

From: Beau Nouvelle [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 31 March 2022 11:59 PM
To: adtech inquiry
Subject: Digital platform services inquiry 2020-2025

Hello,

I'm a software developer living in Melbourne and have just over 10 years of experience developing applications for Apple platforms. I've worked in a number of different industries for both large and small companies. I now run my own business building apps for a wide range of clients and even have a few of my own. I'm writing to have my say about the subject of this email and to go through a few things that I have witnessed over the years.

Here's the short of it. Apple needs to be regulated.

Why?

1. From 2016-2018 I managed the mobile team at a startup called LOKE. It's a SAAS B2B company in the hospitality sector offering customers an app and various ways for them to reward their own customers. Think loyalty programs and customized apps on the store. Some notable customers include Messina, Baskin Robins, and Nando's. Each customer had their own, customized version of our white label app on the Google and Apple app stores.

Part way through my employment Apple decided to create a new rule that was in their words, to combat "App Store Spam". It was no longer okay for developers to upload "skinned" versions of the same app, or apps that were "generated". Our business was suddenly on shaky ground. 15 employees and 200+ restaurants were about to lose out big time. We sent many emails to Apple but received no response. We tried calling them. We tried everything.

Eventually there was enough public outcry over it that Apple backed down slightly and instead made it a requirement that each app had to have its own developer account. This means that Apple would pocket another \$150 AUD for each "skinned" app uploaded to the store.

Obviously the reason they gave about combating App Store spam was a lie. Many of us in the developer community figured it was an attack on other app development tools that were going around at the time.

2. Apps must be built using macOS. This is something that doesn't get talked about much. Many people want to see side loading come to iOS (as do I) however, as a developer, we need more freedoms. We are bound to their rules in other ways. Having to use a Mac to develop iOS applications forces developers to purchase a Mac. Which, have only increased significantly in price over the last few years.

This also locks people in to having to choose device configurations that may not fit their needs, and an inability to perform upgrades or repairs on their machines. For example, on a PC, it could be as little as \$250 to add more ram. On a Mac however, you need to purchase that ram when you buy the machine, sometimes costing 3x more. For some people, there's no choice. They HAVE to buy a Mac to do any work. Which means they may not have the money to buy a different computer to use for leisure.

The design of these computers isn't always consumer friendly either. Some come with only 2 USB ports, which means more money needs to be spent.

There is no technical reason to have this restriction from Apple besides money. The programming language (for all iOS and Mac apps) Swift, also runs on Linux and Windows. I can make a Mac app on Linux or Windows providing I don't plan to put it on the App Store. It's a silly restriction.

To contrast, Android apps can be developed and submitted to the Play and Amazon app stores on any platform.

3. Developer relations. There is zero support from Apple. More and more the development community has to rely on each other for help when things go wrong. The latest SwiftUI framework has lots of missing documentation. Bug reports go ignored. Complete lack of communication.

It's clear the App Store has grown so much that Apple can't even manage it correctly anymore. I reported a significant security issue in 2018 and that bug is still present in iOS. I reported my finding through their radar system and the bug bounty program. Completely ignored. It can be very difficult to get work done when there's no communication about release cycles, or what new App Store rules they plan to bring into effect.

Indie developers have no chance.

When Apple announced the M1 Mac, developers were invited to spend \$500 USD on a development kit. A kit, that when a certain amount of time had passed, was to be returned to Apple. Which is fine, we knew what we were signing up for. However, many of these devices stopped working 3 months into use. Apple did not have support channels in place for these machines and so getting a replacement was not possible. Developers paid \$500USD for a device that failed within 3 months, and because it was a developer kit... too bad. Apple then had the nerve to ask for them back, offering something like \$200 in return... in Apple credit... It was later boosted to \$500 of credit after many people complained.

They do not care about us. Even in the Apple vs Epic cases they have talked at lengths about all the good they have done for the world and developers over the years. Never once stopping to realize that the iPhone wouldn't be what it is without third party developers.

4. They play favorites. Despite what Apple may tell people, they certainly do NOT treat all developers the same. Many companies had special code put in place for them over the years so that their apps could function and do things that others could not.

I have a story of my own about this. On a recent government project I was tasked with building an app and web platform for a VIC gov branch who had over 800 iPads. I was having trouble with crashes in their PDF rendering code. I was unable to contact anyone from Apple to help with my issue. However, when my client got involved, we had developers on the PDF team from Apple on the phone within a week. Why? Because they bought 800+ iPads from them, and Apple wanted to keep that business going.

