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This Week's Stories

Apple's App Store Is About To Go Green In A Big Way

April 14, 2016

As part of its broader environmental efforts, Apple on Thursday is launching a new app campaign, Apps for Earth, in conjunction with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), an environmental advocacy organization.

The campaign, which is similar to 2014's Apps for (RED) initiative, is designed to raise awareness about the WWF's core focus areas — conservation of forests, oceans, fresh water, wildlife and food, as well as climate change.

Here's how it works: Apple has teamed up with 24 app developers to build custom content related to the WWF's mission. Additionally, from April 14-24, 100% of the proceeds of those apps — both from paid-app purchases and campaign-specific in-app purchases, will go directly to the WWF.

The app collection features 27 different apps, including everything from free-to-play games such as *Kendall & Kylie* and *Star Wars Galaxy of Heroes* to utility apps such as the photo editor Enlight. Many of the apps are available worldwide, and the campaign itself is global.

Carter Roberts, President and CEO of the WWF, sees this as a way to reach hundreds of millions of people who access the App Store every day.

Lisa Jackson, Apple's vice president of Environment, Policy and Social Initiatives and former head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), told *Mashable* it was important to work with Apple's "great developer partners" on a broader project that raises awareness of the WWF's goals.

The campaign isn't just limited to the App Store. Jackson says the initiative will have a presence on Apple.com (and its newly revamped Environmental page) and at Apple Stores. Apple retail stores will have apps related to the campaign running on display devices, and the leaf on the Apple logo at 132 stores will turn green.

Organic App Integrations

Jackson says Apple contacted developers — in some cases months ago — about the campaign. The implementation for each app is different, with some taking an educational approach and others going for something more thematic.

Enlight went for the latter approach. Itai Tsiddon, founder of Lightricks, the company that makes Enlight, told me that because nature is such a big part of how people take photos, the team focused on creating a number of nature presets and tutorials.

For the app *The Earth*, which describes itself as "an interactive model that lets kids study and observe the geological forces that change the planet," the integration is more educational.

There is a new in-app purchase pack for *The Earth* that lets kids see how different actions affect the environment. Since forest conservation is one of the WWF's priorities, one of the scenes in the app lets kids see the effect on the Earth when trees are cut down versus planting seeds for new trees.

Raul Gutierrez, who leads *The Earth* creator Tinybop, says his team looked and adhered to the national science standards for kids' education and coupled that information with what it learned from the WWF in order to create the experiences.

Glu Mobile — its *Cooking Dash 2016* and *Kendall & Kylie* are part of the campaign — has integrations with the campaign go pretty deep.

In *Cooking Dash*, there is a special Earth Day Telethon level in the game. The food items players use in these levels are sustainable ingredients, and they can buy special in-game items like compost bins and eco-friendly decor to spruce up the restaurant. Proceeds from those in-app purchases all go to the WWF.

For *Kendall & Kylie*, Glu created several in-game quests focusing on water conservation. There are also ocean-conservation-themed clothing and accessories players can purchase. There's even a WWF-branded selfie booth that players can use to grab photos of their characters.

For its game *Star Wars Galaxy of Heroes*, EA created a special Ewok battle to protect the forest moon of Endor.

The content within these apps is time-limited as part of the campaign. Once it's over, the quests disappear. Though probably not by design, the ephemeral nature of the content *does* make a statement about sustainability.

A Win-Win-Win For Apple, The WWF And Developers

Each developer I spoke with said Apple approached them to work on the campaign, and in each case, they said they jumped at the chance.

A big incentive for working on this promotion is that the apps will get prime feature placement in the App Store. And for some of the developers I spoke with, that was certainly part of the appeal.

But each developer stressed that they also got involved because they felt helping support the WWF and Apple's broader environmental mission — which includes both extensive use of renewable energy as well as innovative tech-recycling technology — was the right thing to do.

Glu Mobile's CEO Niccolo de Masi told me that he expects the campaign "to have a real impact" on raising money for the WWF. It also helps build brand value for Glu, *Cooking Dash* and *Kylie & Kendall*. "It's always a delight when you can raise money and do real good," de Masi told me.

