

Subject: 9 smart and useful features of Apple's iPhone ecosystem that make it hard to switch — Tech News and Analysis

From: "Eddy Cue" <[REDACTED]>

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To: "Jeff Robbin" <[REDACTED]> "Steven Leung"
<[REDACTED]> "Greg Gilley" <[REDACTED]> "Robert Kondrk"
<[REDACTED]> "Patrice Gautier" <[REDACTED]> "Kevin
Saul" <[REDACTED]> "Todd Teresi" <[REDACTED]> "Matt
Fischer" <[REDACTED]> "Tracy Pirnack" <[REDACTED]>
"Roger Rosner" <[REDACTED]> "Bill Stasior" <[REDACTED]>

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9 smart and useful features of Apple's iPhone ecosystem that make it hard to switch

Once you get used to a mobile ecosystem, it can be hard to switch. Here are several reasons why Apple has made it hard to switch from iOS to Android, whether it's because you can't live without the features or because Apple has locked you in.

When shopping for a new smartphone, looking just at the features of one specific model compared to another, or even the capabilities of one release of Android to that of iOS doesn't show the full picture. While the online reviews may indicate that the [Samsung Galaxy S 4 has better hardware components](#) than the iPhone, or that [notifications in the recently released Jelly Bean version of Android are better than iOS](#), that does not necessarily make all Android phones better than all iPhones.

Apple cares about more than just creating a consistent and unique experience for each of their devices individually. In my opinion, Apple has created a more complete and user-friendly ecosystem that encompasses much more than the features or abilities of a single phone. If your total investment in Apple is just a single iPhone, then switching between iOS and Android with each upgrade opportunity is not just possible; it is likely very probable.

However, if you have taken full advantage of everything Apple has to offer iPhone users, then switching platforms may be harder than you think. For many iPhone owners, the question is more than just upgrading a phone to the next great thing. It is also about how

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much one has totally invested in Apple as a whole. Here's a list of several aspects of Apple's complete ecosystem that I think makes the iPhone experience much better than it could possibly be on its own.

Shared Photo Streams for iCloud members only

While your own personal [Photo Stream](#) may be a convenience when it comes to accessing your photos from multiple devices, sharing your best moments with other iCloud members is certainly more rewarding. [Liking and commenting on each other's photo stream](#) is an experience not unlike other [photo sharing](#) services. The problem is that you cannot access any of these shared Photo Streams from outside Apple's ecosystem. So switching means that you will have to leave your shared memories behind and convince your friends and family to share their precious life moments with you elsewhere.

iMessage and FaceTime friends and family

[iMessage is Apple's messaging system](#) that in many instances — [at least when its working](#) — can be used as a replacement to SMS messaging provided by cellular carriers. Like iMessage, [FaceTime](#) is the video extension that enables one to call someone they know and see them live and in person. Both products certainly have their competition online, but convincing your family and friends that you communicate with regularly to switch services may pose more of a challenge. Not everyone has accounts with multiple competing services.

GameCenter Friends, Saved Game Data and Top Scores

If you are a gamer, you may have quite a bit more invested in [GameCenter](#) than you think. If you're an avid iOS gamer, all of your online friends that you challenge and play multiplayer games with are all GameCenter members. Your top scores, achievements, rankings and more are all in GameCenter as well. This includes the investment you made in purchasing the games as well as the ability to [use your iCloud backup and restore your data to a new device](#). Yes, there [are alternatives like OpenFeint](#), and [more recently Google Play Games](#) has added similar features, but you will need to start over with new friends and establish yourself once again on the leader boards.

iTunes Mix and Match media libraries

It used to be that digital-rights management (DRM) locked all of your music to one

service, iTunes and your iPod. This has [changed in recent years](#) and your music library is more portable than ever. Moving your entire music library from one service to another can be a bit of a challenge, but you can do it. However, unlike some of the other multiplatform music storage services like those from Google or Amazon, your [iTunes Match music library](#) can only be accessed from your iOS device, not Android. And even though your music library may be liberated from DRM, the rest of your iTunes purchases are not. From movies to television series and even the books you purchased from iBooks, they are all part of your Apple ecosystem. This is why you must [use your iTunes account authorize all of your devices](#). There is no legitimate way from Apple to transfer your media collection to another platform.

AppleTV, AirPlay and AirPrint enabled devices

From speakers to [amplifiers](#), Airport Express and of course Apple TV, streaming your music, videos, and even your screen is certainly easier when you have an [AirPlay](#) capable device to stream it to. Even printer manufacturers have been [supporting Apple's AirPrint interface for a while now](#). And that makes printing from your iOS device simple and easy. And if you happen to have multiple iOS devices in your house, switching just one device over can make supporting all of these peripherals problematic to say the least.

iCloud synced data and backups

It's not just Apple's iWork apps — Pages, Numbers and Keynote — that can sync documents from your iPhone and iPad to your Mac. There are quite a few [apps that cross over from the iOS app store to the Mac app store](#). Some of my favorites include mSecure, iDraw, ByWord, OmniGraffle, PDFPen and MindNode to name a few. Sure, you can set up a Dropbox account and sync a folder of documents, but that takes time to set up, and does not take advantage of [OS X's Power Nap feature](#). Power Nap is a power saving feature where your Mac will continue to sync with iCloud, even when it is asleep.

Charging cables at work, home and in the car

Then there are the cables. So many cables. Travel cables, bedside cables, work cables and car cables. After you have lived in Apple's world for a while, you start seeing more and more charging cables appearing everywhere you live. First it was 30-pin cables and now it is Lightning cables (and even MagSafe for Macs). All such cables are exclusively Apple. Not to mention "[Made for iPod](#)" compliant docking stations that you may have at your bedside in the form of an alarm clock or a speaker stand in the living room. There is no "Made for Android" equivalent.

AppleCare+ protection plans

Cellular carriers are [looking for ways to shorten the amount of time](#) that you are 'stuck' with an outdated phone. Apple on the other hand has looked for ways to get customers used to updating every other release with [their version of the "tick tock" strategy](#). Add to this the [extended AppleCare+ plan](#) and you have a solid two years that you will want to keep your iPhone close to you. And AppleCare does not end with your iPhone, you can track and manage all of your Apple devices that are protected under AppleCare., a convenient way to manage all of your Apple devices.

All those iOS exclusive apps

Lets not forget ones investment in apps. For paid apps this works both ways. For Android owners, having an investment in paid apps that you use each and every day would be the same deterrent for switching platforms as an iOS owner. There are however a number of [apps that are exclusive to the iOS platform](#). And if it just so happens that one such app is an app that you use every day, then switching may not be an option you are willing to entertain.

After reading this, you can look back and see it in one of two different ways. Either you see it as a trap, locking you in to a life of limited choices, or you see it as Apple having thought of everything.

And no matter which way you see it, both viewpoints will admit that Apple makes taking advantage of each and every one of these features as simple and easy as possible from the very first the moment you take your new device out of the box. Some will say that is by design to lock you in, while others will counter that it is all about making the customer experience great. If you are one who has taken full advantage of all Apple has to offer, you'll find it hard to switch away, and you might not care.