

Interview Report

Introduction

I chose to conduct a mock interview for the role of Software Engineer on the Apple Pay Team at Apple Inc., linked [here](#) (Role Number 200435799). The company is looking for experienced hires with deep technical knowledge and demonstrated teamworking abilities. Consequently, this role will provide a strong basis for the mock interview since a wide range of questions are able to be asked, and the answers would be stringently criticized.

Rhetorical Analysis of The Job Role

Apple's reputation as the epitome of technological luxury is reflected in their digital job advertisements, both from their use of rhetoric and general design. The role specifically being explored, as mentioned in the introduction, is that of a "Software Engineer" position on the "Apple Pay" team.

Visually, the webpage is simple. There are no images, and all sections are center-aligned and use similar fonts. This design pattern emulates the consumer-facing side of Apple - subtly elegant through its use of minimalism. It perhaps focuses more on the functionality of the site than some of its other web pages given the monochromaticity. Additionally, this format makes it easy to use screen readers, which might be an outcome of their commitment to accessibility and equal opportunity.

There are 5 distinct sections in the ad (in order of reading from top to bottom): Summary, Key Qualifications, Description, Education & Experience, and Additional Requirements. This ordering is unique among MAANG companies; generally, "Descriptions" precede Key Qualifications. This shows how Apple prioritizes more measurably qualified individuals than those who demonstrate passion and product interest. However, the ad is also linguistically rhetorically heavy, asking for 'talent' and 'dedication'. Apple is targeting 'highly motivated' engineers with a 'track record of successful projects'. Apple's standards for their new hires are high, especially for this role which specifically highlights deliverables being 'key to the Apple Pay stack'. This works to both excite and intimidate applicants. Therefore, it can be expected that the interview process is rigorous and comparatively more difficult than similar roles at other firms.

Generally, there are correlations between this job ad and other job ads in the industry, with the notable exception of technical expectations being more oriented toward Apple and Apple-adjacent software. There aren't many similar products to Apple Pay in the MAANG ecosystem, so it is likely that the position attracts a lot of talent for those interested in payments and fintech in general. Therefore, they are not necessarily competing for an audience with this role and can rely on their reputation to continue to attract applicants while maintaining a high standard for success in this position.

Mock Interviewer Question Selection and Rationale

The following are the questions selected to conduct the mock interview for the preceding software engineering position. They were retrieved from a question bank of known behavioral and technical questions historically asked by Apple recruiters.

1. What is your favorite Apple device? Why?

The first question was chosen because the interviewer would likely be looking for specific interest in the Apple ecosystem, and product knowledge is a good indicator of that. The justification for the candidates' preference may be consumer- or technically- focused since both ways of answering can be compared against apple's corporate objectives.

2. Describe an interesting problem and how you solved it.

The second question is looking to fulfill the part of the job niche explicitly stated in the ad, "a proven ability to solve problems, interest in continuous learning and digging deep into the domain when necessary". This question also explores the candidate's ability to explain technical problems.

3. Are you creative? What's something creative that you can think of?

This a curve ball question. It's imperative and direct. There isn't a clear 'correct' answer, which may intimidate candidates. It aims to fill the 'something special/unique' criterion in a hiring manager's checklist. Apple will likely be looking for someone with new ideas that can help contribute to the organization's consistent innovation.

4. What will you miss at your current work if Apple hired you?

This question's function is twofold. It highlights what the candidate particularly values in their workplace while also revealing what they expect Apple is missing as a whole. This can thus serve to show their holistic understanding of the company and if they will be a good fit for their potential team.

5. There are three boxes, one contains only apples, one contains only oranges, and one contains both apples and oranges. The boxes have been incorrectly labeled such that no label identifies the actual contents of the box it labels. Opening just one box, and without looking in the box, you take out one piece of fruit. By looking at the fruit, how can you immediately label all of the boxes correctly

Naturally, no interview is complete without some sort of brain teaser or technical question. While a programming assignment is out of the scope of this mock interview, a short brain teaser is appropriate to complete the immersion process into the environment we're emulating.

