

Sierra update arrives on Macs: Four things to look for

September 20 2016, by Anick Jesdanun



In this Monday, June 13, 2016, file photo, Craig Federighi, Apple senior vice president of software engineering, speaks about Mac OS Sierra at the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference in the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco. The Sierra update to Mac computers brings iPhone services to desktops and laptops and further breaks down walls between devices. It also borrows an iPad feature for watching video while you work and offers ways to automatically free up storage space. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar, File)

The latest software update for Mac computers, MacOS Sierra, brings

iPhone services to Apple laptops and desktops and further breaks down walls between devices. It also borrows an iPad feature for watching video while you work and offers ways to automatically free up storage space.

The free update is available Tuesday through the Mac's app store. If you have any crucial third-party software or accessories, you might want to hold off until you verify that they will work properly with Sierra. Check with the software or accessory maker, or look for any complaints online. Be sure to back up your data before upgrading.

Once you have Sierra, here are things to look for:

IPHONE COMES TO THE MAC

Sierra brings two features already found on iPhones: the Siri virtual assistant and Apple Pay.

Siri can help with directions, web searches, reminders and even Mac-specific commands, such as putting the Mac to sleep. I find it odd, though, to talk to a computer, so I still use the keyboard and trackpad most of the time. Unlike Microsoft's Cortana assistant on Windows computers, however, Siri won't take typed requests in public settings such as coffee shops; all you can do is talk to her.

Where Siri helps is in letting me pin results to the Mac's notification center, so I can continually get baseball standings and scores after asking Siri just once. I can also drag and drop Siri results such as weather and maps into email, Word documents and other apps.

Apple's payment service, meanwhile, now works with websites that

enable it, although you'll still need an iPhone or Apple Watch nearby to complete the transaction. Apple Pay saves you the trouble of re-entering credit card and shipping information.

The Photos app is getting new search and highlights options to match updates in iOS 10, the a href='https://apnews.com/211b2659758546bd90efd689408d63c7/6-key-things-to-know-about-Apple's-new-iOS-10-software'iPhone system update/a released last week. As with iOS 10, Messages on the Mac gets larger emojis and previews of web pages, rather than raw links. It also gets the ability to display, but not create, some of the expression options introduced in iOS 10.

DEVICES WORK AS ONE

Apple's devices now all work together much better, though you'll only notice if you have an iPhone or Apple Watch in addition to a Mac. When you copy text or an image from one device, you can paste it in another signed in to the same Apple ID.

This feature proved crucial on a train when I typed a passage in a Word document but didn't have Wi-Fi to send it in before a deadline. I copied the passage with the usual Command-C combination. I then pasted it into email on the iPhone with the usual long press on the screen. I sent that in with the phone's cellular connection. My boss didn't need to know I wasn't in the office yet.

It works the other way, too. When I see an interesting website on the phone, I can paste a relevant passage into a Mac document without revisiting the site.

And if you have an Apple Watch, you can now unlock the Mac simply

by waking up the computer with the watch on. No more typing in passwords. Setting that up took time because the Mac required that I tighten my Apple ID security settings first, but now the Mac unlocks instantly.

SAVING SPACE

Sierra brings several space-saving features, including the automatic deletion of files from the trash can after 30 days. Normally, you need to manually empty the trash can every now and then.

As space runs low, the Mac will also remove files you can get again online—namely, iTunes video and email attachments. If you choose to sync your desktop and document folder through iCloud, the Mac will also delete older files and keep them online only. You'll still see the file on the Mac, but when you open it, the Mac will retrieve it from iCloud, presuming you're online.

VIDEO ON THE MAC

A picture-in-picture feature, already in iPads for a year, lets you watch video in a small window that stays on top, even as you move windows around. It works with iTunes and some Safari video.

In fact, as I wrap up this story, I'm watching the movie "Inside Out" in a corner.

No spoilers, please.

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