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Apple Engineers Don't Have an AI Problem



Pen Magnet

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The creator is no longer in charge



Photo by [rishi](#) on [Unsplash](#)

In my teens, I developed a trick to amaze my friends: I made up acronyms.
One of my favorite gems:

| *HTML: Hold on Till Microsoft Loses*

That reminds me of yet another acronym, AI — Apple Intelligence.

Generative AI has been with us for three long years — a very long time in a disruptive era.

For reference: When the App Store was launched in July 2008, Google Play (Android market then) quickly followed in just 3 months: September 2008.

So what exactly is Apple doing?

Apple is buying time:

Every time a LLM model fails a benchmark, Apple fanboys (**Disclaimer:** I was one some years ago) are quick to highlight the old guy's wisdom: See, that's why Apple isn't doing AI.

Soon, they get on their free Apple advocacy service desk.

Let's dissect them one by one.

#1: AI is far from accurate:

Apple's widely circulated paper, The illusion of Thinking, was initially hailed by AI deniers. Apple concluded that there was no *reasoning* going on in the so-called *reasoning* LLMs:

We found that LLMs have limitations in exact computation: they fail to use explicit algorithms and reason inconsistently across scales and problems.

However, soon after, Anthropic released a rival paper parodying Apple: "The illusion of illusion of Thinking":

Their central finding - that model accuracy "collapses" to zero beyond certain complexity thresholds - has significant implications for AI reasoning research.

However, our analysis reveals that these apparent failures stem from experimental design choices rather than inherent model limitations.

Apple eventually got mocked — not just by the data science community, but also by mainstream AI consumers. Not that its findings were meaningless, but that Apple's entire perception of the AI-driven world was misplaced.

No one thought AI was powerful enough to handle the complexities of arbitrary magnitude. Even primary school kids know that AI hallucinates.

But just think how much weight this claim holds today, against the time of the ChatGPT launch. In only two years, how many AI skeptics changed sides to join the GenAI early adopters' camp?

The answer lies here: The market has comfortably allowed 2 dominant players besides OpenAI: Google and Anthropic.

Apple isn't a hardware company. It is a company that sells experiences via its hardware: iPhones, iPads, iWatches, and Vision Pro. Netflix and Disney also do it, without selling their own devices, and do it quite well.

If Apple were held back by the apparent lack of LLMs' accuracy, it would be making the same mistake Google made by sitting on its own invention during 2017 and 2022, only with much more to lose.

#2: The “Something big up its sleeve” Theory:

Apple is known for its secrecy. However, this is a marketing relic that has died with Steve Jobs. In Jobs' era, it paid off, because in the end, it unleashed

some fundamental change that justified the silence and the wait.

I once dreamed of developing apps for Vision Pro. When it launched, I was disheartened by its prohibitive price point. I haven't regretted it. The product isn't a mass product. Without enough developers, it will never achieve critical mass.

Apple Car was finally shelved in 2024. Was it AI? If so, it turned “**Something non-AI up its sleeve**” on its head.

To me, after the iPhone, the iPad was the most profound transformation coming from Apple. It brought together knowledge and elegance unlike any other device, even MacBooks.

But how can we forget Siri?



Source: [Reddit](#)

Wouldn't Siri deliver any such *aha* moment in the near future?

This is a loaded question.

Siri isn't a standalone AI assistant. It is tied with Apple's app ecosystem. Like an advanced chatbot, it was designed as an intent-target mapping pipe.

When the user types a query, it tries to predict its purpose and routes her to the most appropriate app, bringing conversion for its partners (App

developers), whose X% profits go to Apple.

When it's raining, it could present a button to "**Rent an umbrella within 0–500m from your home — Free Trial**" from a hypothetical app.

Siri's aim was not to answer questions, but to direct actions. Actions, and not passive consumption, drive revenue to apps. And those apps keep fans queuing at Apple Stores every year.

With LLMs, Siri can do this in a much broader and deeper way.

In theory, this is a rock-solid business model. However, Siri has failed to live up to its intention, let alone the user expectations.

