

Google Unveils Cross-Platform Messaging System, Streaming Music Service

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At its 6th annual Google I/O developer conference, Google packed tons of announcements into three hours of keynote. Less gadget-heavy than last year's I/O which introduced Google Glass, this year's event focused more on new and improved services.

Hangouts stood out among the new services. Previously rumored to be announced as "Babel," it's a cross-platform communication system that incorporates Talk, Hangouts, Voice and Messenger into one application. It has the ability to store conversations indefinitely, integrates group video chat and syncs across multiple devices.

In light of rumored music streaming service that Apple has in the works, Google scored a nice coup by announcing its new Google Play Music All Access subscription service. Users will pay \$9.99 per month—though they can lock in at \$7.99 by starting a trial before June 30—and get Spotify-like access to all the music along with the ability to create and share playlists.

Providing a little bit of hardware on which to enjoy some of these new features, Google announced it will begin selling through Google Play a Samsung Galaxy S4 running stock Android. It's slated for a June 26 release and will run \$649.

Not that a shortage of new devices at I/O seems to affect Android overall, as Chrome boss Sundar Pichai announced Google has tracked 900 million Android activations as of 2013.

"It's an extraordinary ecosystem achievement," Pichai said, lending much of the credit to the developers in attendance.

Hugo Barra, VP of Android product management, had similarly good news about Google Play, revealing the storefront has hit 48 billion app installs. He added that Google Play has clocked 2.5 billion app installs in the last month alone and over last four months has paid out more money to app developers than in all of the 2012 while more than doubling ARPU from a year ago.

To a clearly appreciative crowd of developers, Google announced lots of new and updated APIs being made available. Three new location APIs launched, Google + sign-in now spreads across platforms and can enable automatic app downloads

across the user's other devices.

As an answer to Apple's Game Center, Google brought out a new game services family of APIs including Cloud Save for saving progress across devices, as well as Achievements and Leaderboards launching on iOS and web. It also introduced a multiplayer API although the demo did not go smoothly and never did get the three on-stage tablets to connect inside of a jet-ski game demo.

Google+ also got a major redesign, incorporating columns—which adjust to screen size—and providing automatic enhancements to photos. Search received a major update making it more personal and intuitive, more in line with Google Now. Google Maps saw a big revamping as well by new integrations of Google Earth and Street View.

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