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Apple WWDC: Maps, Facebook, Siri at heart of iOS 6 update

By Ben Woods, 11 June, 2012 23:34

Apple's update to its mobile iOS 6 operating system includes its own new 3D mapping software with turn-by-turn navigation, deeper Facebook and Siri integration, and new group sharing features for iCloud.



Apple has said its forthcoming iOS 6 update will have more than 200 features, including new capabilities for the Siri voice-recognition app. *Image credit: James Martin/CNET News*

The update to the iOS 6 platform was announced at Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference in San Francisco on Monday.

The new Maps app will replace the Google Maps app that Apple has used on the platform until now and includes features such as voice-guided turn-by-turn navigation, traffic information and an aerial view called 'Fly over'.

"We can't wait for hundreds of millions of iOS users to experience the incredible new features in iOS 6 including the new Maps app, expanded Siri support, deep Facebook integration, shared photo streams and the innovative new Passbook app," Scott Forstall, senior vice president of iOS software, said in a statement.

Much like Google Maps, the new Maps app integrates information about local businesses and points-of-interest.

Apple said the update to iOS contained more than 200 new features, which notably include deeper Facebook integration that allows posting from the Notification Centre, Siri and other Facebook-enabled apps. For example, Siri can now be used to post a status update to Twitter or Facebook, or launch an app.

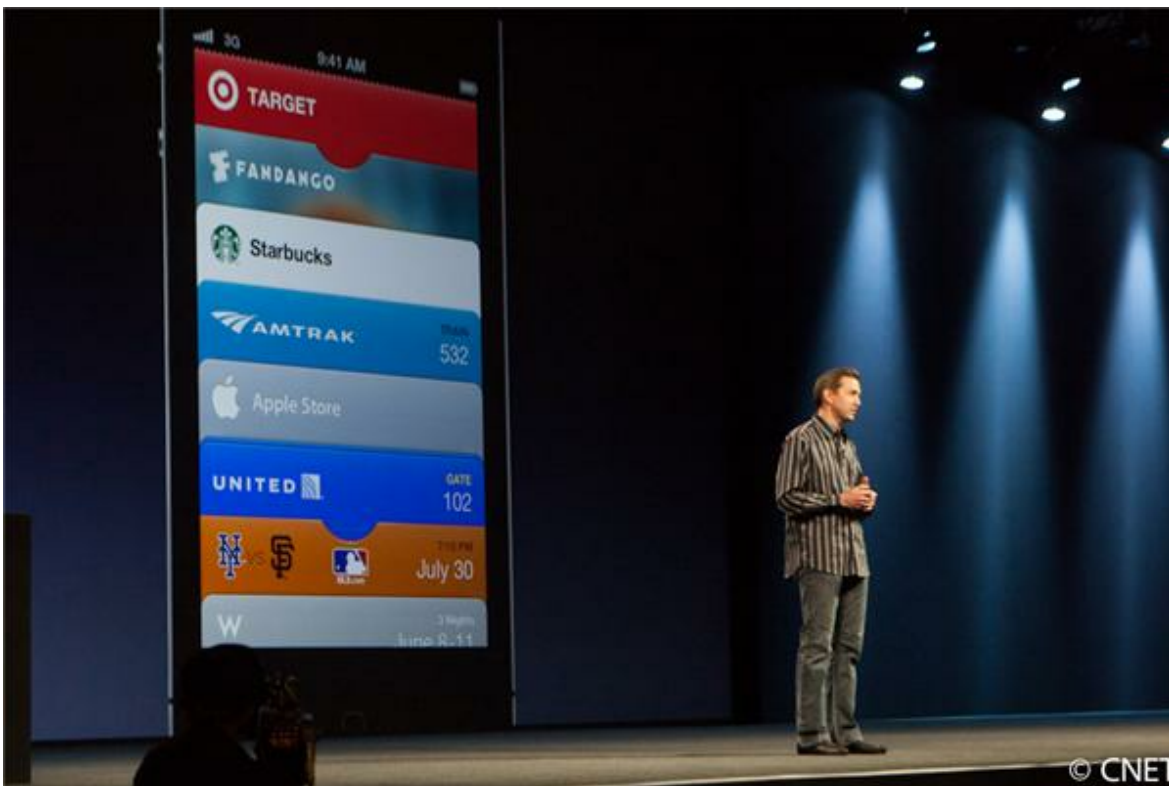
The update also brings Siri to the iPad for the first time.

Android competition

The additions to the platform will help fend off competition from the likes of the Galaxy S III on the Android platform which offers similar voice control features.

Mobile analyst Francisco Jeronimo said that Apple's additions to the platform were canny, if not revolutionary.

"It will try to close the gap to Android in terms of market share, but it will continue to lead the user experience and usability race. Today's announcements are not about features, they are about value," Jeronimo said in a statement. "Apple already understood that applications or features per se are not enough to drive stickiness and loyalty."



Scott Forstall, senior vice president of iOS software at Apple, presents the Passbook app, which gathers together boarding passes, tickets and QR codes. *Image credit: James Martin/CNET News*

Jeronimo believes that Apple will continue to challenge competitors' platforms and eco-systems by focusing on users, rather than features.

"Apple is creating new ways to improve usability and to add value. Other vendors will continue to add more features to their devices, but none will be able to match Apple's experience in the short term, because they haven't yet understood the importance of focusing on users' capabilities rather than phone capabilities," he said.

Other changes in the platform include an upgraded Safari browser, support for Facetime video calls over 3G networks — rather than being restricted to Wi-Fi — and a new VIP mailbox feature for quick access to messages from people designated as VIPs.

Apple's iCloud service, which now has 125 million users according to the company, also gains new group photo sharing options with the 'Shared Photo Streams' feature.

The Apple iOS 6 developer beta is available to download now, with the full release expected to arrive "this fall", Apple said.

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