Mock Interviewer Candidate Feedback¹

The candidate performed well during the mock interview. Their responses followed the STAR method loosely, which enabled them to answer the questions to a satisfying extent while also keeping the responses unique and ‘fresh’. Their response to the final question was particularly clever and demonstrated the creative thinking they claimed to have in their answer to question three.

In question one, the candidate chose the Apple AirPods as their preferred product. This was a good choice for them. They were able to eloquently explain the user story of the product and how that differentiates it from other similar devices. Additionally, they showed an understanding of how the AirPods reflect Apple’s values, which demonstrates that they are capable of integrating this phenomenon into their work.

In questions two and four, the candidate demonstrated how much they valued the people they worked with and how keen they were on fostering a friendly and collaborative environment. Unfortunately, the response to question two remained undeveloped as the question explicitly asked: “... how you solved it”. They described the problem of creating positive work environments, but not their solution. Instead, they described it as an abstract iterative process. It would have been better to use a more concrete example here. However, in question four, they expanded on this collaboration process and included more personal experiences that showed how they would carry this value into Apple.

In question three, the candidate did not answer the latter half of the question (Multipart questions seem to be a recurring issue), “What’s something creative that you can think of?” but did provide a unique definition of creativity. They are mainly focused on the big picture in the creative process and want to go “Beyond the Code”. Again, something concrete would have helped argue their case. However, their one-sentence answer to the final question was both cocky and technically correct and showed that they are capable of this type of out-of-the-box thinking.

A follow-up interview seems necessary. The candidate demonstrated some strong qualities and is an effective communicator. Nevertheless, it is still unclear whether these values align with the company’s values and the goal of the follow-up would be to extract some concrete examples of problem-solving to see how they function in real world scenarios.

¹ See Appendix A for candidate’s responses to mock questions

Mock Interviewee Reflection²

During my role as the interviewee, I was surprised that I was asked two negatively-framed questions back-to-back. One was about disagreement and the other about failure. This suggested that the environment I would be working in could be unpleasant. Additionally, this exposed some weaknesses in my preparation as I maintain a list of examples to use for behavioral questions, but most of them are positively framed. Luckily, I was able to integrate the concept of “failing fast” because of how the question was phrased, which I know is a corporate buzzword that tends to be well-received.

On the theme of “failure”, I also find myself thinking back to my Pecha-Kucha briefly; It was on planned obsolescence. In other words, planned device failure. It seems that there is a thematic element regarding failure in the Apple workplace. This made it difficult to answer the “why do you want to work at Apple” question because, candidly, I did not want to. As a result, I focused more on their reputation rather than my personal interest in the company when answering questions, which may have weakened the quality of my response. In addition, I used heavy technical jargon when possible, to convey my qualifications for this role. It is unclear if this was an effective strategy in general because it is highly dependent on who I’m interviewing with and whether there is a dialogue between us instead of a stricter back-and-forth.

The final question was about customer obsession. This was a strange question because Apple is unique among MAANG in that “customer obsession” in any form is part of their values. In fact, the word “customer” is not present at all. Instead, they focus on “people” and “individuality”. While this may make Apple product consumers feel more appreciated, I felt like these questions did not fully align well with their outward-facing image. This leads me to believe that being an employee at Apple is not as glamorous as being a customer of the company.

