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## This Week's Stories

### Apple Stores Get Major Makeover

May 20, 2016

One of the most successful stores in the history of retail is getting a major makeover.

Apple opened the 42-by-40-foot sliding glass doors to its new flagship store here Thursday, throwing the curtain back on a design that puts a premium on hanging out over shopping. Roughly 20% of the new store's space is dedicated to an open Forum area where visitors can learn about the company's various software and hardware offerings.

The store officially opens May 21; Apple has already rolled out its new populist look at stores in Brussels, Memphis and Guilderland, N.Y.

"This is the next generation of Apple retail," Angela Ahrendts, Apple's senior vice president of retail and online operations, told media gathered at the two-story store at 300 Post Street, not far from Union Square and the company's former flagship.

"Fifteen years ago today Apple opened its first two stores and we're thrilled to mark the occasion with the opening of Apple Union Square in San Francisco," she said.

"We are not just evolving our store design, but its purpose and greater role in the community as we educate and entertain visitors and serve our network of local entrepreneurs."

The new stores represent the collaborative creative efforts of Ahrendts and Apple's longtime design chief, Jony Ive.

Among the other big changes in evidence is morphing Apple's Genius Bar to Genius Grove; the addition of a new Boardroom area dedicated to small business customers; and the advent of a new staff position, Apple Creative Pro, tasked with helping consumers with specific questions on music, photography, videos and the like.

In addition, some of Apple's most significant store locations, including the one here, will feature a public Plaza that will be open 24/7 and feature free WiFi as well as occasional concerts and other performances.

Another highlight of the new look is a giant 6K video wall, whose ultra-high resolution display broadcasts a loop spotlighting various Apple products.

The new in-store emphasis on enterprise clients is new for Apple and represents a shift away from its core customer. Apple increasingly has been forging partnerships to build out its appeal to businesses, including teaming with Microsoft to run Office on Apple's iPad Pro tablet.

Some analysts suggest that Apple could once again revolutionize the retail space with an approach that encourages consumers to hang out as they might in a coffee shop, where interacting is perhaps more valued than buying.

"The bottom line is that they are approaching (the new store) as if it were a town center," says Tim Bajarin, an Apple analyst with Creative Strategies. "The open doors, the wide open tables where you

can come and touch and feel the products. While it is for retail, they are also letting people play with and touch the products and also creating a gathering place where people can come and learn and get help taking better pictures."

Ahrendts, who was lured to Apple last year from her post as CEO of upscale fashion house Burberry's, would appear to be a logical choice given the Cupertino, Calif., company is gradually expanding its product line to include items with a luxury-purchase feel, notably Apple Watch with its myriad wrist bands.

The original Apple Store was the brainchild of the late Steve Jobs and former Target makeover wizard Ron Johnson.

With its modernist feel and innovative Genius Bar, the outlets quickly became the most lucrative-per-square-foot stores in the U.S., and spurred rivals such as Microsoft to start their out retail outposts.

Standing outside the new store was Arkan Razi, 24, who said he'd seen the building going up over the past year and wondered what was going in to such a prime location.

[usatoday.com](http://usatoday.com)

## NBC, Spotify, Google Play Music Join T-Mobile's Binge On In Fifth Expansion

May 17, 2016

With much of the initial controversy about potential net neutrality violations behind it, T-Mobile's Binge On video service continues to grow.

The Un-carrier on Tuesday announced it has added 13 new video streaming partners to Binge On's lineup, including Google Play Music, NBC, Radio Disney, Univision and Spotify.

The latest addition brings the total number of Binge On partners to more than 80.

According to T-Mobile, Google Play Music, Radio Disney, Spotify and fellow new addition TIDAL, are all also members of the Un-carrier's Music Freedom program.

As Binge On does for video, Music Freedom allows customers to stream music from participating services without using their data allowance. T-Mobile said the new partnership with Binge On will provide a home and audience for the providers' expanding video libraries.

The additions follow T-Mobile's crossing of a major milestone in March when it added dominant Internet video provider YouTube to its list of participating services.

At the time, the Un-carrier said its partner services represented 70 percent of all video watched by Un-carrier customers.

Since the launch of Binge On in November, T-Mobile said its customers have streamed more than 377 million hours of video.

[wirelessweek.com](http://wirelessweek.com)

*"According to T-Mobile, Google Play Music, Radio Disney, Spotify and fellow new addition TIDAL, are all also members of the Un-carrier's Music Freedom program."*

## Products & Services

### AT&T Rolls Out Unlimited Data For Connected Cars

May 19, 2016

In an effort to boost its connected car initiatives, AT&T on Thursday said it will offer customers an unlimited data plan option for their vehicles.