Development shop Tinybop is taking this opportunity to offer *The Earth* for free during the campaign. The Apps for Earth component will be available only for 10 days, but the app, which is normally \$2.99, will be free.

Gutierrez says that this campaign will be "great exposure for our brand." He told me that he's previously seen an increase in sales to other apps in Tinybop's Explorer series when one of the apps is available for free because once parents find and like one app, they want to buy the others for their kids.

On working with Apple on this initiative, Gutierrez was effusive. "I think it's very easy to be cynical about large companies," he told me. But with Apple, he is convinced that their motives are genuine. "They really do care. It's not green-washing," he said. "They really drink the Kool-Aid."

mashable.com

Apple May Let Developers Pay For App Store Search Results, Report Says

April 14, 2016

Apple may soon be radically changing the way it deals with developers in its App Store. The company is considering plans that would allow developers to pay for sponsored search results in the App Store, according to a new report in *Bloomberg*.

It sounds like Apple hasn't nailed down exactly how it would charge developers for these deals, but *Bloomberg* reports the company is looking at a Google-like model that would allow developers to pay for their apps to appear in specific search results.

Though it's not clear when or how Apple plans to introduce these features, the company has apparently dedicated a team of about 100 people to this effort, according to the report. The team includes engineers from Apple's iAd team, which is being phased out, according to previous reports. The company is also reportedly looking into retooling the App Store's search and browsing experience. Apple did not immediately respond to *Mashable's* request for comment. Whether or not Apple actually goes through with its plan, that Cupertino is apparently dedicating so many resources to the effort highlights what many developers have known for years: App Store discovery is horribly broken.

Though Apple has tried to fix the search and discovery process within the App Store a few times over the years, it remains a huge problem for developers. With well over a million apps in the App Store, finding the right app can be incredibly frustrating — keywords often don't surface relevant results — and it's even worse for brand new apps.

A newly launched app can take several hours or even days to be indexed in all of the App Stores where it's available, which could prevent it from appearing in search results immediately after launch. (One prominent example of this was Kim Kardashian Kimoji app, which angered many fans when they couldn't find the app in the App Store on the day it launched, causing Kardashian to tell her fans they broke the App Store.)

User experience aside, the move could also open up the possibility for Apple to make a lot more money off its App Store, which is already a multibillion dollar business. Currently, developers give Apple a cut of the money they make off app sales, in-app purchases and advertising (if they use Apple's iAd platform). But if Apple charged developers for sponsored search results or featured placement in the App Store, that would represent a whole new revenue stream from the App Store and one that it wouldn't have to share.

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Products & Services

Sling TV Is Making A Box To Stream Free Local TV Channels

April 15, 2016

More than any technical challenge, the big problem for streaming services like Sling TV and PlayStation Vue today is licensing local broadcast networks. Because of that, Sling TV only offers ABC as part of a special package and Fox with its new multi-stream plan, while PS Vue only has broadcast channels in certain cities. But there is one simple solution to those baffling licensing issues: free, over-the-air broadcasts of local channels, which anyone can view with an antenna. That seems to be the entire point behind Sling's upcoming AirTV box, which will capture your local OTA TV streams and let you watch it via Sling TV apps, reports Zatz Not Funny.

“While Aereo was shut down for reselling OTA TV service over the web, AirTV shouldn't pose any problem for Sling TV.”

While Aereo was shut down for reselling OTA TV service over the web, AirTV shouldn't pose any problem for Sling TV. You're relying on your own antenna, after all -- the box simply streams a signal that's legally accessible to any private consumer. It's unclear how the OTA channels will integrate into Sling TV's channel guide, but hopefully they won't seem too out of place.

Sling TV previously bundled OTA antennas with its service, with the hope that customers would access local channels outside of the Sling app. The AirTV box is the logical next step, giving you a way to view those channels anywhere you can access Sling TV. Sources tell Zats Not Funny that the company is working on several new devices. It looks like the AirTV can only capture and spit TV signals over the internet, so it's not hard to imagine another box that can also be plugged into a TV and serve as a standalone Sling TV solution.

