

The New Zealand Herald

The ugly side of Apple

1:03 PM Friday Sep 16, 2011

Most people think of Apple's slick products, clean lines, must-have devices that work well but, and strangely more importantly for some, that can make people look good, too.

The Apple design ethos was echoed in the software - operating systems that worked well and looked great, hiding the wires and joints behind the slick interface just as the products did.

But there's an ugly side to Apple. To me, it physically manifests everyday in Lion (OS 10.7x). Generally, the Lion interface is clean and hews to and refines Apple's OS X look, but at the same time, it is somehow duller. The icons in sidebars are grey and can't be customised, which reduces glance-recognition.

Apple's vaunted human interface had a misstep in flags in Mail. Before, you could flag or unflag an email with one orange flag. The seven flags available in the latest Mail is great, allowing you to categorise and mark emails differently.

But the flags themselves are ugly. They look like they're from a 1950s children's book. It doesn't go with the rest of the interface ... apart from the Address Book and iCal.

And the new Address Book is, frankly, ugly. It has a faux leather look that jars with the clean lines of most of the other software in Lion. We have a Germanic, Bauhaus chic most places - but not with Address Book.

Worse still, it's harder to use, requiring many more steps to add an address, even via the Mail app's data detector.

That's because it only has a two-column view, which you'd think would be easier to use - but the previous three-column view let you add groups and individuals, and edit and order your addresses, all without having to flip back and forwards in virtual 'pages'.

iCal also looks ... well, bad. It also has the faux leather, and it's less intuitive to use, with features hidden away and no handy sidebar.

App ugly

But personally, I believe the ugliness at Apple goes further. Like the feeling app developers get when their apps don't get approved for seemingly arbitrary reasons. Sure, there are reams of guidelines to adhere to, but some can't help a suspicion that these are sometimes used as excuses to refuse apps that just offend Apple, somehow.

For example, a game app that implied criticism of Apple via its controversial China-based device assembler, Foxconn. *Phone Story* was a "game for smartphone devices that attempts to provoke a critical reflection on its own technological platform.

Under the shiny surface of our electronic gadgets, behind its polished interface, hides the product of a troubling supply chain that stretches across the globe.

Phone Story represents this process with four educational games that make the player symbolically complicit in coltan extraction in Congo, outsourced labour in China, e-waste in Pakistan and gadget consumerism in the West."

That's from the developer, [Molleindustria](#)'s, blurb. The unit has the tagline 'Radical games against the dictatorship of entertainment'.

All of the revenues raised were to go directly to workers' organisations and other non-profits working to stop the conditions represented in the game.

The game appeared briefly on the App store this week, then it was gone. You would presume that Apple has the guidelines and vetting procedure to stop anything it dislikes - I mean, that doesn't fit the guidelines - from ever actually appearing on the Store, though developers report that Apple is more helpful on getting their apps up to speed than originally.

Did Apple ban the game based on its description? The title does not explicitly criticise Apple's iPhone manufacturing process, just the state of the entire smartphone manufacturing industry. (This story comes via <http://www.cultofmac.com/apple-bans-game-supporting-foxconn-workers-rights-from-the-app-store/113494> target="new">Cult of Mac.)

Apple did get in touch with Molleindustria, and explained that the game is in violation of the following guidelines:

15.2 Apps that depict violence or abuse of children will be rejected.

(Irony alert! The game depicted the abuse of children that smartphone manufacturers were complicit in.)

16.1 Apps that present excessively objectionable or crude content will be rejected

(Again, irony.)

21.1 Apps that include the ability to make donations to recognised charitable organisations must be free; and

21.2 The collection of donations must be done via a website in Safari or an SMS.

Molleindustria contests the violation 21.1 and 21.2, "since it's not possible to make donations through *Phone Story*. Molleindustria simply pledged to redirect the revenues to no-profit organisations, acting independently."

Molleindustria is currently considering two steps:

To "produce a new version of *Phone Story* that depicts the violence and abuse of children involved in the electronic manufacturing supply chain in a non-crude and non-objectionable way."

Do you get the arch irony of that statement?!

Secondly, Molleindustria is considering releasing a version for Android and jailbroken iOS devices - in other words, for non-iPhone users and iPhone jailbreakers so they can play a game that depicts the perfidy of Apple's manufacturing partners, for devices most likely manufactured in the same conditions, if not at the very same plants.

