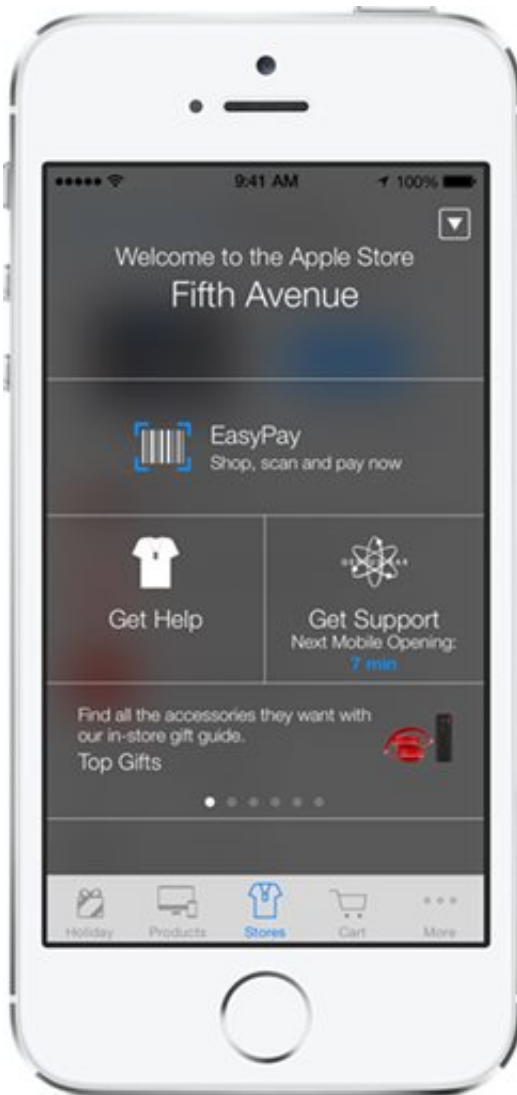


Apple guides shoppers inside stores with iBeacon (Update)

December 6 2013, by Barbara Ortutay



This undated photo provided by Apple shows the screen on an iPhone using Apple's iBeacon, offering precise location technology. On Friday, Dec. 6, 2013, Apple Inc. will begin using iBeacon, a part of its iOS 7 mobile software, to send

shoppers inside its U.S. stores messages about products, events and other information based where they are in the store. (AP Photo/Apple)

GPS will tell people how to get to the nearest Apple store. With iBeacon, Apple hopes to guide visitors around once they're inside, whether it's to pick up an order, upgrade to a new iPhone or shop for a pair of headphones.

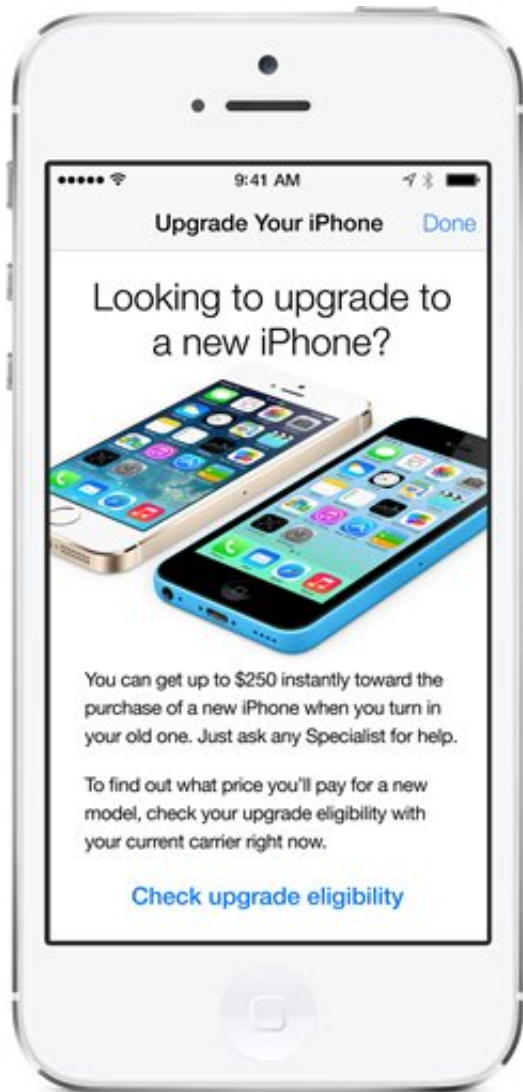
The implications of iBeacon go beyond Apple stores. One day, commuters might get information on subway delays as they stand on the platform, while museum visitors might get details on the painting they are standing in front of. Other retailers will be also able to offer deals or track which aisles shoppers linger in the longest.

In-store location technology does raise privacy concerns, though many shoppers have shown a willingness to be tracked if there's something in it for them.

"With any new technology, you don't know how it's going to be used until it is being used," technology analyst Rob Enderle said.

He said Apple "is pretty good" at getting people to use new technologies, but it could take years for iBeacon to mature and reach its potential. He said Google, Microsoft and other tech companies will likely follow suit with their own location technology.

On Friday, Apple Inc. began using the technology at its 254 U.S. stores to send people messages about products, events and other information—tailored to where they are inside, provided they have downloaded the Apple Store app and have given Apple permission to track them.



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Using the iBeacon feature, the app will notify shoppers if the computer they ordered is ready for pickup, for example. Show a clerk your screen with the order number, and the clerk will get it for you. Walking by an

iPhone table? You may get a message asking if you want to upgrade, check your upgrade availability and see if you can get money for trading in your old phone.

Major League Baseball already plans to use iBeacon next year to customize fans' experiences at its ballparks, through the At The Ballpark app. In a demo earlier this year, MLB officials showed how the app can offer special features based on users' location in a stadium, such as coupons in the souvenir shop or a video that plays near landmarks.

Apple demonstrated the technology to The Associated Press this week at its busy, 24-hour Fifth Avenue store in New York City. At this particular store, Apple has installed about 20 iBeacon transmitters, some of which are simply iPhones and iPads, which come with the capability as part of the iOS 7 mobile software released in September. The transmitters use Bluetooth wireless technology to sense your exact location. That's not possible with GPS, which don't work well indoors and aren't good at distinguishing between locations that are just a few feet apart.

The beacons can be adjusted to specific distances, so you may get some notifications regardless of where you are inside. Others will come only when you are standing at a particular aisle, wall or product demo table. The store can also send out notifications about deals or upcoming events.

Apple is not the first to offer in-store location technology. An app called Shopkick, for example, sends users discounts when they enter Macy's, J.C. Penney and other stores. But Apple's entry into micro-location puts the nascent technology into the hands of thousands of developers and broadens its reach considerably.

Apple said iBeacon provides apps with "a whole new level of micro-location awareness, such as trail markers in a park, exhibits in a museum, or product displays in stores."



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To take advantage of this, make sure you have Bluetooth enabled on your phone and download the Apple Store app. You'll have to agree to let Apple track your location and to receive notifications while in the

store. It'll only work if you say yes to both as you set up the app. In addition, your device must have Apple's latest operating system, iOS 7.

The app will automatically switch to "in-store mode" once you enter. Even without iBeacon, the app already lets you scan and pay for some items using your phone, get customer service help and reserve products.

Location tracking does raise privacy worries. After all, shoppers may not want their every move watched and recorded inside a store. Apple, however, said that it does not collect information about shoppers inside its stores. But other companies using iBeacon could, as long as people who download their apps agree to be tracked.

Privacy advocates have raised concerns about the various ways that retailers track shoppers, whether it's their location, purchase history or how often they visit a store. But consumers often agree to be tracked in exchange for discounts.

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