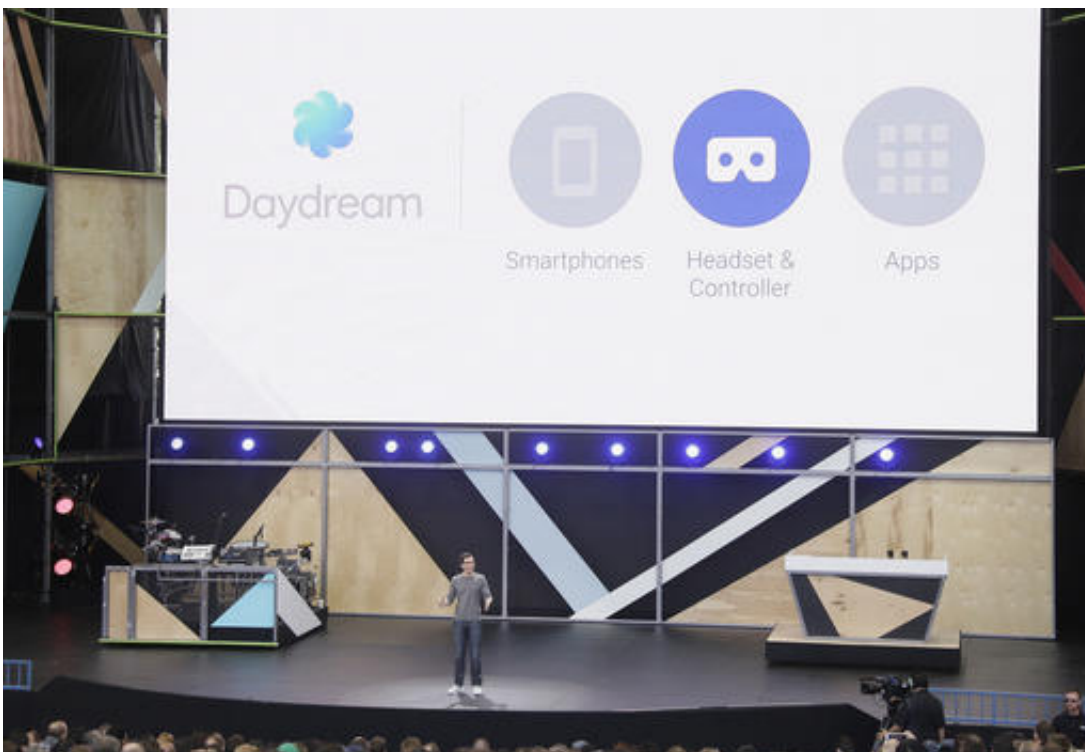


The Latest: Google seen ahead in some areas, no so in others

May 18 2016



Clay Bavor, Google vice president of virtual reality, talks about Daydream and virtual reality during the keynote address of the Google I/O conference, Wednesday, May 18, 2016, in Mountain View, Calif. Google unveiled its vision for phones, cars, virtual reality and more during its annual conference for software developers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

The Latest from Google's software conference (all times local):

1:45 p.m.

Google is catching up to competitors Facebook, Apple and Amazon in messaging, video calling and home speaker-embedded digital assistants. But it's taking the lead in virtual reality and may have changed mobile phones forever with a new twist on mobile apps that allows them to play without being installed.

That's the conclusion of Jan Dawson, an analyst with Jackdaw Research, who was at the Google I/O annual developers conference Wednesday in Mountain View, California.

Dawson said Google's new Allo app focuses on the search giant's strengths in search and natural language recognition, but may have come too late behind bigger rivals to gain much use.

In a research note he praised Google's new Daydream virtual reality platform, but noted it'll take time to become popular because the high bar for specifications means no devices can support it yet.

He also said the introduction of Android Instant Apps has "the potential to significantly change" the way apps work. Apps updated to the system can be made available to older Android operating systems covering 95 percent of active users today.

12:05 p.m.

It can be a pain to install phone apps you know you'll use just once or twice.

Google's answer to that: Android Instant Apps.

The app runs on Google's servers instead of your phone. Only the parts you need get sent to your phone on an as-needed basis.

If it works as Google envisions, without lags and other annoyances, users won't have to spend a few minutes downloading and installing that app and having it take up valuable space on the phone.

The app maker needs to enable this feature, though.

Google unveiled the feature at its annual conference for software developers in Mountain View, California.

11:30 a.m.

Google's stepping further into the virtual world.

It announced a new platform for virtual reality called Daydream, and said manufacturers including Samsung, HTC and Huawei would have smartphones capable of handling it this fall.

The platform, included in its upcoming Android N operating system, is meant to improve upon the experience of Cardboard, which Google launched two years ago, by making virtual-reality experiences that are more comfortable, higher quality and more immersive.

Google said it had created a reference design for a headset that a partner manufacturer would have ready for the fall, and designs for a new controller that has a few buttons, a touchpad, and sensors that track its orientation and where it's pointing.

In a demonstration for some 7,000 attendees at its Google I/O

conference in Mountain View, California, the Internet search giant showed how the controller could be used to flip digital pancakes, throw things, cast a virtual fishing line and fly a digital dragon.

