

Cutting the cord: Apple pulls the earphone jack

September 8 2016, by Erwan Lucas



A pair of the new Apple AirPods are seen during a launch event on September 7, 2016 in San Francisco, California

The venerable earphone jack looks destined for the same technological graveyard where the Walkman and the rotary telephone now lie after Apple nudged wireless audio closer to mass-market adoption.

The Silicon Valley giant eliminated the earphone jack from its new

iPhone 7, unveiled on Wednesday, in order to make the phone water resistant and sleeker.

And while users have long called for Apple to make the iPhone able to survive an accidental spill, the move provoked a firestorm of chatter on social networks about the loss of a standard piece of equipment that connects everything from phones, hi-fi players, computers, tablets and airline entertainment systems.

Tech website ZD Net noted that in the six hours following Apple's unveiling of the latest update of its trend-setting product, the elimination of the earphone jack generated over 150,000 tweets, over 50 percent more than the new Apple Watch.

'Rage-pee'

"The new iPhone not having a headphone jack is the worst idea of all time," wrote one user on Twitter.

"No headphone jack makes me so mad I could rage-pee all over my new phone," fumed another.

And it is not only iPhone owners who are faced with the prospect of having to go wireless.

"We know from past experience that innovations however small brought in by Apple are then taken on board by the industry as whole," said Imran Choudhary at market research firm GfK.

He said rival manufacturers may even try to compete by enticing users with wireless headphones, which accounted for less than 15 percent of \$11.7 billion in earphone and headphone sales last year by value according to a report by Global Market Insights.



Apple Senior Vice President of Worldwide Marketing Phil Schiller introduces a Lightning to 3.5 mm audio jack adapter during a launch event on September 7, 2016 in San Francisco, California

But the earphone jack, which dates back nearly 150 years and took its 3.5 mm form in the 1980s with the boom in Walkman cassette players, may not be obsolete just yet.

"It's true that it is a connector that has been around a while, tracing its origins to Bell telephones," said sound engineer Dominique Blanc-Francard.

"But it became a mass market product because it is robust and more practical" than other technologies.

The humble jack's ubiquity may thus ensure that it endures a bit longer even in the rapidly changing technological sector.

And then there is the question of sound quality.

While the industry has been moving towards better quality for digital audio, Blanc-Francard noted that most wireless on the market was still mono.

Sound issues prompted Walkman inventor Sony to use the larger headphone jack connection—mostly found on upscale hi-fi systems—in its latest top-end Walkman phones to ensure the best sound.

But in a nod to changing trends, Sony also included top of the line wireless audio, much liked by users who use their phones as music players during their daily run or in the gym.

And sound engineer Blanc-Francard says wireless sound is getting better all the time.

So the earphone jack may well be destined to hit the road and, like the song says, "never come back no more".

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