

Jobs Refutes iPhone 4 "Antennagate" Hype

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ABSTRACT

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FULL TEXT

After showing the video for a catchy song parody defending the iPhone 4, Apple's Steve Jobs appeared at a press conference at the company's headquarters in Cupertino, Calif., on July 16 to debunk the hype surrounding customer complaints about the hot-selling smart phone. Walking attendees through a slide presentation, Jobs presented a four-point defense.

First, Jobs noted that phones aren't perfect, emphasizing the fact that "smart phones have weak spots" and calling it "the heart of the problem." He showed video of users holding different popular smart phones with the "death grip" that has been the source of many iPhone 4 complaints. Based on the video, the HTC Droid Eris drops from four bars to no bars, the Samsung Omnia II drops from four bars to one bar, and the BlackBerry Bold 9700 drops from five bars to one bar.

"Most every smart phone we tested exhibits the identical behavior if grabbed in a reasonable way as the videos you've all seen on the Web of the iPhone 4," Jobs said.

Second, Jobs said that Apple consulted its AppleCare customer service program to tally the percentage of customers who called with complaints. While Apple has sold about 3 million iPhone 4s since its launch, the number of calls represents only 0.55% of these consumers.

"Around half of one percent of iPhone 4 owners have called AppleCare in relation to reception and antenna issues," he said. "An extremely low number."

Third, Apple consulted wireless provider AT&T to see how many of these consumers returned their iPhones. While last year's 3GS model was returned at a rate of 6% during a similar period of early shipments, which Jobs called below average for the smart-phone industry, the iPhone 4 has seen 1.7% return rates since its debut.

"The return rates for iPhone 4 are running one-third of those for the iPhone 3GS a year ago," he boasted.

Finally, Jobs turned his attention to dropped calls, which appears to be the source of the "Antennagate" hype. While AT&T doesn't release its numbers for proprietary reasons, Jobs said that the iPhone 4 drops less than one additional call per 100 calls than the 3GS. He admitted, though, that even this fractional increase was too high and that Apple should be improving performance from generation to generation.

Still, Jobs offered his own theory behind the increase. While 80% of the people who bought the 3GS also bought a bumper case, he said, only 20% of the iPhone 4's consumers walked out with one, leaving a greater number of users vulnerable to the antenna flaws and skewing the data in the 3GS's favor.

"I think that has something to do with this disparity," Jobs said. "But who knows? We're gonna track it down."

Jobs then said that Apple's scientists and engineers do acknowledge a problem, but that it affects a "very small percentage of users." In fact, Jobs said that he has gotten "somewhere over 5000 e-mails from users" telling him that their iPhone 4s work perfectly and that "they can't figure out what all this is about."

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Calling the hype "blown all out of proportion," Jobs vowed that Apple wouldn't stop until "every user is happy" and explained the company's plan for solving the problem. First, Apple already has released iOS 4, version 4.0.1, which

"fixes the wrong formula" that the iPhone 4 uses to calculate how many bars to show for signal strength. Second, Apple will give every iPhone user a free bumper case, insulating the antenna from human contact and preventing the loss of signal. Users who already have bought a bumper case will get a full refund. These free cases will be available for every iPhone 4 purchased through September 30. Users who still aren't happy can bring their undamaged iPhone 4 back to the store for a full refund, with no restocking fees, within 30 days.

"We'll re-examine this in September and decide whether to keep going, or maybe we'll have a better idea," Jobs said. During the conference, Jobs addressed some additional issues. For example, he said that there have been some reported problems with the phone's proximity sensor and that a software update is being developed. The white iPhone 4 will start shipping later this month. And on July 30, the iPhone 4 will be released in 17 more countries. "We are gonna take care of everyone," Jobs said. "We want every user to be happy."

Apple

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