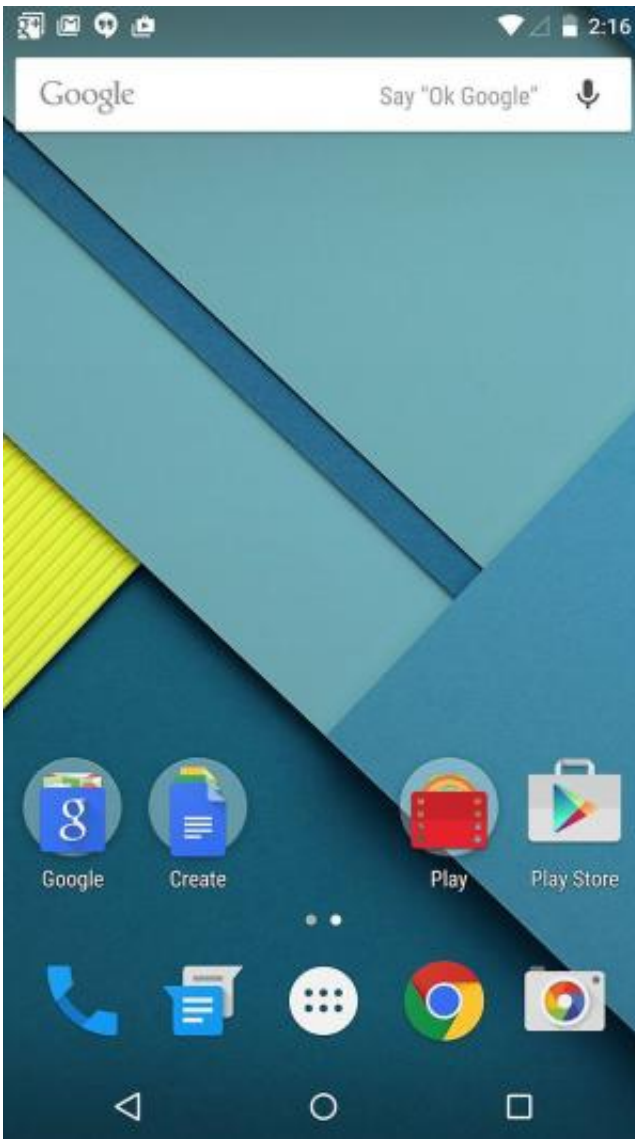# Review: Android Lollipop gives Google operating system a sweet new look

February 19 2015, by Troy Wolverton, San Jose Mercury News

Traditionally, the best word to describe Google's Android operating system has been "utilitarian." The engineers behind the world's leading mobile platform have long emphasized features over aesthetics.

But that may be starting to change. In its latest version, dubbed Lollipop, which has just started to roll out to older phones and tablets, the look and feel of Android and its primary apps get a major overhaul.

Google calls the new look in Android 5.0 "Material Design." It's marked by brighter colors, a "flatter" but layered look to applications and icons, and greater emphasis on clear and legible text.

The new design borrows ideas from the flat look that Apple introduced to its mobile operating system in iOS 7 and the interface Microsoft designed for its Windows Phone software. Android remains distinct from both, but it now appears to be in the same family.

For example, when you turn on Lollipop's new "battery saver" mode, the notification bar at the top of the screen and the taskbar at bottom turn a bright orange. The look is reminiscent of how the notification bar turns green in iOS when you are on a call or blue when you turn on its personal hotspot feature.

Similarly, many of the Google-designed apps in Lollipop have a unique color in their menu bars that serves to distinguish them from other apps. While Gmail's accent color is red, the one for the contacts app is blue.

The net result is an operating system that feels less like something designed by engineers for engineers and more like something that is lively, fun and accessible to non-techies.

Google made some other design changes in Lollipop. One is to how Android displays open applications when you want to switch between

them. In previous versions, when you pressed the "overview" button to see which applications you had running, Android would display a vertical list of thumbnail images of those programs. With Lollipop, Android displays them like a carousel, with the app windows stacked one on top of another. I prefer the new look, because it allows you to see more of the open apps at once.

Google has also revamped the quick settings feature in Android. It's still available in the notifications area, but it's now accessible by swiping down twice from the top of the screen. It also includes some new settings, such as the ability to turn on a smartphone's hotspot feature or to turn on a device's flash to use it as a flashlight.

To be sure, Google did more in Lollipop than revamp Android's look. The updated software also includes lots of new features.

Among them are a greater amount of options and controls for notifications. Android users can now respond to alerts that display on their lock screen. They can turn on a privacy feature that allows notifications to be displayed on the lock screen, but blocks their content, such as the actual message in a text message. And they can turn on a mode that will only display alerts from particular people and apps.

One of the cool new features of Android is that it gives users more options in how to share their devices with others.

Android tablets have been able to support multiple user accounts for a while now. With Lollipop, Android smartphones gain the same ability, allowing consumers to access their own contacts and other data on a friend or family member's phone. Lollipop also allows users to create guest accounts on both smartphones and tablets that can access any apps, but none of the personal data on them.

Of note for parents, the new software has a related feature that allows users to "pin" a particular app to the screen so that a child, say, can't use any other apps or see anything else on the device. That might be helpful if your kid wants to play a game on your phone, but you don't want them to see your email or reconfigure your home screen.

These types of features - support for multiple users and the ability to easily restrict access to younger users - are ones that I've long wished Apple would build into iOS.

Google has also enhanced the security in Android. In Lollipop, encryption is turned on by default; previously, it was hard to know that you could use it to protect your data, because to turn it on, you had to find it deep within the system's settings. While Android's ability for apps to work together fairly seamlessly was a selling point over iOS until recently, it's also been a vulnerability, potentially allowing malware to gain access to important functions on the device.

In Lollipop, Google limits the access particular programs have to the underlying functions; your apps should still be able to work together, but they should pose a lot less of a threat to the functioning of your phone.

As with any new version of Android, the big questions for users are when they will be able to get the new software and the degree to which phone manufacturers will customize it. Although Lollipop has started to become available to certain Android devices, there are lots that still can't get it. When I tried several days ago to download it to two Android smartphones I've been testing - Samsung's Galaxy Note Edge and Sharp's Aquos Crystal - it wasn't available.

Meanwhile, few electronics manufacturers offer an unadulterated Android experience. Unless you have one of Google's Nexus devices, you may not see many of the cool new interface features in Lollipop.

Overall, Lollipop is a sweet new update. With both good looks and cool features, it's well worth downloading if you can get it.

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What: Android 5.0 Lollipop operating system update

Likes: New, more colorful look and feel; new support for multiple users on smartphones and guest users on both smartphones and tablets; ability to lock device on one particular application; default encryption of user data.

Dislikes: Ability to download update varies by device and manufacturer; likewise, support for particular features will likely vary from device to device.

Price: Free

Web: [android](#).com

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