

The Apple Worldwide Developers' Conference (WWDC) has never been a hardware show, but rarely has it been so focused on operating system updates-- both OS X and iOS are getting new versions packed with tweaks and features later this year.

As these things tend to do we also got the latest Apple user numbers, from the Mac installed base (80 million) and the percentage currently using Mavericks (51%) to big iOS numbers (2013 saw 135m customers buying a first iDevice) and overall satisfaction totals (97%).

Opening proceeds before the traditional keynote was "Apps We Can't Live Without," a video celebrating the users' favourite apps and the developers behind them. After all, WWDC is a developers' event-- and registered Apple developer numbers now total 9 million, a 47% increase in 12 months.



Anyway, on to the aforementioned OS updates. Apple revealed the latest version of OS X, "Yosemite." Originally codenamed "Syrah," OS X 10.10 is the the 11th version of the Mac OS and the second to share a name with a California landmark.

It is also more tightly integrated with iOS-- as well as a translucent UI more similar in look to that of iOS 7 it features "Continuity," an enhanced version of AirDrop allowing one to, say, start a task on a Mac and continue it on an iPad. Apple calls such functionality "Handoff," and it works even with tasks such as emails or the sharing of wifi settings between desktops and iPhones.

A new version of the Messages app allows users to compose SMSs or use a Mac as a speakerphone for a tethered iPhone, and an updated Mail app can send attachments of up to 5GB in size via Apple servers.

iCloud gets a major update-- now called "iCloud Drive," the cloud-based storage service has been turned into a full-blown Dropbox rival complete with file synching across Macs, iDevices and even Windows PCs via Finder folders.

The Spotlight tool also gets enhanced capabilities allowing it to search across apps, reminders, calendar events, the internet and even Maps. Oh, and in a slight towards Google it uses Bing as default search engine.



The next OS update on the agenda is, of course, iOS 8. Described by Tim Cook as a "giant release," it features numerous enhancements on mainstays such as the notification centre, Safari, Mail, Messages, Spotlight and even the keyboard, as "Quicktype" provides Android-style predictive typing.

Siri also learns new tricks, as a "Hey Siri" command switches on the voice assistant without need to physically touch the phone.

Of interest for developers the addition of frameworks called "Kits", of which three are revealed-- HealthKit, HomeKit and CloudKit. HealthKit handles the transmission of health data to and from iDevices. It comes with Health, a new Apple health app offering "a single comprehensive overview of your fitness."

HomeKit claims to bring "rationality" to home automation, with a common networking protocol allowing the control of garage doors, lighting and thermostats via iPhone, while CloudKit provides developers with a whole lot (up to a petabyte) of cloud data and bandwidth for "effectively free"

However the biggest news for developers comes in the shape of "Swift"-- a new programming language promising quicker and more dynamic app development. Game developers also get "Metal," a means to access console-stye visual effects on iDevices.

Both OS X Yosemite and iOS 8 are available now as developer previews before general launch sometime on Q3 2014.

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