Review: Macs, mobile unite with Yosemite system

October 16 2014, by Anick Jesdanun

Craig Federighi, senior vice president of Software Engineering at Apple, discusses the new operating system update during an event at Apple headquarters on Thursday, Oct. 16, 2014 in Cupertino, Calif. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

(AP)—If you've upgraded your iPhone or iPad to iOS 8, the new software update for Mac computers will seem familiar.

The Yosemite update to Apple's OS X system, available as a free

download starting Thursday, adds several features to bring the Mac in line with last month's iOS 8 update for mobile devices. There's also new functionality to make Macs act more like iPhones.

Yosemite still has plenty of touches that make a Mac a Mac. But it continues a trend of breaking down barriers between the various devices as people depend more on smartphones and tablets for their everyday computing.

SEAMLESS

Let's say you're writing a lengthy email on your iPad and would prefer the Mac's keyboard. You can just click an icon on the lower left corner of the Mac and continue there. What you've already started on the iPad automatically appears on the Mac, including the "Sent from my iPad" footer.

It works with several other apps, too. The Safari Web browser opens to the specific page being viewed on the other device. The Maps app launches to the location you were viewing. This feature came in handy as I was chatting with a friend through Messages and got tired of pecking on the iPhone's small keyboard.

You can also start tasks on a Mac and continue on an iPhone or iPad.

HELLO!

Mac computers already come with a FaceTime app for videoconferencing, but that's limited to calling other FaceTime users. With Yosemite, you can make voice calls to anyone. Yosemite connects wirelessly to your iPhone to make and receive calls. The recipient sees Mac calls as coming from the iPhone's number.

You don't get video, and there's a slight lag with audio. In my tests, call quality was comparable to what you'd get over a speakerphone. It won't replicate a landline, but it's useful when your phone is charging in another room. The phone and the Mac must be on the same Wi-Fi network.

With the iOS 8.1 update coming Monday, you'll be able to send regular texts from the Mac, too. Currently, you're limited to reaching other Apple users through iMessage chats.

Craig Federighi, senior vice president of Software Engineering at Apple, far left, has a video chat with Stephen Colbert as he discusses the new operating system update during an event at Apple headquarters on Thursday, Oct. 16, 2014 in Cupertino, Calif. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

UNIVERSAL SEARCH

The Mac's Spotlight feature already is good about finding various documents on your computer, no matter where you stored them. Yosemite goes further by pulling related items from the Web as well, similar to a feature Microsoft introduced last year with Windows 8.1.

A search for "Lady Gaga" got me not just an email receipt for an album I bought (I'm busted!), but also her Wikipedia entry, Twitter account and other albums I can buy on iTunes. A search for "Empire State Building" delivered news and map results. I can get directions with just one click.

SIMPLER BROWSING

Web browsers have gotten more powerful over the years, but added functionality also leads to complexity. The Safari browser that comes with Yosemite simplifies all that by consolidating many basic functions into a single box.

While most browsers now combine the box for Web addresses and search, Safari moves bookmarks and frequently visited sites there, too. A menu pops out when you click there, with choices that sync with those on your iPhone and other devices. And as you type in search terms, you also get Spotlight's Web suggestions.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

On iOS devices, you can swipe down from the top to get nuggets to help you through the day—calendar appointments, weather conditions, stock quotes and more. Now, you can do that on the Mac as well by pulling out the Today panel from the right.

Preferences sync with your mobile devices, though content will vary. For instance, I noticed the iPhone gave me weather for the current location,

while Yosemite offered me additional choices based on past settings. I'm also able to add tools such as a calculator to the Today panel, so I no longer have to dig for it in the recesses of the Mac's Dashboard.

MORE VERSATILE STORAGE

Apple's iCloud online storage service has been mostly useful for sharing and syncing music, photos and other documents among Apple apps on various Apple devices. With iCloud Drive, you can do that with non-Apple apps and Windows computers, too. Just move files to a special Mac folder for syncing. It's similar to what Dropbox and other storage services offer.

For iOS 8 [mobile devices](), though, developers need to tweak individual apps to take advantage of it. That's just starting to happen. Android devices aren't supported at all.

A related feature lets you send large attachments through the Mac's Mail app without clogging your recipient's inbox. Attachments get uploaded to iCloud, without counting against your storage quota. Your email then includes a link instead of the massive file. I was able to open a 27-second video clip of kangaroos on Windows, but not Android.

TIME TO UPGRADE?

Yosemite works with all Macs introduced since 2009 and some older ones, too.

If you use a lot of obscure or specialty software, you might want to check first to make sure it's compatible with Yosemite. If you mostly use Apple software and services, you're not likely to encounter problems because Apple tested Yosemite with Apple users more extensively than

before.

It's free, so why not?

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