

Without new iPhone, Apple iOS 5 more evolutionary than revolutionary

October 20 2011, By Troy Wolverton

Apple's latest update to its iOS software for iPhones, iPads and other handheld devices is more evolutionary than revolutionary, particularly if you're not getting it on the new iPhone 4S, which was released Friday.

iOS 5, which Apple made available early this month, has a lot of neat new features. But the most exciting one - the Siri voice-command system - is available only on the new [iPhone](#). Others, such as weather and stock [widgets](#), aren't available on the iPad.

Many of the other features, meanwhile, don't break new ground; instead, they represent an effort by Apple to catch up with the competition.

Still, the additions in iOS 5 are welcome and the update is well worth the time needed - about 90 minutes in my case - to download and install it.

One of the big themes of iOS 5 is to cut the cord that has long connected Apple [handheld devices](#) to Apple's [iTunes](#) software running on users' personal computers. With the new software, users can pretty much get by without ever plugging their iPad or iPhone into their PCs.

After installing iOS 5, users no longer have to connect them to a computer to get new operating system updates. They can just download them directly to their device. And should they want to back up their device to their computer, they can configure the iOS device to do so wirelessly whenever it is plugged into an outlet to recharge.

As part of this effort, Apple has added a number of services that link iOS 5 devices to its data servers on the Internet. iPads and [iPods](#) can save their backups to Apple's servers, rather than to a PC. Using a service called Photo Stream, Apple allows users to instantly and wirelessly transfer pictures they've taken on an iOS device to other such devices, their computers and to the Apple TV set-top box via its cloud service. Music that users purchase on an iOS device - or on their computer - is similarly synced automatically across devices through the conduit of Apple's [data servers](#).

This wireless integration works much like other services on other devices. Users of smartphones running Google's Android software have long been able to download updates directly to their devices without having to plug them into a PC, for example.

But even if they aren't original, these PC-free features of iOS 5 are very much appreciated. I had a lot of fun taking pictures of my daughter and my new cat and quickly being able to pull them up on my PC and on my TV via Apple TV without having to plug my iPad into my PC first.

One of the things I was most anticipating about iOS 5 was its revamped notification feature. Notifications, which alert you to such things as new text messages, requests to play multiplayer games and a low battery, have long been among the worst parts of the iOS software. In the past, users were alerted to new events with either a sound, a numerical badge attached to an application's icon or a pop-up message. None of the notification options were great, but the pop-up message was the worst because it interrupted whatever application you were using and wouldn't let you resume using it until you dismissed the message.

The new notification feature allows users to get alerts in a banner at the top of the screen. The banner quickly disappears without the user needing to dismiss it, so they can ignore it and go on playing their game

or typing an email.

If users want to review recent alerts, they can swipe down from the top of the screen and a virtual window shade will come down that includes the latest notifications from a variety of applications. Users can jump straight to an email message, a calendar event or a particular game by simply tapping on the notification.

The system looks a lot like the notification system that's been built into Google's Android software for years now. It's late in coming to iOS, but I'm glad it's finally here.

One of the coolest new feature of iOS 5 is AirPlay mirroring, which allows users to beam what's on their iOS device screen to their TV using Apple TV. It can be great for sharing a presentation or a Web page or allowing a friend watch you play a game without having to literally look over your shoulder.

Other app developers are starting to take this concept even farther. Instead of mirroring what's on the iPad, they are essentially creating two separate video streams, one that's on the iPad and one that's beamed to the TV.

In Pangea software's "Cro-Mag Rally," users play a racing game on their computer from a viewing perspective that's right behind the car their driving. On the TV screen, though, the game projects an image of the overall race, allowing viewers to see the race as if they were in the stands.

The developer's "Nanosaur 2" game is even more innovative. When hooked up to the [Apple TV](#), users can actually play the game on their TV, with the iPad used only as a game controller. When users tilt the iPad or press a virtual button on its screen, their flying dinosaur steers or

fires blasts on their TV screen.

It's not perfect; the video on my TV was a bit jittery and a little behind the actions I made on the iPad. The setup works much like Nintendo's Wii U game console that's expected out next year. I hope Apple and the developers work out the bugs by then.

APPLE IOS 5:

-Troy's rating: 8.0 (out of 10)

-Likes: Much-improved notification feature; wireless updates, backups and synchronization of photos and music; AirPlay mirroring allows users to play games, share videos on their TVs

-Dislikes: Siri voice-command feature is available only on iPhone 4S; weather and stock widgets not available on iPad; many features merely match - not surpass - those on other platforms

-Eligible devices: iPhone 3GS, iPhone 4, iPhone 4S; third- and fourth-generation iPod touch; iPad and [iPad 2](#)

-Price: Free

-Web: [apple.com](#)" target="_blank">www.[apple.com](#)

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