While Sling won't have to worry about licensing channels with AirTV, its mere existence may cause some friction with its broadcast network relationships. And of course, OTA reception varies wildly depending on where you live and the quality of your antenna. AirTV likely won't be as easy to set up as Aereo, but it might just be what many cord cutters need.

engadget.com

Move It Puts A Smart Mini Gym In Your Room

April 13, 2016

No more excuses for not working out.

Eons ago, I used to go to the gym several times a week, but nowadays I can give you hundreds of reasons for why I no longer do so. Meanwhile, my beer belly is slowly engulfing my belt, and that's never a good sign (I really should have joined the Engadget Fitness Challenge). This is pretty much the kind of scenario that Hong Kong's Eggplant Technologies is targeting with its Move It smart fitness apparatus, which has just launched on Indiegogo ahead of its August shipment. In a nutshell, this is a four-in-one compact gym kit that you can leave in one corner of your home, and it comes with a mobile app that not only coaches you, but also lets you meet and challenge other fellow Move It users around the world.

When put together, the Move It assembly -- available in either red on black or black on white -- comes in at about 40cm tall, 38cm wide and 21cm deep -- about the same footprint as one or two pairs of dumbbells. Thanks to the aluminum and plastic parts, the kit weighs just around 3kg in total, so you won't break your back when you move the set around.

Move It consists of four main parts that cover your basic cardio and muscle training needs: An ab wheel, a jump rope, a pair of pushup stands and a resistance band. We're told that these have all been stress-tested, in case you're concerned about how durable they are. When idle, these parts can be hung onto the strong plastic vertical frame which also has a slot in the middle for your phone or tablet -- you may want to look at your rep counts on the screen.

The two smart handles -- packed with Bluetooth radio, RF radio, gyroscopes, accelerometers and capacitive sensors -- can be stored in the micro-USB charging cradle underneath; they can apparently operate non-stop for up to ten hours on one charge. To start your workout, just plug the handles into your desired equipment and the system will recognize what you're holding.

It's worth noting that the four parts also have extra sensors to help detect your particular workout type. For instance, the pushup stands use a combination of pressure sensors and IR sensors to cover both downward and upward movement, and they can detect whether you're doing standard pushups, wide pushups or narrow pushups using the handles' RF radio. The resistance band parts feature tension sensors that are similar to what's inside digital luggage scales, and it can

automatically detect six workout modes like left/right arm extension, shoulder extension, should fly rotation and more.

The skip rope modules have integrated IR-based counters, and combining these with the handles' sensors, it can tell whether you're doing standard jump, reverse jump or crisscross jump. Last but not least, the ab wheel has its own pressure sensor and IR sensors (for distance measurement), and with help from the handles, it can detect standard rollout, left side rollout and right side rollout; it knows the required force and travel distance based on your weight and height.

On the software side, Eggplant has created some training programs in partnership with professional fitness coaches to provide real-time voice guidance, and it'll even tell you if you need to push harder. Obviously, you can also use the app for just simple rep counting, time tracking and calorie tracking. Everything is stored in the cloud, and you'll get a status report on a daily and weekly basis. You can expect more advanced programs to be added in the future, though they'll likely require subscription plans. Ivan Ho, CEO of Eggplant and former Microsoft software engineer, also expects personal trainers to utilize Move It to track their clients outside of lessons, as they will be able to add their own custom programs.

Then there's the fun part. On top of the usual training modes, the Move It app also lets you connect with fellow users around the world (OK, a bit like Tinder), find a real-time workout buddy for some motivation, and even send challenges to friends or teammates. Say you're in the mood for a push-up battle, just pick a challenge type (like a one-minute pushup count), send a request to your friend, do your part first, and when your friend is available he or she will then do it as well, and finally you'll both see the game result. Ho says there will be many more challenge options available in the near future, so stay tuned.

Move It is already live on Indiegogo and the current base price is \$159, which seems a pretty good deal given the quality of the early hardware I played with last week. Not to mention the wide range of exercise options and the extra software features to come as well.

engadget.com

Emerging Technology

Molotov Is Defining The Future Of TV

April 15, 2016

For the smartphone generation, the idea that you have to sit in front of the TV at a very specific time to watch something is archaic and unconceivable.

