

Why can't Apple and Adobe just get along?

February 11 2010, By Troy Wolverton

The bickering between Apple and Adobe over why Apple's iPhone and its new iPad don't run Adobe's Flash software is giving me a headache.

Apple CEO [Steve Jobs](#) says Flash is buggy and accuses Adobe of being lazy. Kevin Lynch, Adobe's [chief technology officer](#), denies that and accuses Apple of trying to control what [iPhone](#) and iPad users can do with their devices.

Jobs says Flash is on its way out. No way, says Lynch.

Enough already. You guys are beginning to remind me of my kids. Can't you find some way to get along?

It seems to me that Apple and Adobe need each other. Even if they didn't, the millions of us who own iPhones and iPod touches or who plan to buy an iPad when the new multimedia tablet hits the market need them to work things out. Because we're the ones who are going to lose out if they don't.

Adobe's Flash is a software program that plugs into a Web browser to deliver multimedia content such as games, videos and interactive advertisements. Adobe says the vast majority of top Web sites include Flash content and that 75 percent of the video on the Web is delivered using Flash.

Flash has mostly been a PC experience, because Flash players either haven't been available on smartphones or weren't powerful enough to

access much of the Flash content on the Web.

Until now, the lack of Flash on the iPhone hasn't been that big of a deal. When the iPhone debuted in 2007, the browsing experience was so much better than what came before it on mobile phones that it was hard to complain that it didn't support Flash. It was great just to be able to access the Web and full HTML pages. And because other smartphones also lacked Flash support, iPhone users didn't feel they were missing something.

That's about to change. Through an initiative called the Open Screen Project, Adobe is revamping Flash to allow consumers to access by smartphone almost all multimedia content they can get on a PC. By the end of June, the company expects to have Flash version 10.1 available for a wide range of smartphones, including Palm's webOS phones, Research In Motion's BlackBerrys and devices running Android. The only major smartphone operating system missing from the list is Apple's iPhone OS.

iPhone users may not have worried much that their phones can't simultaneously run more than one application like other smartphones. But they soon may be unhappy that their phone can't access the videos and games that other phones can.

iPad owners may be even more unhappy. One thing people will want to do with Apple's new tablet device is access Web content. But if they can't watch a video on Hulu, play a game on Facebook or even look up ticket information for Cirque du Soleil, they may regret having bought an [iPad](#) instead of a netbook for \$150 less.

Apple says consumers often can download a native application that does the same thing as Flash. YouTube, for example, uses Flash to deliver its videos to PC Web browsers, but its iPhone app lets users watch those

videos without Flash.

But not every Web site has created an app -- nor should they have to. And even those that have often discovered that their iPhone apps can't interact easily with their Flash-based applications on the Web.

While Apple enjoys a huge lead in applications available for the iPhone, Flash support could help its competitors level the playing field. With Flash, those devices could offer games, videos and other content not available on the iPhone.

Mind you, I'm not discounting Jobs' complaints about Flash. Adobe's Lynch himself acknowledged that Flash has typically run faster in Microsoft Windows than in Apple's Macintosh OS, from which the iPhone OS is derived. I've seen numerous comments from rank-and-file Mac users that Flash slows down their machines and makes them unstable. So it would seem that Adobe does need to improve Flash for Apple devices.

But Jobs' assertion that Apple doesn't need to support Flash because it's on the way out is premature at best. While a new version of the language used to code Web pages does include Flash-like multimedia capabilities, the standard for doing that is still being hashed out. With only a fraction of Web surfers using browsers that can translate the language's new capabilities, few Web publishers are using them yet.

So Apple needs to support Flash in the iPhone OS -- or risk losing customers to other platforms that do. And Adobe needs Apple to support Flash -- or it will risk Flash losing favor with developers and advertisers who use the technology to deliver their content and want to reach those millions of iPhone owners.

But most of all, we iPhone OS users need Apple and [Adobe](#) to work

things out. Because we'll be missing out until they do.

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