the space.

IMPACT ON EXISTING APPS

More than with any previous OS update, companies will need to get on the iOS 7 bandwagon very rapidly. When iOS 7 is released virtually all iOS 6 apps will suffer UI breakdowns that will appear as bugs to the end user, and some apps will cease to function. Almost all existing apps will look like they don’t fit and over time as consumers get used to iOS 7 will begin to look hopelessly antiquated (especially those apps originally designed/built for iOS 5 and earlier).

The companies and organizations that create great iOS 7 apps early will have a considerable opportunity to leapfrog their competition and/or expand their customer base.

USER MIGRATION TO IOS7

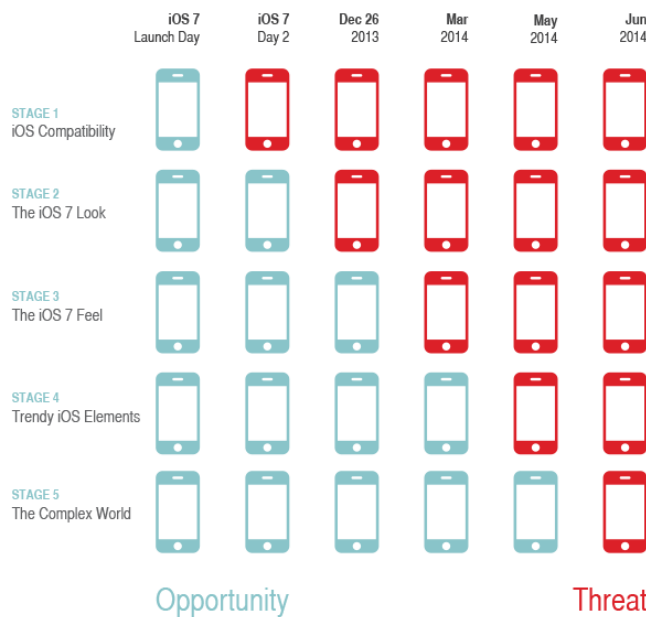
We predict that the switch to iOS 7 will be faster than any previous upgrade cycle. Each iOS release tends to see even more rapid consumer adoption than the previous version. One analysis of iOS 6 saw 15% adoption within 24 hours; 25% after 48 hours; and 61% after one month. Recently Apple stated that 93% of active iOS users are using iOS 6, just 8 months after launch.

iOS 7 introduces a more prominent update call-to-action and will make updating easier than ever before. Users will be prompted to update to iOS 7 in order to use an iOS 7-only app. We expect this to increase the adoption rates even further.

We predict that there will be five conversion stages to iOS 7. For those that move fast and do it right, each stage will offer opportunity. If not done on time or not done well these moments in time will become inflection points that will threaten leaders or keep followers as followers.

THE FIVE-STAGE SWITCH TO IOS 7

The 5 Conversion Phases to iOS7



Stage #1. Launch Day

Some iOS 6 apps that are not updated will not work at all under iOS 7. Because users will switch to iOS 7 so rapidly, apps that don't work with the new iOS will be left behind. Users will at a minimum stop launching apps that don't work and will seek out similar apps that do work.

Apple will be making a huge push around apps that are iOS 7-optimized (i.e. not apps that just work, but ones that have completely embraced the iOS 7 paradigm), so there is a significant opportunity to get a major PR benefit for clients that have great iOS 7 apps that are picked up by Apple, or other publications writing about apps that take full advantage of iOS 7.

Stage #2. The iOS 7 Look

The new look of iOS 7 will be one of the first things users notice. As more apps onboard to iOS 7's flatter, less-skeuomorphed UI aesthetic, those that do not will look dated. We predict that close to the end of 2013, users will begin to abandon any apps that do not begin to use the basic iOS 7 UI look, or apps that hold onto iOS 6's heavier, more visually shaded look. We recommend that all apps be updated to match the look of iOS 7 by December 26, 2013 in order to best capture people receiving iOS devices for Christmas.

Stage #3. The iOS 7 Feel

iOS 7 contains lots of UI elements that are more subtle and not obvious at first glance. Parallax is one of the most discussed so far. This is the effect makes the background appear to move more than the foreground when the phone is tilted and shifted.

Parallax is one element of what we see as the shift from an iOS that was based on a 2D world to one that is based on dimensionality. Some people are calling this 3D but we feel that confuses it with things like 3D games that are trying to simulate our actual 3D world. Dimensionality is made up of many subtle elements and utilized to help users find where they are in iOS or in an app. Apple calls this keeping context, one of the cornerstone's of the iOS 7 design philosophy.

Users may never consciously notice these elements but after a time, apps that don't take advantage of them will begin to not feel right... even if the consumer is never able to describe why.

Within about five to six months of the iOS release, we expect most users to be upgraded and using all iOS 7 looking apps. The apps that feel more like they fit will begin to have an advantage. Our recommendation for including these types of UX patterns is prior to March 1, 2014.