And yet, I've been using Molotov for three months, and I can clearly say that the startup represents the future of TV.

Molotov is what Apple has been trying to build in the U.S. for months, or even years. But so far, Apple has yet to sign deals with all the major U.S. networks. It looks like the networks are still reluctant and want to build standalone services, leading to a giant fragmentation of TV content.

But the truth is out there, literally. French startup Molotov has been quietly working for more than two years on a seamless, flexible and universal TV service that lets you watch content at your own pace on all your devices — as long as you live in France.

“Molotov isn't television, and it isn't Netflix,” Molotov co-founder and CEO Jean-David Blanc told me. “It's like TV, but we reinvented it.”

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“Molotov isn't television, and it isn't Netflix, it's like TV, but we reinvented it.”

This kind of bold statements led me to paying close attention to Molotov and understanding what makes it different.

The Facts

Using the service on my computer, my iPad and my TV has been a surprisingly good experience. I didn't expect to open Molotov so often, and I'm sure millions of people will feel the same way. At first, they won't expect much. Then, they'll be hooked. There are three reasons why Molotov is uniquely positioned to take over the French market when it launches on July 11.

First, the service starts with partnerships. On this front, Molotov has taken advantage of its talented team to sign all of the major French networks. Molotov has *everyone* on board, from TF1 to France Télévisions, M6 and Canal+. And if that weren't enough, the company also worked with countless smaller channels to put them on service.

Second, Molotov is nothing like turning on your TV and hopping from one channel to another. It mixes live content with previously aired TV shows and upcoming movies in a brand-new way. Molotov is another way to explore TV content.

Third, Molotov has more content than anything out there in France. Even better, the catalog changes all the time. In France, free TV channels can air movies a year before they appear on Netflix or CanalPlay — premium networks can even air movies two years before Netflix (and Netflix's French catalog has been shrinking quite drastically). These free and premium TV channels are Molotov's bread and butter.

"Netflix invests around €300 million every year for the French catalog," Blanc said. "French TV networks spend €6 billion every year."

On-Demand Molotov

While Molotov lets you watch live TV, there's a wealth of content available on demand.

The Experience

I don't watch TV. You could even call me a cord cutter, as I don't have a cable box hooked up to my TV. And yet, something weird happened. Over the past few months, I've opened the Molotov app on all my devices more often than the Netflix app.

When it comes to finding something to watch, Molotov beats other services because there's simply more to watch with many different ways to access your content.

Sure, you can watch what's happening right now on TV. But the true power of Molotov lies in the other ways to browse content. I often find myself flicking through the list of movies that recently aired. In just a couple of taps, I can watch a movie right now. And if something has yet to air, I just bookmark it.

Similarly, there are countless interesting documentaries. If it weren't for Molotov, I wouldn't even know these documentaries exist. I often end up watching a science documentary that aired on an obscure TV channel. Molotov makes it easy to access this long-tail content.

The bookmark feature is a sort of VHS recorder in the cloud. And for those who are too young for VHS recorders, it's like Pocket for TV content.

And then there's the search feature. If you like Star Wars, you can search for the movies. If you like Harrison Ford, you can also search for movies that feature him. Straightforward, right? But you can also search for Clint Eastwood and see all films starring or directed by Clint Eastwood. You can even search for someone like Tim Cook and catch up on all his interviews.

What if I don't want to hunt for something new? I head over to the bookmark section. Here I can find all the movies, TV shows and documentaries I've saved for later. You save something and you can watch it weeks or months later.

But the best part of Molotov is that it's the same experience across all my devices. I can start watching a movie on my TV, then switch to my iPad in my bed. When I pick up my iPad and launch the app, the first screen lets me continue watching what I was watching.

Molotov is a well-designed, fluid service that bends to your needs.

I can scrub forward and backward on all content including live TV, switch the language to English for movies and TV shows and skip the ads.

There are many devices that let you pause TV, record things and more. But it's often clunky experience and limited to your TV. Molotov is a well-designed, fluid service that bends to your needs. Over time, you tend to forget that TV was this inflexible medium.