² See Appendix B for my responses to mock questions

Appendix

Appendix A: Answers Received as Mock Interviewer

1. The apple airpods. Apple is a company that prides itself on taking the time to really work out a product, not rushing to push it to market. The earphone space was once dominated by wires, then slowly bluetooth earbuds started becoming the norm. Companies like Samsung and Sony had released their own versions which were pretty substantial products in themselves and people enjoyed. Apple didn't worry though, taking the time to design a product that would provide the perfect user experience, from pairing, to connecting and listening to music. The product design itself, a sleek magnetic case with 2 separate earbuds was good looking and desirable for the consumer. Audio quality was along the same lines, providing an amazing experience compared to the other devices in the same area that had problems with grainy audio quality. The UI for connectivity made it so the user never had to open up the settings app, making their flow to start listening to music much quicker. Overall the airpods in every way resemble the way Apple works and does things, with thought and determination as to what would be the best experience for the user.
2. Managing a developer group to the utmost ability and efficiency. In my past positions this is something that I have had to do many times over with various people. It is something which intrigues me because each group is necessary for a different application or feature and thus each problem needs to be addressed in its own way. I have not been able to solve the problem of how to create the perfect setting for people to work together and collaborate but each time I attempt to do better and better. Making mistakes along the way I have been able to prevent them in the future by understanding them and how they were formed. There is a little bit of psychology in this as well as one must understand how people function which also is a task with such varying examples. Some people are more inquisitive or like to share more and all these strengths should be utilized, not suppressed. Working with others is a necessary part of getting things done and especially in the world of technology, getting things done correctly, and so it is something that I am always striving to do better at.
3. Yes I am creative. My creativity is something that I pride myself on because it extends beyond areas that one would typically define as creative such as art or design. Creativity can be seen in processes, in management, in understanding how things work. In all of these areas and more I employ my creativity to come up with good solutions, understanding the problem space and figuring out the best approach to conquer it. Going beyond the code and understanding the people working on it and how to bring them together is one area that I can see myself succeeding in with this position. Coming up with ways to have each person share their ideas and form creative collaboration is part of the process that sets the tone for the rest of it. From here people will do honest work and provide you with honest feedback. Never staying stagnant in one type of methodology is especially important for continuous innovation and creative development.
4. I will definitely miss the people and the environment to which I contributed so much time and thought. I believe in giving your all wherever you are no matter what your next step is and I feel as though I can say that I did this in my last position. This is partially due to the amazing people who allowed me to foster both good and bad ideas and get constructive feedback on both allowing me to learn a lot. My boss always gave me the ability to provide my input and be truly honest with what I thought was the best path to follow and this while nerve wracking at times provided a perfect sandbox for me to succeed and fail, learning from both along the way. Each place I have been has given me something to keep for the future, and this last company taught me so many skills which I am thrilled to possibly bring to Apple.
5. Mix all the boxes into one and apply all 3 labels to that one box.

Appendix B: Answers Given as Mock Interviewee

1. Why do you want to work for Apple?

I want to work at Apple because Apple drives innovation. There are very few places one can work and confidently say they build a product that touches the lives of many people. There is only one place to work where one can confidently say that *changes* the live of many people. With this intense responsibility, I desire to use my skillset as a programmer to improve user's quality of lives in never-before seen ways.

2. How would you resolve a disagreement with your manager about a key decision?

I would resolve a disagreement with my manager depending on the key decision. For example, At my previous firm, I worked on a project requiring a choice of programming frameworks. The manager believed we should use x, while I believed we should use y. We used our time in daily stand up to debate the topic, and ultimately decided to use y because my experience using the product would allow us to free resources that can be used to improve other facets of the project. In other situations where a decision is more wholistically business sensitive, unless I have a very specific reason to disagree with my manager, I trust their ability to choose the correct path for the team

3. How would you recover from a situation of total failure?

Total failure is a hard situation to be in, there is always something to be gained from the work you do. The key to failing successfully is to fail fast. For example, I worked on an exciting product x that was overcome with scope creep, and the project needed to be cut. We worked to quickly built out an MVP to demonstrate to management to show the most promising facets of the project. As a result, while this product 'failed', we were able to actually use some of the features and reuse some code in other projects at the company.

4. Share about a time when you went above and beyond for a customer.

One time I went above and beyond for a customer was during my time working on an internal dashboard for my previous firm. In this case, the customer was my firm. The project was fairly low scope, but I realized this dashboard had potential to relieve pressure off some of QA's key responsibilities. After discussing my proposal with my manager, I was able to recruit a small team of my own to work on building a more modular and integrated dashboard that the organization loved. It continues to be used, and provided business value well beyond the initial scope of the project with a limited increase in time commitment.