Starting this week, AT&T said customers on its Unlimited Plan for mobile will have the option to add unlimited data for their connected car for \$40 per month. The plan will work with select cars with an embedded Wi-Fi connection or those utilizing ZTE's Mobley Wi-Fi connected car plug-in, AT&T said.

Unlimited Plan customers who don't need as much data will also have the option to get a 1 GB data plan for \$10 per month per connected car or Mobley device.

AT&T's Unlimited Plan for mobile devices is available to new or existing DirecTV or U-verse subscribers, and includes unlimited talk, text and data for \$100 per month.

The new offering comes alongside a new ad campaign from the carrier highlighting the benefits of connected cars.

As of the first quarter 2016, AT&T said it had more than 8 million cars on its network. The carrier also said it connects more than half of all new connected vehicles in the United States.

The company said it now has connected car partnerships with 19 automotive brands, including recent additions Infiniti and Volkswagen.

[wirelessweek.com](http://wirelessweek.com)

### Netflix Launches Fast.com, A Dead Simple Way To Test Your Internet Speed

May 19, 2016

Now that watching video is one of biggest uses of the web, the speed of your connection has never been more important.

To that end, Netflix, one of the primary sources of what the entertainment industry calls over the top (OTT) content, launched a tool on Wednesday that lets you test your Internet speed.

This isn't any old website. The company cleverly managed to snag the most appropriate domain out there: Fast.com. That's one of the best domain names — for any service — you could possibly have.

No technical knowledge is needed. Simply visit Fast.com and the site immediately starts calculating what your current Internet download speed is.

Of course, some more experienced Internet users might wonder why the site is so simple in its approach. On the information page, Netflix describes Fast.com as, "a simple-to-use way for consumers to estimate what speed their ISP is providing. It is not a network engineer's analysis and diagnostic suite."

The site uses Netflix servers to test your download speed and can give you results no matter where you are internationally and no matter which device (desktop or mobile) you use.

"This consumer speed test is different than our Netflix ISP Speed Index," David Fullagar, Netflix's vice president of content delivery architecture, said in a statement on the company's website. "Like the cellular data controls we recently introduced, fast.com is another tool consumers can use for greater insight and control of their Internet service."

Many are already aware of sites like SpeedTest.net, which offer detailed information on both your download and upload speeds. However, the obscure URL and advertisement-cluttered interface may turn off less techie users.

With a clean look and simple URL like Fast.com, this could quickly become both a widely used speed tester for a mainstream audience, as well as a Netflix gateway drug of sorts once you see the subtle "powered by Netflix" logo at the bottom of the page.

Well played, Netflix, well played.

[mashable.com](http://mashable.com)

## Emerging Technology

### Meet Home, Google's Answer To Amazon Echo

May 20, 2016

Google officially entered the voice-activated speaker race Wednesday with Google Home.

The standalone device will compete directly with Amazon's popular Echo and should be available to consumers later this year, Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced at the search company's annual developers conference, Google I/O.

The move had been anticipated, as Google looks to put its mark on a coming age of artificial intelligence in which machines learn to interpret and answer human queries by leveraging the speed and scope of Big Data and cloud computing.

Though smartphones still hold a lock human-computing interactions, the surprise hit of Amazon's Echo speaker has energized a new category: speakers run by digital assistants connected to a tech giant's app and content ecosystem.

Google Home project lead Mario Querioz held the device in his palm, revealing a design that was shorter and wider than Amazon's cylindrical Echo, which is powered by Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa. Microsoft also has its own personal assistant, Cortana, but as yet no at-home device.

Google Home will use its new Google assistant, which leverages Google's search and the contextual queries it's been developing with a decade of research into artificial intelligence. It will be able to play music, complete a range of tasks and answer questions that one would ask of Google search. Google did not reveal a price.

"Google's entry (in this market) validates the space and its vision to sit between the consumers and their favorite brands," says Forrester analyst Julie Ask. "However, Google also failed to offer answers to questions such as a firm date on availability, price or access to the service, (which makes one wonder) how open will access be for brands who want to engage their consumers on Google Home."

A video screened during the unveiling of Home showcased a morning routine in which a woman checks on her flight, changes a dinner reservation and sends a text to a friend, while her husband asks the device to turn lights on and children pose homework-related questions.

*"Google Home will use its new Google assistant, which leverages Google's search and the contextual queries it's been developing with a decade of research into artificial intelligence."*

Ask says that while entertaining, such use-cases for Home don't yet showcase the "true breakthrough experiences that bots fueled by artificial intelligence and machine learning" promise to provide. But, she adds, Google "is on a journey and they have time (because) consumers won't expect these experiences for another two or three years."