We never did resolve the issue, but it's just amazing how easy it was for them to do that, and how difficult it was for me.

5. App Store scams. We have all heard by now the sheer amount of scams on the store. I even found a few myself. Some of which were actively being promoted by Apple. <https://www.imore.com/apple-promotes-676-year-scams-asmr-slime-apps-app-store>

This was all over the news, and is still ongoing. As a developer I don't want to have my content on a store that promotes this kind of content. I don't want to have to compete with people doing the wrong thing. Many of the apps on that store have fake reviews. Download numbers are inflated and I have no chance of getting noticed.

Things did use to be easier when it wasn't so completely curated. There used to be a "new" section that was automatically updated whenever new apps were uploaded to the store. Now all we see is scams and the same "ToDo"

apps and games being promoted time and time again. It's impossible to stand out unless you have connections within Apple or cheat your way there.

6. Apple steals ideas. This has happened many times over the years, and sure "It's just business". But its different when you control the store that you're stealing ideas from. Amazon do the same thing with their products and have been caught copying high selling items in their store and selling their version at a lower price.

In Apples case though and most recent example:

<https://www.theverge.com/2021/8/16/22627515/flicktype-ios-keyboard-discontinued-blind-visually-impaired>

They also did the same with the app called Duet, and their night shift feature was also stolen.

Generally, more competition is a good thing. But when Apple does it, it locks people out of the competitor. They do it in such a way that it's impossible to compete with them at all. Just look at Tile and Apples own AirTags. Tile can NEVER integrate their app as deeply as Apple can. AirTags will always have better features as its completely supported at an OS level. Tile only has their app. Who would even buy a Tile product now?

Likewise, NightShift is an OS feature. No app can do that. Apps are sandboxed. No app can make the screen change color across the entire device.

They defeat their competitors in one go.

Another story from a developer perspective. Back in the early days of Xcode (the software used to make iOS apps), developers were able to use plugins. Little bits of code that enhanced Xcode. Some of this code came in the form of ways to quickly restructure code, or specific syntax highlighting, or debugging tools. Apple completely removed this ability due to "security" concerns. Xcode LOST a lot of functionality when that came into play, and to this day still hasn't recovered.

7. Apple hates the web. It's true. Their own developer website is slow to load and terrible to use. Why does this matter? Apple have said in the past, that if you don't like the rules you can always make a web app, or switch to Android. Well guess what. They've ruined the performance and usability of web apps through iOS. Web apps are not feasible. As a dev, I'd gladly switch over, but web apps are missing so many features that would put them on par with native apps.

8. Anti-competitive. Let's use Safari as an example. Safari is the ONLY web browser you can use on iOS. Google Chrome??? That's Safari underneath. Apple will not allow any other browser on the platform. Why? I'll tell you why. Third party app stores. A third party web browser could essentially be the gateway to running other code on an iPhone. Apple has no control over what goes on in a third party browser. They hate that.

This is bad for customers because when bugs or security issues are found in Safari, all browser are effected. Users cannot switch to another so that their web browsing, bank details, etc is secure.

OVERALL

Both Google and Apple have a duopoly. The mobile space is the new web. Except the web is open, and these app platforms are not. They need to be treated as such.

In recent news Apple are thinking about creating iPhone subscriptions. So you know where things are going. We'll never actually own our devices.

I should be able to purchase replacement parts (especially batteries). I should be able to upgrade my computer. It reduces e-waste, and saves people money.

I think the biggest company in the world can certainly afford to make some concessions for once.

Third party app stores or new laws around side loading would solve many of the problems that come with navigating all the smaller problems. It will make developers less reliant on Apple and allow users to download apps from new, trusted locations. Imagine the Australian government having its own App Store for gov based apps that don't have the same restrictions. Schools could have their own stores.

You need to be careful though. Apple can be tricky. It wouldn't surprise me if they decide to pop up a screen when someone buys a new phone give them a choice. App Store or Side Loading, with no option to do both. Choosing side loading may also cut users off Apple Music, Apple TV+, etc. So we'll need to be careful about that. Don't let them weasel their way out of it.

Honestly it's so bad now that I'd rather they be banned from operating in the country altogether than continue doing what they're doing. So either bring about new laws to force them to open things up, or ban them completely.