Stage #4. Trendy iOS Elements

With every iOS, certain UI elements begin to get heavily used. In addition, new UI elements get invented by app developers and spread rapidly. An example of this was when the developer of the popular Twitter client Tweetie (which Twitter acquired in 2010) created the pattern "pull down to refresh." This can now be seen in many apps including Apple's own Mail app.

Apps wanting to look current will add these UI elements in as they appear. We feel that by May of 2014 some of these will emerge.

Stage #5. The Complex World

When iOS first launched, it was tasked with very simple actions because it was designed as a supplement to desktop computing. It launched simple apps like weather, made phone calls, kept a calendar and read email. Over the years iPhones and iPads have begun to deal with much more complex tasks because for many people their iOS device became a replacement for a desktop or laptop or became their primary digital device. Today mobile devices perform a huge number of functions. They help integrate social media into daily life, are where people turn to for news and entertainment and allow data to be synced on multiple devices and much more. Until now, iOS has been updated or patched to help it deal with this new complex world. iOS 7 was a rethinking of iOS with this kind of a world in mind. Where there were tasks that we would have recommended clients not try with early versions, many new types of apps will be able to succeed under iOS 7. We expect that by June of 2014 we will begin to see apps designed with this understanding.

The forward thinking companies will look at each of these stages not as a threat but as an opportunity. Those that move fast and move well will be rewarded.

Users will have a level of excitement and curiosity about iOS7 so the moment it's released a number will immediately be looking for cool apps that show off these features. Companies who are ready at that moment will have an opportunity to capture customers and to add to their brand's reputation for savviness.

FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The five things companies need to do to ensure that they deliver a great iOS 7 experience - whether they are updating an existing app, or creating new:

1) Understand that users get touch

Previous iOS versions leveraged UI designs that clearly indicated to users where and how to touch. This was accomplished through the use of heavy drop shadows, gradients, textures, and skeuomorphic design, or design elements that look like an older piece of technology to forge familiarity with the user. Over the past 6 years, users have learned how to use a touchscreen. iOS 7 is designed to no longer treat users like they are learning. No more handholding. The drop shadows are subdued. The textures are either non-existent or subtle. Instead of forcing a visual metaphor onto the user, the new design paradigm embraces the iPhone for what it is: a touchscreen computer.

2) Remember that users want to multi-task

The new multi-tasking features in iOS 7 are not limited to allowing apps to run at the same time in the background. Multi-tasking in iOS 7 comes all the way to the UI and allows (or maybe even encourages) users to switch from one app to another. Don't build your app to try to keep users from leaving because this will only frustrate them. Rather, understand that they will jump to other apps and then come back. Ensure that your app is built for this kind of behavior. For example ensure that the mini-screens in the app switcher visually reflect any changes or updates. When a user leaves, be sure to keep the app preview updated and look for other ways to encourage them to come back.

3) Content is king

The new edge-to-edge, translucent iOS 7 aesthetic is designed to highlight what users want—your content. Instead of designing your iOS 7 app with big shadows, gradients, and gratuitous UI elements, let the content be the focus throughout the interface—a design philosophy Apple calls Deference.

4) Leverage three dimensions

iOS 7 was designed for a deep, complex universe with lots going on and in a world where apps are not simple linear constructions. iOS 7 has lots of UI elements that enable an app to dive to many deeper levels while keeping the user informed of where they are, what they are doing, and how to get back—keeping users informed of their context at all times through motion, physics, and clear labels. We are calling this a shift from linear navigation paths to dimensional, fluid navigation. We believe this one of the most important changes, especially for apps with deep, complicated data and content.

5) Focus your Experience

iOS 7 is an opportunity for companies to rethink how their apps present features and content. Apple has always recommended that before app developers write one line of code, they should start with an "Application Statement", or a few sentences that describes the core functionality and purpose of their app.

Companies with existing apps are now in a position to write a more informed Application Statement by way of diving into app analytics reports, reading App Store reviews, and conducting customer interviews. What problem is your app solving? Who is using it? What features are users using most frequently?

It's the perfect time to rewrite your Application Statement (or write it for the first time), and potentially hone your app to make the experience laser-focused, align with the new design paradigms of iOS 7, and ultimately make it a more valuable experience for customers.



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WillowTree Apps, one of the most trusted and respected mobile development companies in the US, is admired for its ability to help clients create and implement mobile strategies that help solve business challenges. The company's designers and developers are experts across the nuances of iPhone, iPad, Android, Mobile Web (HTML5), Windows Mobile, and Blackberry platform best practices. The entire team is located in its Charlottesville, VA headquarters. No work is ever outsourced overseas.

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CONTACT US

✉ info@willowtreeapps.com
☎ (888) 329-9875
🌐 willowtreeapps.com

