

Apple's WWDC event goes big on design, but says less on AI

Warm-up question: Have you ever felt excited or disappointed by a new tech product release? What happened?

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A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

Today is one of the biggest days of the year for Apple followers. Its annual developer conference kicks off. Now, in previous years, the company has used the event to introduce new stuff - things like operating systems, microchips and even its virtual reality goggles. And this year, people are watching to see if Apple can follow up on some ambitious promises it made last year on artificial intelligence. Now, just a note - Apple is a financial supporter of NPR.

NPR's John Ruwitch is here to tell us more about all this. John, so what exactly is this event?

JOHN RUWITCH, BYLINE: This is the once-a-year WWDC, or Worldwide Developer Conference. It's an event aimed at software developers, mostly - the people who make apps for Apple or partner with the company. It's also a forum, like you said, where they introduce new products. Most, though, are going to be on the software side.

MARTÍNEZ: OK. So last year, the big announcement had to do with artificial intelligence. What did Apple say it was working on?

RUWITCH: Well, Apple **jumped on the AI bandwagon** in a big way with a product that it calls Apple Intelligence. It was supposed to do a bunch of things. One of the big things people were watching out for was that it was supposed to make the virtual assistant, Siri, a lot more interactive and useful and just generally smarter about your individual context. So, for instance, it could access your emails and pictures and text messages, help you find things in them and help you do things with that info.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. So how did that **pan out**?

RUWITCH: Well, the company, a few months ago, said that it has made improvements to Siri. But a lot of those AI-enabled features that they talked about aren't quite here yet and are going to take longer than expected to deliver. Patrick McGee is a reporter with the Financial

<http://masteringenglishcommunication.com>

Times who just published a book about Apple. He says this is a big problem for Apple, especially at a time when AI is **taking the tech industry by storm**.

PATRICK MCGEE: It's hard to be too **hyperbolic** about the significance of what AI will be in the next few years, and I'm not even sure Apple's in the top five. Maybe they're in the top 10. I mean, for the world's most valuable company, basically, since 2011, they're doing a remarkably poor job in keeping up, let alone leading.

MARTÍNEZ: Wow. That was - bit of a surprise there. So beyond artificial intelligence, where else is Apple maybe facing some pressure?

RUWITCH: Well, they're facing pressure on a lot of **fronts**. Tariffs is a big one. There are, of course, tariffs on countries where Apple manufactures, like China. But also, President Trump has singled the company out. He's explicitly said he told Apple CEO Tim Cook that he expects iPhones to be made here in America, or else he'll impose a tariff of 25% on them. Apple's run into regulatory hurdles both in the U.S. and Europe, mostly around its App Store. So it faces challenges - a lot of challenges at once on different fronts. In terms of getting AI right, Apple did take a credibility hit, and it needs to be seen to be less **flat-footed** on AI. But Carolina Milanesi, who's a tech analyst at a firm called Creative Strategies, says Apple is not out of the game by a long shot.

CAROLINA MILANESI: The AI race, as much as we like to talk about it as a race, is a marathon. And it's a marathon that changes pace very quickly, pretty much on a monthly basis.

RUWITCH: She says Apple's had great success with products that the company wasn't necessarily the first to bring to market - it came later, but it had a better product. And it's got a really loyal customer base on top of that. At the event, we may hear more about Apple's plans with AI. Apple watchers are also expecting the next version of Apple's operating system to **drop** with a fresh design. And there are reports about possible upgrades to AirPods earbuds being announced. Apple has declined to comment on what to expect today, or on the criticism, so we're going to have to wait and see.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. That's NPR's John Ruwitch. John, thanks.

RUWITCH: You're welcome.

Vocabulary and Phrases:

1. **Jumped on the bandwagon:** joined or supported something that is already popular or successful.
2. **Pan out:** to develop or happen in a particular way, often successfully.
3. **Take (something) by storm:** to become very popular or successful quickly.
4. **Hyperbolic:** exaggerated or overstated, often to emphasize a point.
5. **Fronts:** different areas or aspects of a situation or effort.
6. **Flat-footed:** unprepared or slow to react.
7. **Drop:** (in this context) to release or launch something, like a new product.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is the WWDC and who is it mainly for?
2. What was Apple's big announcement at the last WWDC?
3. Has Apple delivered on its promises about AI?
4. What are some of the other challenges Apple is facing?
5. What does Carolina Milanesi suggest about Apple's position in the AI market?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think companies like Apple might struggle to keep up with trends like AI, even with lots of resources?
2. Do you agree that being the first to release a product is less important than releasing a better one? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of a time when a new technology "took the world by storm"? What made it so popular?