

WWDC: Apple will Refine, Define Cloud Services

Monday's WWDC keynote will see Apple tying up some loose ends on the software side of things, while simultaneously bringing together everything, from iOS devices to Mac OS X machines, in the iCloud. Some would say it's about time, I'd be quicker to say all in good time, which has been Apple's mantra for quite a while.

An iOS developer once told me that he's never worried when Apple gets behind in the smartphone game, as it did with multi-tasking, because when the company finally does come around, it has inevitably executed better than any of the front-runners.

On Monday, Apple will unveil the culmination of its acquisition of Lala, as well as the uses to which it will put its massive North Carolina data center. If you haven't seen the correlation between Apple's addition of the new Thunderbolt port and the company's move to the clouds, you haven't been paying attention. The Thunderbolt port Apple's way of inviting you to store your everything on its servers and the means to do it quickly.

The iCloud announcement will be even more significant than a new iPhone would be and immediately valuable to anyone who owns an Apple product. If you're a long time Mac or iOS users, you've undoubtedly resigned yourself to the company's content policies. You've realized that iTunes was the reason you bought your first iPod, but some users might not realize that it's probably the number one reason they bought an iPhone instead of an Android device.

iTunes is the fuel that drives the Apple machine. It's familiar with consumers. It works well and it's so ubiquitous that most Android users still have a latest version installed on their desktops.

My bet is that Monday's updates to iOS and Mac OS X will so deeply integrate the two platforms as to make them almost indistinguishable. Mac desktops, laptops, iPhones, iPads and Apple TVs will share content and features in ways the industry has yet to realize. Add to that the natural evolution of iTunes in the cloud and you have the makings of yet another bar set by Jobs and Company.

While Amazon and Google are undoubtedly pushing toward wireless syncing of cloud-based content, they remain ad-hoc solutions with very little common vision. The fact that they're competitors doesn't make an Android user's experience any better, just more fragmented and complicated. Open platforms are great for choice and personalization, but Apple's closed system has emerged as the most refined consumer computing platform on the planet.

I've said before that you will never see Apple adopt a clumsy docking solution like the one employed by the Motorola Atrix. There are simply too many cords and

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connections; too much extraneous hassle. The iCloud, as well as the software enhancements that will come with updates in iOS 5 and OS X (Lion), will prove my theory. Already Apple offers native wireless printing and content streaming from the iPhone and iPad and these improvements to its software will only add to the tasks that can be handled wirelessly.

On Monday, I expect we'll see the beginnings of an entirely wireless, absolutely seamless Apple ecosystem, where existing technologies like AirPlay and AirPrint continue to mature and morph into new features and capabilities. I'm not saying this is the only way things will be done in the future, but it will be the refinement of everything we've seen rushed to market in the past few months from the likes of Google and Amazon.

While many people believe Apple's expertise is hardware design and UI, it has a pretty good hand at content sales and management. In fact, it's the best in the business when it comes to peddling music, video and apps. Expect to see that talent, as well its many others, on display in all their glory at WWDC.

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