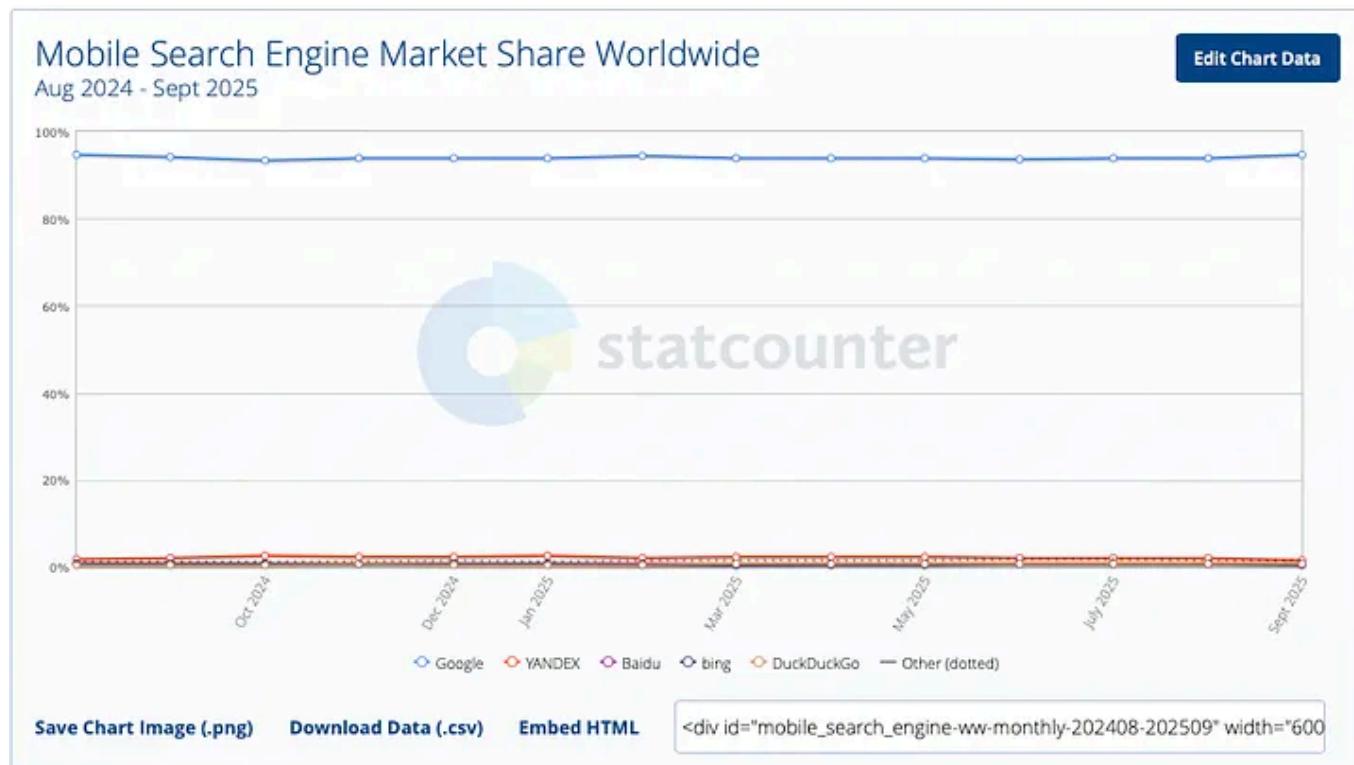
The problem with Siri is that it smells like someone from the Windows 98 team wrote its core. The tech debt is so heavy that Apple decided to rewrite it from scratch to exist in the post-GPT world. Now, it had to even push back on that initiative.



Credit: [Telegraph](#)

Despite its serious flaws, Google was (and still is, past ChatGPT) the go-to search engine for most iOS users. Yes, Google pays Apple handsomely to keep itself the default.

But has anyone asked: If Google stops paying Apple, how many will default to *SiriSearch*? Unless it bans the Google.com domain on Safari — a mistake akin to what Microsoft did to Netscape in the 90s and paid heavily for it — Apple has no way to force its way into Google's search dominance.



Credit: [StatCounter](#)

Even if it rewrites the Siri client, Apple doesn't own search data beyond what happens on an iOS device (if at all). Unlike Microsoft, Google, and Amazon, it doesn't even own a cloud offering. In fact, it is partly reliant on them.

That leaves the last frontier in Apple's quiver.

#3: Apple's strongest weapon is UX

People keep buying iDevices not just because they look shiny. But because they do things most seamlessly!

Except, they don't.

And Apple's AI debacle is visible here in a much bigger way, unlike any other frontier.

Text Translation:

There is something called text translation, and AI has no small part to play in it.

Apple has been offering it since 2020. Since iOS 26, it has also been offering Live translation. Along with AirPods and normal phone calls, this would be a magical experience: "Speak Russian, and your friend at the other end will hear it in Spanish".

As of today, Apple's translation list barely has 19 languages in total. It has not even covered the developed world. Living in Finland, when I read a Finnish article in Safari, I see no way to translate it to English through Apple's own translator.