The Business

There's some level of excitement around Molotov right now. When the company put up a landing page last summer, they were expecting a few hundred sign-ups for the beta test. Instead, the website was flooded with tens of thousands of sign-ups.

We were promised a huge library of movies and content with Netflix, and all we got was a new HBO for the Internet.

It's clear that people are anxiously waiting for a service like Molotov to save them from their own crappy TV experience.

It's also clear that Netflix and CanalPlay don't live up to everyone's expectations.

Don't get me wrong, I love Netflix original shows. But the service is becoming a delinearized premium channel instead of a Spotify-like streaming service for TV shows and movies — especially in France. We were promised a huge library of movies and content with Netflix, and all we got was a new HBO for the Internet.

"Netflix is like a lake. There are movies and TV shows and you pick them up from this lake," Blanc said. "Molotov is more like a river — you can see upcoming shows arriving 15 days in advance, then you see them pass right in front of you like schooling fishes. And you can see them go away for another week."

And this is smart, because Molotov is positioning itself as just a distributor. It doesn't own the content, and it doesn't want to bypass networks. Instead, the company is working with networks, respecting their channels and promising them a larger audience.

Now, there are a lot of challenges ahead. Can Molotov turn an amazing product into a successful company? Video streaming is an expensive business and only works at a large scale. In other words, Molotov needs millions of subscribers.

But it's hard to persuade people to subscribe to something like Molotov if they can already watch TV one way or another. It's even harder to persuade people who already subscribe to a couple of services.

That's why Molotov is betting on a freemium offering. Finding the right balance between free and paid features is going to be key if the startup wants to succeed. Molotov has already raised \$11.2 million from Idinvest and a few business angels (€10 million). I've also heard from multiple sources that there were rumors about another much bigger round before launching this summer. Blanc says the company hasn't pitched VC funds yet. Either way, the company will probably end up raising soon.

That's because only a team like the one behind Molotov can build a service like this. The founders already know the TV industry inside out — at least in France. "I've built something in the cinema industry with AlloCiné. Now it would be really cool to make something successful in the TV industry," Blanc said. And it's also the right timing, as French TV networks are realizing that working in silos will make them hit a plateau — we'll see whether Molotov can quickly expand its service to other European countries. Google, Apple and smart TV makers are now all selling Internet-connected devices, as well, letting Molotov focus on software.

Molotov is definitely onto something. I wouldn't be surprised if the company inspired big companies that have been trying to make a move in the TV industry.

Even more important, it wants to become the default way to watch TV in France. It's a risky bet, but Molotov has the product to do it.

techcrunch.com

Google Is Helping This School Build A 'Waze' For The Blind

April 12, 2016

Like many Bostonians, Joann Becker uses her smartphone to find the nearest bus stop. Unfortunately, GPS is only accurate give or take 30-feet, and unlike most people, Becker can't look up to see exactly where the bus is going to stop. Becker is blind.

Her employer, the Perkins School for the Blind, is building an app that crowdsources micro-location information. It's starting with local bus stops but developers think it can eventually help address the "last 30-feet" problem faced by visually impaired commuters all over the world.

Now the Perkins School is getting a little help, and \$750,000, from a technology company that knows a thing or two about mapping: Google.

Google.org, the philanthropic arm of Google, is giving out more than \$20 million in grants to organizations that are using technology to help people with disabilities. The company announced the 30 winners of its Google Disability Challenge on Tuesday, with an average of \$750,000 going to each organization. Google received over a thousand applications from 88 countries after announcing the contest last year.

"This particular topic was of interest because it was really globally relevant," said Google's Brigitte Hoyer Gosselink, who led the challenge. "One in seven people around the world has a disability." The final grants will help people with a wide range of disabilities. There are groups of 3D printing prosthetics and creating software that helps people with Autism Spectrum Disorders practice job interviews on digital people.

The Center for Discovery is getting \$1 million to make indieGo, an open-sourced device that can turn a manual wheelchair into a power wheelchair. Ezer Mizion and Click2Speak are working on an on-screen keyboard that helps people with impaired motor skills type without their hands. Google.org is giving them \$400,000.