Pichai told the 7,000 developers present at Shoreline Amphitheater that the company was working hard on natural language processing, giving examples of how Google's search engine can understand context. Ask about movies playing, and Google will surface nearby theaters. "Let's go with Jungle Book," Pichai said, and the assistant followed up by purchased tickets and sending them to his digital wallet.

"Every conversation is different and we're working hard to do this for billions of users around the world," he said. "It's an ambient experience that extends beyond devices, beyond just phones, to devices they wear, into their cars and even to their living rooms."

Some of the looming questions about the boom in voice-activated computing includes the security of such human-machine conversations as well as just how such voluminous personal-habit information will be used by companies such as Google and Amazon.

Amazon's \$179 Echo, which has sold millions of devices since its initial rollout in the fall of 2014, can respond to a range of questions, from ordering a pizza to calling an Uber. Speaker company Sonos recently laid off some of its staff in order to pivot towards voice control. Devices such as Samsung televisions and Comcast remote controls also react to voice activation.

Siri was the first broad-based application of voice command technology when Apple introduced the feature to its iPhone in 2011.

Siri founder Dag Kittlaus recently unveiled Viv, a cloud-based virtual assistant that he contends will be able to respond to queries that contain multiple layers of requests and require contextual thinking to act on. Think, "Cancel my hotel reservation but book a new flight for me and a new dinner reservation," which means the virtual assistant needs to mine your calendar information to understand what trips and meals you mean.

[usatoday.com](http://usatoday.com)

## Fitbit Eyes Integration Of Mobile Payment Tech After Coin Acquisition

May 19, 2016

Forget your wallet, forget your phone. Soon all you may need to pay at checkout is your Fitbit wearable.

Fitbit on Wednesday said it is eyeing the release of a wearable NFC payment solution following its recent acquisition of related assets from consumer electronics and financial technology company Coin.

According to Fitbit, the deal with Coin included the transfer of key personnel and intellectual property specific to the company's wearables payment platform. Other terms of the deal were not disclosed.

Though it said it doesn't have any plans to introduce wearable payments technology into its 2016 products, Fitbit said the NFC payment technology could be embedded into future Fitbit devices.

"We are focused on making wearable devices that motivate people to reach their health and fitness goals, and that also make their lives easier with the smart features they need most," Fitbit CEO and co-founder James Park said. "Coin has been one of the key innovators in advanced payment solutions. The inclusion of their payment technology into our offerings will further our strategy of making Fitbit products an indispensable part of people's lives."

If Fitbit does include NFC payment technology in its devices, the impacts on the mobile payment industry could be huge.

In the first quarter 2016, Fitbit continued its domination of the wearables market, accounting for 24.5 percent of the market share. During the period from January to March, the company shipped 4.8 million devices, for year-over-year shipment growth of just over 25 percent.

By contrast, Apple – who's Apple Watch already includes Apple Pay technology – only accounted for 7.5 percent of the wearable market share with 1.5 million shipments.

[wirelessweek.com](http://wirelessweek.com)

## Mergers and Acquisitions

### Microsoft Sells Nokia's Feature Phone Business To Foxconn

May 18, 2016

Microsoft has signed a deal with FIH Mobile, a subsidiary of Foxconn to sell what used to be Nokia's old feature phone business. The outfit, that still produces low-end handsets like the 222 and 230, has been sold to FIH Mobile for \$350 million. It'll now come under the control of the manufacturing giant that produces (pretty much) every device you can think of. Microsoft is also handing over a manufacturing plant in Hanoi, Vietnam, as part of the deal. In addition, 4,500 employees responsible for producing the devices will be given the opportunity to join the Foxconn family.

If Microsoft wanted to convince people that it had any ambitions in the handset world, the news today does a terrible job. The company claims that it will continue to "support" Windows 10 Mobile and devices like the Lumia 950, but makes no mention of building more. There is a line to say that the outfit will "support" partners like Acer, Alcatel, HP, Trinity and VAIO. Otherwise, it looks like Satya Nadella believes that his predecessor's grand push into the smartphone wars was a mistake. After all, the company's most recent round of financials revealed that Lumia sales have fallen through the floor.

[engadget.com](http://engadget.com)

### AT&T Acquires OTT Video Platform Quickplay Ahead Of DIRECTV Streaming Service Launch This Year

May 16, 2016

Telecom giant AT&T has announced plans to acquire Quickplay Media, a cloud-based platform that powers over-the-top (OTT) video services.

Founded out of Toronto, Canada, VC-funded Quickplay has raised more than \$180 million since its inception in 2003, and it was bought out by Chicago-based private equity investment firm Madison Dearborn Partners in 2012 for around \$100 million. Terms of the AT&T acquisition were not disclosed.