Finland was the home country of Linux, the parent of Android. It is the birthplace of Nokia, which gave reason to Apple to disrupt the world. It gave Apple some of its most profitable moments, including Angry Birds, Clash of Clans, and Brawl Stars.

Apple engineers don't have a voice within the company to fully serve the tech community, even for translation, a thing that existed at least a decade before

ChatGPT.

How much would it cost Apple to buy a localization company?

If someone in the Apple product division is still doubting the demographic dividend (paying iOS user volume for a given language), globalization never happened, or Apple never knew about it.

UX:

After unboxing my iPhone 16 Pro Max (iOS 17), my instinct was to expect a translator choice pop-up: **Apple Translate**, **Google Translate**, and so on, just like the Apple Maps vs Google Maps choice pop-up.

But Apple did a “*What’s that?*” eyeroll.

After updating to iOS 18.6, selecting the default translation app was possible in Settings. But the translation isn’t inline. Even after favoriting Google Translate, I had to deal with its ugly translation pop-up in Safari.

iOS’s “writing summaries” is already late to the party. But here’s what’s more pathetic: Typing on an iPhone suffers from the horrible cursor experience.

Try making a selection at your desired point in an iOS textfield, and you will know how easy it is on Android devices of a similar class.

Sometimes, spellcheck makes it impossible to select and format a word. Apple doesn’t seem to have any data on when its spellcheck fails, and how often its users need to type wrong spellings.

If you manage to select your desired text, try formatting it with **bold/italic** options. You won't find them easily, or you won't find them at all. This happens not just in 3rd party apps, but also in Notes.

And if by any chance you have to **look up** a slightly misspelt word in an Apple dictionary, only Google can help you ("Did you mean...").

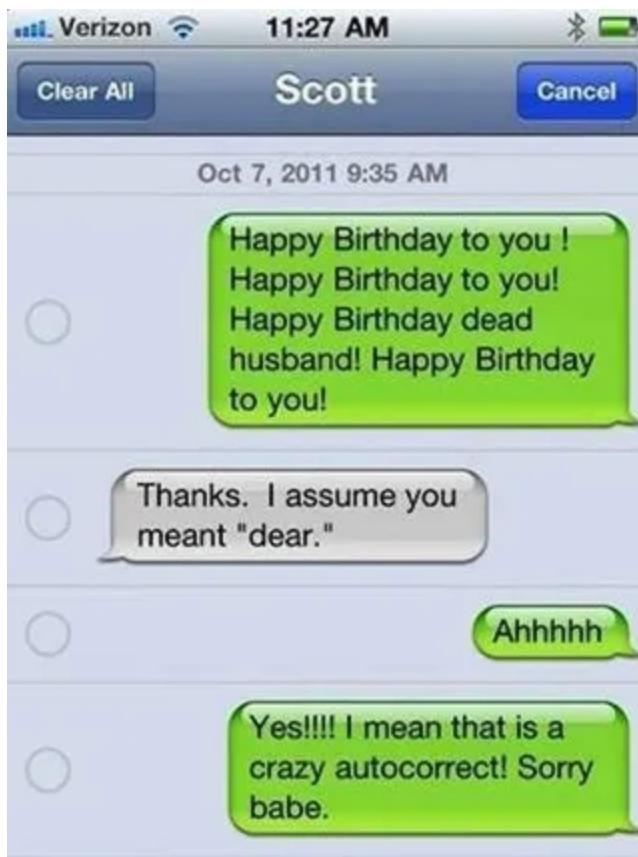


Source: Author screenshot

Word Prediction:

This is yet another AI frontier that Apple never got right from the beginning, and has never caught up.

If you are angry at someone, please decide to fight with them over your favorite iOS messaging app.



Source: [Freemake](#)

- Firstly, Auto-correct will alter the message to its destructive worst.
- Auto-suggest is its last line of defense: Totally irrelevant suggestions will boost your panic mode.
- Now, look at the flip side: In 95% of the cases, your anger will transfer to your iPhone, and you will relinquish typing the angry message, which will save your relationship.

Auto-suggest is perhaps the biggest proof that Apple isn't simply deaf to innovation, but actively resists it. Here is some dark history. Apple tried to stifle a developer whose keyboard extension offered better auto-suggest, only to sherlock his creation by offering its own, inferior keyboard. In the end, it had to settle a lawsuit.

Apple's late adoption of RCS in messaging wasn't different. Initially, it held onto its steadfast "keep them within the walls" stance.

Buy your mom an iPhone.

