

OS 10 Delivers Plenty of Useful Features That Aren't Just Eye Candy

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NEWS ANALYSIS: Apple is billing iOS 10 as its biggest mobile operating system release, which could be true, but most people will be interested in only a few of the improvements.

Installing a new operating system on your phone is always an adventure. There's always the question of whether it will work, and if it does, whether the improvements will be worth the effort.

In the case of Apple's iOS 10, there was real concern following reports on Sept. 13, the day the update was released, that iOS 10 would totally disable mobile devices, forcing users to clear their devices and reinstall iOS. So naturally, I decided to perform the update just a few hours before leaving the office on an extended business trip.

Fortunately, the update went smoothly, and my phone was fully functional once it was completed. The change to iOS 10 is immediately obvious because the phone wakes up as soon as you pick it up. It also displays your notifications in a new attractive format in which each notification has a header and a body.

You'll also be greeted by a message that says, "Press Home to Unlock." If your phone is set up to read your fingerprints, then you must physically press the Home button instead of simply touching it.

You'll also notice the three small dots just below those words, one of which looks a little like a tiny camera icon. What that means is that there are now three screens available when the phone is locked. Slide to the left, and you're in the camera app. Slide to the right, and you can see your notifications and widgets. You can even create additional widgets for some of the apps on the phone.

The interesting new features on iOS 10 include a number of photo editing capabilities which will be of interest to serious photographers but perhaps not so much to everyone else.

The iOS 10 photo app now supports a search function that can look for features in an image. So if you touch the search icon in the photos app and type "dog" you'll get photos you've taken of dogs. Of course it will also look at location tags and you can search those too. This feature doesn't only work with the new cameras in the iPhone 7. It works fine with photos taken with the cameras in earlier model iPhones.

One truly useful feature is the ability of the iOS 10 phone app to transcribe voicemail messages. If you press on the message in the voicemail screen, your phone will display the messages' transcribed contents.

In fact, iOS 10 has a number of other small but useful features like that. For example, you can set your phone so that if you're driving or using headphones, iOS will announce who's calling so you don't have to look at your phone.

There are some new features that will save you time. You can clear all notifications with a single tap. You can also clear all of the tabs in Safari at once. Also useful is the ability to prioritize downloads of updates.

Let's say you need to use your weather app, which is currently being updated. You can press on the item and use 3D Touch to open a menu to

choose "Prioritize Download," which will make the other apps wait until the one you need is all there and ready to install.

Apple Mail has some improvements that will also make things easier, including a threaded view of messages that's similar to what's available in both Microsoft Outlook and Google mail. You can also automatically quit mailing lists, and it's easier to delete mail, which is a primary purpose of having email on your phone. There's also a handy ability to show only new messages.

Some of the changes are subtle. For example, when you open a folder to see what's inside, the screen you're on is blurred rather than being blanked out with a gray background. It's not a big deal, but I think it's attractive.

Other changes, such as the need to actually press the Home button to get past the lock screen aren't so nice if you're already using the phone's fingerprint recognition.

Fortunately, you can return the phone to its original behavior of only having to touch the home button to open the lock screen. On the other hand, if you're not using fingerprint recognition, perhaps because you have an older phone, then pressing the Home button is easier than swiping.

There are many features that I've heard about but haven't tried yet. So I'll cover those later. So far my impressions of iOS 10 are positive. Apple has added a number of features that are actually useful, and the company has made it possible to customize the phone more to your liking. For example, now you can clean up your screen by getting rid of default apps.

I also haven't tried iOS 10 on an iPad yet, although some iPad-only features look useful. For example, you're supposed to be able to display multiple web pages side by side in Safari.

Overall, iOS 10 seems to be a much bigger improvement over its predecessor than was the case with earlier versions. It's worth noting that many of the updates to the new version actually do something useful and are a lot more than just eye candy. So taken altogether, iOS 10 seems to be a particularly worthwhile update.