Not all of the innovations Google is funding are high-tech. Miraclefeet will use its \$1 million grant to expand the use of SMS messages to help clubfoot patients keep up with treatments. Perkins is just one organization helping the visually impaired. As the first school for the blind in the United States, the school has always worked on innovative technology, but this is its first smartphone app.

"Google isn't just offering money to these organizations, it's also connecting them with its own experts to consult on the final products."

"We see so much potential for mobile applications to help the blind, it's like a brand new tool to go after the old stubborn problems," said Perkins' president Dave Power. The school is working with Raizlabs, a software development team in Boston.

The school got the idea after Becker mentioned her bus stop woes. An avid walker, her route can change from day to day, and she often visits new neighborhoods for her job.

"Thirty feet makes all the difference between a bus moving right past me to actually stopping where it ought to," said Becker.

The app is still in the early stages but they hope to have a final version next year. It will ask sighted commuters to share more detailed information about bus stops they visit, such as the exact space where a bench or shelter is located. It will motivate people to contribute information by making it into a game or offering rewards like a discount on coffee.

Google isn't just offering money to these organizations, it's also connecting them with its own experts to consult on the final products. It has a special connection in mind for the Perkins School.

"We at Google actually have a team that does a lot of crowdsourced clues" said Gosselink. "It's called Waze."

[cnn.com](#)

Mergers and Acquisitions

Amazon Eyed Up Everlane, Le Tote And More For Acquisition In A Wider Fashion Push

April 14, 2016

Amazon has been focusing attention on areas like media streaming, its faster delivery and pickup services, hardware and enterprise via AWS. But it's also making an effort to reboot one of the more legacy parts of its business: fashion.

TechCrunch has learned from multiple sources that the e-commerce giant has considered buying several startups in the fashion sphere as potential acquisitions to update and expand its presence in the category. Everlane, Le Tote, Rent The Runway, ThirdLove and PreeLine are among the names we've heard in connection with the effort.

"They are losing big time in apparel and are anxious to acquire brands," one founder approached by the company told TechCrunch. Amazon did not respond to requests for comment, and all the companies mentioned here declined to comment about any talks. (Update: in the comments below, Everlane's founder and CEO Michael Preysman, says Amazon has "never talked to us.") The range of these companies speaks to how Amazon is looking to address several parts of the equation when it comes to selling fashion online.

Apparel and accessory site Everlane and lingerie startup ThirdLove are both vertically integrated businesses, selling items that they have designed and manufactured themselves.

Le Tote and Rent the Runway are in the business of Netflix-style clothing rentals, sometimes called recommerce, where you wear and then send back items. And PreeLine is a social platform where people can connect with like-minded consumers to share opinions and discover new items.

Amazon has been looking to build up its own in-house muscle in at least one of these areas already. Following in the footsteps of major physical retailers like Nordstrom, Macy's and Target, Amazon has been working on a number of its own private-label brands, with smart/quirky names like Franklin

& Freeman, Lark & Ro, and North Eleven, designed and manufactured under Amazon's direction and (of course) sold and distributed by Amazon. Of the 399 job openings in fashion that Amazon is currently advertising (399!), 25 specifically mention Amazon's private label business.

Part of the reason that Amazon is interested in acquiring third-party brands and building its own private-label business is because the company has typically had a hard time shaking its no-nonsense and decidedly unsexy image as a purveyor of cut-price books, electronics and just about anything under the sun — an image that has kept some fashion brands away from selling through the site, and kept fashionably-minded shoppers from visiting and buying there.

"Right now, there is no way that some of the top brands would want to be seen for sale on Amazon," one source said.

But in a kind of e-commerce, corporate version of Pygmalion, Amazon has been trying to change this. The company has built photo studios in hipster neighborhoods in New York and London to put together shoots and editorial to better sell items online. It has sponsored Fashion Weeks both in New York and India (also helping to raise its game in the latter country). And in addition to the company's own private label advances, it's finally been wooing some bigger brands, too.