The users who managed to buy the app before it went offline "are now owners of a rare collector edition piece", says Molleindustria. The Italian developer will be posting further [updates on Twitter](#).

Molleindustria's site makes it very clear what their politics are - humanist, basically, pro union, pro atheist, pro gay... what I want to know is what Apple has against that, having weighed in a couple of years ago on gay rights? (See below, on Proposition 8.)

Well, they do say Americans don't get irony.

But Apple pulled a controversial [gay cure](#) app this year. The app was intended to 'help' gay people become heterosexual, which should sound like a tragic joke to anyone with any sense. But it was only pulled from the App Store after over well over one-hundred-thousand people signed an online petition to shut it down.

Prior to being removed, the app had received a '4' rating from Apple, indicating the company considered it to have "no objectionable material."

Apple did not comment on the app's initial rating, according to the report. What I find ironic about this whole story is Apple's public opposition to Proposition 8 three years ago. The measure added a new provision, Section 7.5 of the Declaration of Rights, to the California Constitution, to provide that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized (sic) in California." This had implications for workers rights, insurance, partner inclusion in employment conditions etc.

Apple publicly opposed Prop 8, joining many other high-profile companies in doing so. Apple Inc opposed Proposition 8 as a "fundamental" civil rights issue, and donated US\$100,000 to the 'No on 8' campaign. I think that's about ten minutes wages for CEO Tim Cook who is, coincidentally, gay.

United States district court Judge Vaughn R Walker overturned Proposition 8 on August 4, 2010 in the case *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* (the then Governor), but this was only a stay and the situation is not yet been fully resolved.

Contradictory stances and rulings in the developer world and elsewhere don't help the impression that Apple is a cold and distant entity. Apple, if you're going to be monolithic and unapproachable, at the very least, a clear stance that is clearly adhered to would be greatly appreciated.

- **Mark Webster**

34

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[scottyone](#) (Onehunga)

05:40 PM Friday, 16 Sep 2011

Nice commentary - well done

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[Jacob](#) (Remuera)

05:40 PM Friday, 16 Sep 2011

I thought the article would have been about Apple's patent trolling and anticompetitive monopolistic business practices.

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[DW](#) (Royal Oak)

05:41 PM Friday, 16 Sep 2011

It's curious to see that as Apple becomes more closed and secretive, Microsoft has opened right up. I've seen more about Windows 8 in two weeks than I saw about Vista in 5 years.

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[muscles_dude](#)

05:41 PM Friday, 16 Sep 2011

This is why I don't own an iPhone, Mac or any other type of Apple product.

Apple has chosen itself to be judge and jury (with no 2nd opinion) to decide what's moral or not on behalf of the human race of Apple product owners. The trouble with this concept is that nobody gave Apple the authority to do so on behalf of the 6 billion people on the planet. Apple believes that everyone should agree to its views on censorship and closeness of expression and speech or else you're blocked on behalf of its products and software. Other hardware and software providers do not take up this god-like-moral position and put themselves rightly in the position of not having the authority to judge and rule over their customers' set of morals and own judgements about what is right for them or not. Clearly some censorship is rightly so, such as child abuse content which is clearly immoral. I do not want to buy any Apple product that is controlled by a company who sees its role as to censor my life based on its own mono-monopoly market-driven set of values. I would hope that others can clearly see this very important fact and think about it before jumping head into the Apple marketing sales hype.

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[HC](#) (Onehunga)

05:41 PM Friday, 16 Sep 2011

The truly ugly face of Apple is shown by the local manufacturers in Mainland China, who have repeatedly breached the local environmental legislations and standards by polluting rivers, air and soil through allowing toxic and other waste to emit into the environment. I read about this in the international media weeks ago, which had a similar heading as this article. So I at first thought that this would be addressed here, but another aspect is actually being addressed in this piece. Perhaps someone in NZ may inform the public here about that other ugly side of Apple, which is not much talked about. All we get is a lot of glossy marketing hype about the great products they offer us.

