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Technology Update

Have Apple reached a turning point?

Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) may go down as a pivotal point in Apple's history. They unveiled their new iOS 8 operating system but also highlighted their willingness to work with others, which was a first. This hit home hard with the developer community and others from the greater technology community.

Apple has now sold "well over" 800 million iOS devices, including 200 million iPads and more than 500 million iPhones and their position up to now has always been "our way or the highway".

The new iOS 8 has more than 4,000 new APIs (application programming interfaces) that reach deep into the operating system, giving developers access to features they've never had before in iOS.

The really big concession, however, is Swift, Apple's new programming language, which streamlines the coding process for iOS apps. That means developers can save time and money, and they can publish their little dream app that much quicker.

The additional APIs and tools for developers show that Apple is opening up, at least a little bit. That's the best news Apple has generated in a long, long time. It's a welcome change, and one we should hope is only the beginning of a new era at Apple.

These additional tools include a specific HealthKit API to enable the development of health and activity apps and in the autumn the HomeKit API will be released with new hardware to address the connected home.

New Google satellites

Google is most well known for its web search engine, but it's been rumoured recently that it intends to get into the satellite business.

These months of rumour have proven true. The internet giant **Google** has officially entered into an agreement to purchase **Skybox Imaging**. The \$500 million price tag falls shy of the estimated \$1 billion that the imaging company was speculated to go for, but still represents Google's high level of interest in the company.

In a statement, Google said the Skybox satellites would assist in keeping Google Maps accurate with more up to date imagery,

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which Google currently purchases from DigitalGlobe. The acquisition means Google would no longer need to buy the imagery from an outside source. The Skybox team, which until now stayed very quiet about the acquisition gossip, said that they felt it was the right time to pursue even bigger projects.

Google recently also acquired Titan Aerospace who specialise in Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS). They are working together with Google Loon, a high altitude balloon project designed to bring Internet to unconnected areas. However there are limitations to providing this service from a balloon below the stratosphere. The only way forward is to have satellites as they are not always going to get permission to fly these atmospheric UAS' over any country and not every nation is comfortable with small US built objects flying overhead. Loon might only accomplish a fraction of what Google aspires to do therefore the move into the satellite business. There are other big players planning to expand their reach by using satellites, such as Facebook.

Let's be clear about this the primary reason for both these companies, Google and Facebook, to provide satellite connectivity to customers who don't have free access is for advertising and not for providing the service itself. They would want control of all the content, control of who gets the content, and then they could say how much they want to charge for it.

Over the last few months some great new pocket sized satellite communication devices from Inmarsat, Thuraya and Iridium have been launched.

Inmarsat iSatPhone2

This is the new version of the original **iSatPhone** with some really very good new features and it's available now. This works globally apart from at the poles and is a really good backup comms device that I would have on my yacht or if I were a mountain climber, explorer or simply in any extreme or remote location. It uses L band so powers it's way through rain and clouds.



It uses the one global network and as a result there is no roaming. It just works on a fixed rate worldwide. Voice quality is clear and call stability is excellent with battery life of 160 hours on standby and 8 hours talk time. It only takes 45 seconds to register on the network on power up. The handset is robust and designed to work from -22C to +55C, is 95% humidity proof, dust, splash and shock resistant.

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Location services are included, including tracking and assistance button. You can keep people at-home updated with your position and can call for help. It even receives notification of incoming calls with the antenna down. It interfaces with MS Outlook and is compatible with Windows from XP to 8.

This should be an essential bit of kit to have in the grab bag on every yacht but wouldn't have helped Ernest Shackleton!

Thuraya satsleeve for iPhone or Android smartphone

I think this is pretty cool. You can transform your iPhone or Android phone into a satellite phone and it's available now.

It combines the perfect blend of mobility and simplicity. It's the fastest, simplest and only way to transform your smartphone into a satellite smartphone. It provides access to phone calls, text, emails, instant messages and popular social media apps such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp in satellite mode, across 161 countries across Thuraya's coverage network.



The SatSleeve App is available as a free download from the App Stores. You dock your phone into the SatSleeve and in one of the 12 languages available languages, the user-friendly SatSleeve App allows you to easily integrate your phone address book for satellite calls and messages with the swipe of your fingers.

The SatSleeve also comes equipped with an Emergency Call button, allowing you to make an emergency phone call to one predefined number even without your smartphone docked.

It is available for the iPhone 4/4S/5 & 5S and the Samsung Galaxy S3 and S4.

So what's the difference between these two phones? Firstly, the Thuraya Satsleeve works under the Thuraya satellite service which only covers two thirds of the earth and not the poles. Therefore the Inmarsat coverage is truly global apart from the poles. Secondly, the Thuraya SatSleeve is not designed to be used in a rugged and wild location. However, you can't use Facebook on the iSatPhone2. What's more important?

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Iridium Go

This is not yet available but would have solved Ernest Shackletons' problems. Powered by the world's furthest reaching network, this compact, rugged and portable unit creates the first ever reliable global connection for voice and data communications on up to five smartphones, laptops or tablet no matter where you are on the planet.



A couple of weeks ago I got my hands on one of these and it fits in your pocket. It's like having your own personal cell tower in your pocket!

If I were responsible for specifying the sat comms on your yacht I would have one of each!

Roger Horner of e3 Systems

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