11:15 a.m.



Google vice president Mario Queiroz holds up the new Google Home device during the keynote address of the Google I/O conference, Wednesday, May 18,

2016, in Mountain View, Calif. Google unveiled its vision for phones, cars, virtual reality and more during its annual conference for software developers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Google is adding a few more features to the next version of its Android operating system in an attempt to outshine Apple's iPhone.

The company is promising better graphic and battery performance. It's also adopting a security approach that lets you encrypt specific files rather than the whole phone.

Google released Android N to developers two months ago, but still hasn't specified when it will be ready for consumers. The company previously revealed that Android N will offer a split-screen feature so users can toggle between apps more easily. It also will enable users to reply directly to notifications, something iPhones already allow.

Apple's split-screen feature works only with iPad tablets, not iPhones.

Research firm Gartner says nearly 1.3 billion smartphones running on Android are expected to be sold this year compared with a projected 231,000 iPhones.

The updates were touted Wednesday at Google's annual conference for software developers in Mountain View, California.

10:50 a.m.

A messaging app that incorporates Google's new voice assistant? Say

"hello" to Allo.

The company unveiled the new app at its annual conference for software developers in Mountain View, California, on Wednesday. The app, available this summer on both Android and rival Apple phones, allows chatting partners to look up restaurant options and even book a table right in the app.

It also gives users an array of emojis and stickers and the option to increase or decrease the size of text to add emphasis.

Allo also gives a range of automated responses to questions and even photos, recognizing things like food and dog breeds.

In a smack at Snapchat, Allo also features an "incognito" mode that adds end-to-end encryption and allows a person to set a timer on when their chat messages disappear.

10:30 a.m.

Following in Amazon's footsteps, Google is unveiling a smart home assistant that lets people listen to music and podcasts, as well as manage tasks such as setting alarms and compiling shopping lists, throughout their home.

Called Google Home, the Internet-connected device lets users control it with their voice to listen to music and control lights and thermostats in the home, for example.

Mario Queiroz, a vice president at Google, says the sleek, flower pot-like device also lets you ask Google about "anything you want."

Google says that unlike other home assistants, Home will work with other speakers in the house too.

In the future, Google says the device could let users control things outside of their home too.

The company has not yet named a price, but says it will be available later this year. Sounds familiar? Home echoes Amazon's Echo, a voice-controlled smart speaker.

9 a.m.

Google's bare-bones entry into the still-nascent field of virtual reality came two years ago when it unveiled a cheap headset made out of cardboard.

The company may now be poised to get more serious, given far more sophisticated options available for sale, including the Oculus Rift from rival Facebook.



David Singleton, Google vice president of engineering, talks about updates to Android Wear during the keynote address of the Google I/O conference, Wednesday, May 18, 2016, in Mountain View, Calif. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Analysts are touting virtual reality, a technology that casts its users into artificial, three-dimensional worlds, as one of the industry's most promising areas for growth.

Google is keeping plans for Wednesday's software conference under wraps, but the agenda offers several hints: Virtual reality and artificial intelligence, or "machine learning," will be among the focal points.

The three-day conference is taking place in Mountain View, California.

7:40 a.m.

While virtual reality and artificial intelligence are expected to be big, the core of Google's annual conference is its software—namely the Android system powering 80 percent of the world's smartphones.

Google's three-day conference, called Google I/O, starts Wednesday in Mountain View, California.

Google gives Android away for free to device makers. Google designs it to highlight its search engine, maps and other features, giving the company more opportunities to sell the digital ads that generate most of its revenue.

The bias toward Google's own services is now the subject of antitrust investigation by European regulators trying to determine whether the company is stifling competition in the increasingly important mobile market.

Besides updates for the phone, Google is likely to unveil new features coming to other gadgets such as Android Wear smartwatches and possibly Android TV streaming devices.

2 a.m.

Google's mobile payment service, Android Pay, is coming to the U.K., marking its first expansion outside the U.S.

On Wednesday, Google joins Apple Pay, which launched in the U.K. nearly a year ago.

With both services, users merely tap a phone next to a store's payment reader to charge a credit or debit card. But it works only with stores that have newer wireless readers called NFC.

Another challenge has been persuading consumers that it's easier than pulling out a plastic card for payment.

Apple Pay is also in China, Canada, Australia and Singapore, with Hong Kong and Spain to come. Google says Android Pay will expand to Singapore and Australia this year.

Android Pay's expansion comes as Google holds its annual conference for software developers in Mountain View, California.

9 p.m. Thursday

Google is expected to dive deeper into virtual reality and artificial intelligence during an annual conference that serves as a launching pad for its latest products and innovations.

The three-day Google I/O conference in Mountain View, California, starts Wednesday.

Google is keeping its plans under wraps, but the conference agenda makes it clear that virtual reality and artificial intelligence, or "machine learning," will be among the focal points.

That has spurred speculation that Google will release a virtual-reality device to compete with Facebook's new Oculus Rift headset, as well as Samsung's Gear VR. Analysts also believe Google may release an artificial-intelligent gadget to compete with Amazon's Echo, which is a

cylinder-like device that includes a virtual assistant named Alexa.

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