Today's news comes three months after AT&T revealed plans to launch a new cross-platform TV streaming service later this year, powered by AT&T's \$50 billion acquisition of DirectTV. As it happens, Quickplay already supports AT&T's existing U-verse offering, so expanding on the companies' existing relationship should prove relatively straightforward.

"Our strategy is to deliver video content however, whenever and wherever," said John Stankey, CEO, AT&T Entertainment Group, in a press release.

"Quickplay's multitenant IP distribution infrastructure, combined with AT&T's leading scale in IP connected end points, will allow us to host and distribute all forms of video traffic. We intend to scale and operate an industry-leading video distribution platform, and viewers will get the high-quality online video viewing experience they desire."

AT&T expects to close the deal in the next couple of months, and said it will keep Quickplay's existing 350-strong workforce and contractors. "Their knowledge and skills are a key part of executing our video strategy," said Stankey.

It's also worth noting here that Quickplay will continue to function as a standalone business, with AT&T confirming that it wants to continue to expand its global customer base and support video providers and content distributors.

"With AT&T, we'll have the resources we need to further scale, grow the business, and continuously enhance that platform," added Wayne Purboo, founder and CEO of Quickplay. "Our team is proud of what we've built so far and excited to join the AT&T family. This combination will help us power the next generation of video services."

[venturebeat.com](http://venturebeat.com)

## Industry Reports

### Sprint Sees 'Best Month Ever' In Selling Ports And Circuits After Wireline Reorg

May 19, 2016

A top Sprint executive said April was its "best month ever in the history of wireline" in terms of selling new ports and circuits on its network. Mike Fitz, the VP and general manager of Sprint's new Global Wireline Business Unit, said that the business had been in decline for a while, but that the company is now showing progress in terms of selling new fiber-based Ethernet services and managed services.

"We've been operating this way for a few months, but it has taken us a while to carve out the team and get them focused," Fitz said during a conversation with FierceTelecom's Sean Buckley. "We're confident of the indication of the focus on this business."

Sprint earlier this month launched a new wireline business unit to provide a set of IP-based services to global business customers, illustrating its dedication to the industry segment.

Heading up the effort is Fitz, a ten-year company veteran who previously served as VP of the service provider's Solutions Engineering department. Sprint's new division will include a dedicated set of sales representatives and solutions engineers who sell, design, implement and support wireline solutions for business customers.

[fiercewireless.com](http://fiercewireless.com)

*"Sprint earlier this month launched a new wireline business unit to provide a set of IP-based services to global business customers, illustrating its dedication to the industry segment.."*

## Google's Android And Chrome Operating Systems Getting Closer

May 19, 2016

Google said its Android mobile app store will run on the Internet giant's Chrome OS for personal computers, the latest sign of the two operating systems slowly converging. Google Play, the Android app store, will roll out first on three Chromebook PCs running Chrome OS: the Asus Chromebook Flip, the Acer Chromebook R 11 and the latest Chromebook Pixel made by Google. Over time, the most-popular global app store will run on other existing Chromebooks and new PCs specifically designed for Play that Google is developing with hardware partners, the Mountain View, California-based company said Thursday.

Android apps like Microsoft Corp.'s Skype video calling service, will now work on Chromebooks, filling several gaps that made the computers less useful in the past. The move is the latest sign that Google, a unit of Alphabet Inc., may eventually combine Android and Chrome OS into a single operating system. While the company has said it has no current plans to eliminate Chrome OS, a top Google executive addressed the subject Thursday.

"There's been a lot of speculation about Android and Chrome OS merging," said Hiroshi Lockheimer, head of Android and Chrome OS at Google. "Our approach is to take the best attributes of each and share them with the other."

Google's Play Store, with more than a million apps for Android smartphones, is a crucial part of what has made Android the world's most popular mobile operating system. App developers get access to more than 1 billion Android phone users, while consumers can choose from a wide range of apps to make their devices more useful.

Google is hoping to extend that symbiosis by making the Play store, and the Android apps on sale there, work on its Chrome OS, which powers millions of inexpensive, web-based laptops made by companies including Dell Inc., HP Inc. and Acer Inc.

The latest version of Android, named N, has taken technology from Chrome OS too. When an operating system or security update is sent to Chromebooks, the system creates a new version of the software in the background, allowing people to keep using their computers. When they reboot later, the update is loaded. Android phone users have so far had to stop what they're doing to download updates then reboot immediately. When Android N rolls out later this year, it will use the Chrome OS approach.

[bloomberg.com](http://bloomberg.com)



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