"Dozens of brands now sell directly to Amazon," the WSJ wrote earlier this month, "including department store stalwarts such as Nicole Miller, Calvin Klein, Kate Spade, Lacoste and Levi Strauss." It's also apparently taking a very un-Amazon approach with this new stock: it's selling full price. And on top of all this, the company has been looking at ways of leveraging some of its other assets to differentiate what it presents in terms of fashion commerce. One of the more recent and notable developments there has been the debut of Style Code Live, a daily video program that lets viewers shop for highlighted items on Amazon (and chat about them) while the show is streaming.

The other thing that is notable about these startups that Amazon has looked at for acquisition is that they are the essence of customer loyalty and recurring sales, with sites like Le Tote directly built around subscriptions, but the others donning strong brands that encourage repeat visits and purchases, too.

"They are trying to break the mould and the one-off relationship," one source said of Amazon's interest in smaller online brands with loyal followings. "With fashion it needs to be more of a brand play and longer-lasting relationships, not just 'come to my site to buy a pair of boxers or a regular white t-shirt.'"

Loyalty is something that Amazon has been very bullish about as a way of growing its business, specifically around its Prime service, which gives shoppers free, fast shipping and exclusive access to certain digital content and other goods in exchange for a monthly fee. It's a guessing game how many Prime members Amazon has. One estimate from this past January put the number at 54 million in the U.S. alone.

On the other side of the equation, building e-commerce businesses of any size is notoriously hard, with even large operations often failing to make decent (or any) returns, never mind the challenges for smaller outfits that lack scale. (Indeed, consignment marketplace Threadflip suddenly folded in January and sent its business over to Le Tote, which appears to still be going strong.) That pressure (or more positively, the scaling opportunity) could lead some smaller businesses to consider offers from Amazon.

Amazon itself is no stranger to considering startups for acquisition when it starts to eye up a new business area, be it delivery, food ordering, or video. But while Amazon's push into fashion is on the one hand somewhat recent, it also goes back years, as a reference point in a more general mantra about how the company needs to focus on the essential, recurring items of modern consumerist life.

"In order to be a \$200 billion company, we've got to learn how to sell clothes and food," CEO and founder Jeff Bezos has reportedly said, according to Brad Stone's 2013 book about the company, *The Everything Store*.

techcrunch.com

Logitech Buys Jaybird For \$50 Million

April 13, 2016

If you already make killer audio products, do you think spending \$50 million on a headphone firm is a good idea? It is you're Logitech's management, which just cut a check for that amount to buy sports audio outfit Jaybird. Much like Ultimate Ears, Jaybird will remain an independent subsidiary of its new parent company, selling wireless sport buds. Logitech's interest may rest more on Jaybird's sport-focused wearable, Reign, which measures your heart rate variability during training. In a release, Jaybird founder Judd Armstrong says that his firm will "benefit from Logitech's global distribution network and engineering prowess."

It's another step in Logitech's slow but steady plan to take over the world by stealth and shed its image as maker of keyboards and mice. The firm spent 2015 giving itself a glossy rebrand, strengthening its gaming products and moving into smart home products. Ultimate Ears, meanwhile, dropped consumer-level earbuds from its product range a while back in favor of earning plaudits from its Megaboom speakers. Perhaps mixing UE's audio know-how with Jaybird's will produce some exciting headphones for us to drool over next summer.

engadget.com

Industry Reports

LG Predicts 65.5% Increase In Quarterly Operating Profit, But Mobile Performance Remains Unclear

April 11, 2016

LG Electronics said it expects to report an operating profit of \$439 million during its latest quarter, marking a 65.5 percent increase over the same period in 2015. But the health of its mobile business is still far from clear.

The South Korean company issued brief preliminary earnings for the first quarter of 2016, saying revenues likely fell 4.5 percent year-over-year to \$11.7 billion. The predicted operating profit would be the highest in almost two years and would be a second straight positive quarter. It would also soundly beat previous estimates.

LG makes a wide variety of electronics and appliances, including TVs, refrigerators and telecom gear. Its mobile business has suffered, though, as growth in the worldwide smartphone market slows. The company's mobile division lost \$36 million in the final quarter of 2015 as LG posted a net loss of \$117 million.