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[fearless](#) (Grey Lynn)

09:25 AM Saturday, 17 Sep 2011

I was an Apple fan when their products were made in America. Well, the keyboard on the first Mac Classic I owned was made in Ireland but hey. Tim Cook won by sorting Apple's supply chain to match the cost savings possible by commodity PC manufacturers for Asia, and western firms like HP and Dell sourcing from the same Taiwanese factories. Now that Foxconn (Hon Hai) is effectively a Taiwan-based multinational operating in China, Apple products are built there - albeit under the same sweatshop conditions as generic PCs.

So America has exported its jobs to China and outsourced its call centres to Bangalore. A win for IT? Sadly the genius crew in Palo Alto who devised all this have done themselves out of a job so let's hope they're across next wave of tech innovation or the west just lost its global dominance.

Of course this all a bit moot - Chinese workers leave their lives of rural peasantry (like the English in the Midlands 150 years ago) to make things the west gets to buy with vendor finance from Beijing - sounds awfully co-dependent.

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[McD \(Wellington\)](#)

09:25 AM Saturday, 17 Sep 2011

I couldn't agree more with the cosmetics of Lion, I get the toning down but it feels like going back to *system* 1. On the App Store our opinions differ. I think Apple should maintain the App Store as a heavily curated channel for quality software with controls tightening all the time. The Android K-marts will collectively be pushing higher download volumes in the near future but what unsuspecting consumers won't realise is the quality statement is way different - iOS has real apps, beyond content consumption and has become a real computing OS. I have no problem with irony as a means of proving a point but leave it in the web domain with the other attempts to prove a point, not the App Store. This App appears to be akin to drawing attention to the 'issue' of hard-core pornography by showing examples.

I'm the wrong side of puberty to be patronised by pseudo-libertarian tricks, for those who are susceptible there's the web, Windows and Android. I just want the App Store to provide high-quality Apps if that means banning propaganda trojans, so be it.

Apple use the same assembly partners & plants as most other PC & consumer tech brands so singling them out is just trolling.

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[McD \(Wellington\)](#)

09:25 AM Saturday, 17 Sep 2011

@Jacob: Which ones? Apple has made strategic acquisitions of talent, technology & patent portfolios relevant to delivering real products. It's Google, Samsung & HTC who've pushed design fakes and tried to back them with IP acquisitions to use as leverage - those are the real trolls. And by anticompetitive & monopolistic do you mean integrated products which sell well?

@DW: That's because Microsoft couldn't release Vista details until Apple released the features Microsoft copied in Tiger (2005) & Leopard (2007) - simple chronology. They've also been very forthcoming with the fact that ARM-based Windows 8 Tablets won't run Windows software at all - another tablet with no software! Though I guess their omission of Flash will make that alright now.

@Muscles: No they haven't, they've decided to make their design decisions and release their products. People can decide whether they want to buy them or not (& no, Safari doesn't censor the web for me or my blog responses). But I'm sure they're really out to oppress you because I'm sure you're really worth it.

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[sherriffwoody \(Auckland City\)](#)

09:25 AM Saturday, 17 Sep 2011

I thought this was going to be an article on the true ugly side of apple as a company, not of its OS's. The truth is apple is now the evil empire that M\$ was in the 90's. I'd suggest they need to watch what they're doing otherwise they will also become widely hated as other companies have in the past. Deaths in factories, polluting processes, tracking, closed systems, app restrictions, false advertising, poor security, disallowing apps other than OS apps etc. E.g. Once MS got

hammered for selling windows with IE as an intergrated component, but it could still run other browsers, now apple is getting away with completely preventing other browsers from being run on some of their OS's

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[oldman](#) (Auckland Region)

09:25 AM Saturday, 17 Sep 2011

Well put, reading the news on the lawsuit between apple and Samsung is unbelievable. They (apple, but they not the only one) buys up thousand of patents just so they can sue and block others from making a better phone, they are not the only one but seems they driving the game. Latest patent infringement is copying "thinness and round edges" , like a Morris Mini Minor claiming any car smaller than a mini is copying it?

also how the screen unlocks or how gallery browse it pictures?

like how a car remotely unlocks, any other car having remote unlock is a copy?

really, why can't they concentrate on building better phones, than stopping others to better it? That how we get good products on what WE want.

(they targeting samsung as they are a big threat, why not Motorola who use the same Android OS?)

Not this one phone size,type fits all. Phylosophy.

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