Tim Cook

In the end, due to the [EU's Digital Markets Act](#) (and similar ones from other countries) pressure, it had to give in and adopt RCS in iOS 18.

Conclusion:

Popular media keeps complaining about Apple not being *innovative enough*. As of 2025, it hasn't delivered a foldable screen or an iCar. That it failed to lead us into the Generative AI era is one more argument in the same category.

But they all miss a point.

Apple has an internal culture problem that prevents it from delivering its core promise: A device (shiny or not) with a functional piece of software.

Apple has forgotten why Steve Jobs said: Design is how it *works*. To me, this problem clearly boils down to a lack of an engineering-driven culture. Apple is facing the same problem [Google faced](#) just before the ChatGPT launch. And it's worse.

When a product-led company grows beyond a certain size, it starts commanding engineers, instead of making them try untested, raw things,

and challenging the status quo. It doesn't do it by abusing them. It does it by design: Constraints, Roadblocks, and Discussion aversion.

Apple engineers have no voice.

GenAI has brought the era of building. The new age will dump every experience that stands in the way of doing things.

They want the right mix of ease and control.

Apple seems to have forgotten how to give both. And whether or not it goes AI-first, that's a problem.

Pen Magnet believes that big tech recruiters are looking for ways to augment GenAI in interviews. All they need is a wrapper structure.

One such template of his proposed structure is presented in his popular eBook:

Coding Interviews 2.0 (available at [50% discount for the first 50 Medium readers](#))

For senior developers, he has devised a techno-behavioural approach to target big tech interviews surrounding the famous Amazon STAR Interview format.

His eBook surrounding this concept has already sold 150+ copies already:

Comprehensive Approach to Senior Developer Interview (40+ example questions)

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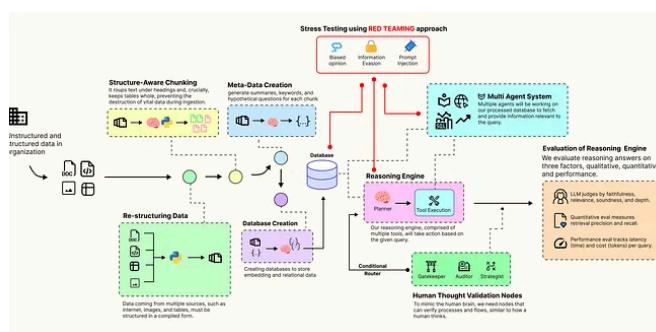
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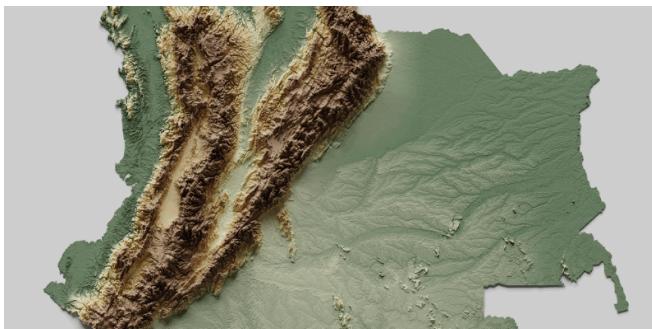


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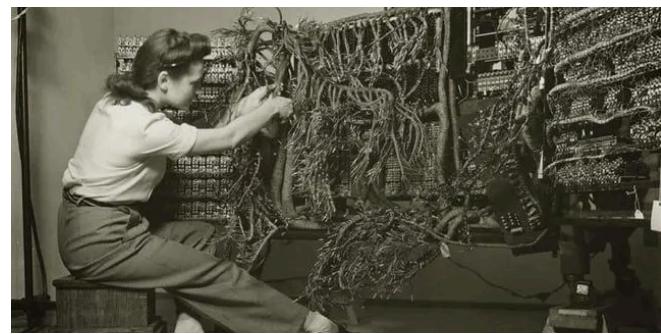
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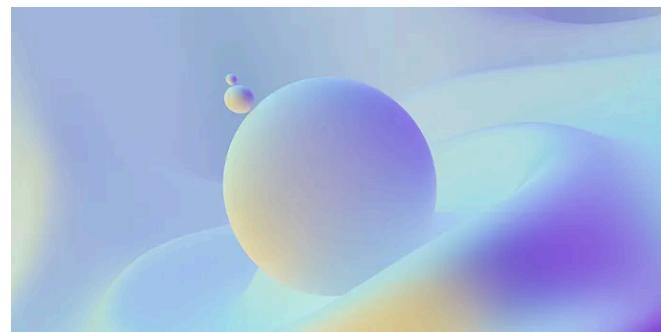
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