In January, LG's mobile division reported \$3.26 billion in sales during the fourth quarter, up 12 percent sequentially and flat year-over-year, buoyed by increased sales in North America. The company claimed only 4 percent of the worldwide smartphone market last year, according to estimates from IDC.

But LG is betting heavily on its G5, a flagship phone it launched last week. The high-tech gadget features a full metal body and a modular design that enables it to transform into a virtual reality headset, a 360-degree camera and a rolling home security device, among other things.

The company hasn't released early sales figures for the device, but The Korean Herald reported that an estimated 15,000 units were sold on the gadget's first day of availability in LG's home market of South Korea, three times as many as the preceding G4. LG didn't break out its profit estimates by business in its preliminary earnings.

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Yahoo Is For Sale; Bidders Line Up; Marissa Mayer Is Toast

April 11, 2016

"After a series of missteps, bad bets and six CEOs over the past nine years, Yahoo is now valued at \$34 billion."

Yahoo is for sale, and bidders are lining up to grab their own, ever-shrinking piece of Internet history. The once-great Internet pioneer is entertaining offers...reluctantly. CEO Marissa Mayer would like to see Yahoo through its struggles, but impatient investors are looking for a way to cash out. Yahoo has reportedly given interested parties until April 18 to make their offers. The company is expected to fetch something like \$8 billion for its core Internet business.

The list of interested parties matches the potpourri of businesses that Yahoo operates. Media companies, such as the Daily Mail and Time Inc. (TIME), are reportedly thinking of making an offer. A Daily Mail spokesman confirmed to CNNMoney that the company is looking at bidding for Yahoo.

Technology companies, such as Google and Microsoft are also reportedly looking into bidding for other pieces. Though Google isn't likely to make an offer, due to antitrust concerns, Microsoft would like to preserve its relationship with Yahoo, providing Bing search results for some search queries. Microsoft had made a \$45 billion offer for Yahoo in 2008, which Yahoo successfully fought off.

Verizon could also be a player. It owns Yahoo rival AOL and other media assets, and the company has publicly expressed interest in taking a look at Yahoo. AOL is like a mini version of Yahoo, with a sizable digital advertising and online content business. Verizon bought AOL last year for more than \$4 billion. Private equity firms General Atlantic, TPG and KKR are also widely reported to be considering buying Yahoo.

After April 18, Yahoo will decide whether it likes any of the offers it received. It could enter into an agreement with a potential buyer, or it could turn down all the offers.

If Yahoo enters into a purchase agreement, it will likely be a complicated deal that could take a long time to complete. Yahoo has stakes in Chinese e-commerce company Alibaba (BABA, Tech30) and Yahoo Japan, which likely won't be part of the sale. Yahoo has been trying to unload Alibaba through a complex reverse-spinoff for months.

If Yahoo doesn't sell itself, it could begin a nasty battle with activist hedge fund Starboard Value, which has said it would nominate an entirely new slate of directors at Yahoo's upcoming shareholder's meeting later this spring.

Either way, Mayer is probably toast. Mayer has led the fight to keep Yahoo on its current path, butting heads with Starboard and other investors pushing for a sale. She'll almost certainly be ousted, regardless of the outcome. If Mayer is fired as a result of a sale, she could get a golden parachute exit package worth about \$37 million. If Yahoo isn't sold, and she's given the boot, she would take home about \$12.5 million.

At its peak in early 2000, Yahoo was worth \$255 billion. Yahoo never really recovered from the dot-com bust. After a series of missteps, bad bets and six CEOs over the past nine years, Yahoo is now valued at \$34 billion. But that \$34 billion is roughly the value of its stake in its Asian holdings. In other words, the stock market is valuing Yahoo's core Internet business as completely worthless.

After a promising start as CEO in 2012, Mayer's free spending on talent, executives and questionable assets like Tumblr -- yielding few positive results -- have landed her in the hot seat. Mayer has been unable to grow the company's profit. Yahoo unveiled a new strategy in February, cutting staff and focusing on its most crucial businesses. But it appears to be too little, too late.

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