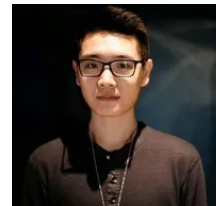


I ranked the best iOS 17 features from most useful to straight gimmicky

There's a laundry list of new features coming to the iPhone, but these are the very best, from actually useful to just fun to use.

Written by **June Wan**, Reviews Editor ZDNet on July 14, 2023



June Wan/ZDNET

The public beta version of iOS 17, Apple's next-gen software for the iPhone, is officially out. With it comes a wave of new features, including ones that turn your iPhone into a bedside smart display, transform your favorite photos and videos into animated stickers, and even reproduce your voice via artificial intelligence.

If that doesn't get you excited, let this tier list be of service. I've been testing iOS 17 for about a month and rounded up the very best features, starting with the ones that will make a big difference to your iPhone user experience and trickling down to the features that will leave you with a sense of jolly and nothing more.

1. StandBy Mode

Usefulness score: 9/10 | Gimmick score: 2/10



StandBy Mode drew headlines when Apple first announced it at its Worldwide Developer Conference (WWDC). The iPhone can now seamlessly transform into a desktop smart display? Who wouldn't want that?

As someone who already sets their phone on a bedside table every night, the usefulness of turning the device into a passive information hub was clear as day, even if that meant having another cable constantly plugged in.

A month of using StandBy Mode later, I'm sold on the feature. From interactive widgets that allow you to turn off that one kitchen light that's still on to glanceable windows of stock prices and daily weather, the iPhone just got more functional, and that's at no expense to you. It also gives me joy knowing that when I undock my iPhone, it's fully charged.

To be clear, StandBy Mode isn't perfect. The feature works best with iPhone models that support Always-On display (read: only the iPhone 14 Pro and Pro Max). Anything older and you'll frequently wish for the ambient display to stay on just a little longer than its 30-second sleep time.

2. Interactive widgets

Usefulness score: 8/10 | Gimmick score: 2/10



Have you ever wondered why you couldn't just tap on the Apple Music widget on your home screen to play and pause? What about ticking those bullets on your Reminders widget? Well, all of that, and more, is made possible on iOS 17, and I'm low-key thrilled by it.

Interactive widgets are fairly self-explanatory, right? Widgets that once forced you into apps when you tried to interact with them now behave natively on the home screen, so you'll easily save a second or two, here and there, by not having to wait for the apps to load up when you tap on the home screen elements.

3. Shared AirTags

Usefulness score: 7/10 | Gimmick score: 4/10

On iOS 17, you can now share the location of your AirTags with family and friends. That's especially clutch if you're lending an AirTag-equipped item to someone and don't want the receiver to be alerted about unknown tags nearby.

More importantly, you can share your AirTags' location with up to five people, so if you typically use one to track your home keys or, say, where you parked the family car, the shared information will benefit everyone in your circle. You can, of course, remove access whenever you'd like.

4. Live voicemail

Usefulness score: 7/10 | Gimmick score: 4/10



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For those who'd rather text than call, this one's for you. (But also, Live voicemail is great for folks who simply don't have the patience with anonymous callers or waiting "for the next available associate".)

Like Google's Call Screen feature and Samsung's Bixby Text Call, Live voicemail transcribes the incoming caller's message for you so that you can read the message first before picking up or hanging up.

I recently canceled my auto insurance plan, and the number of cold calls I received from competing services was beyond me. That's when Live voicemail came in handy. Instead of picking up every call, I simply toggled on the feature, let the iPhone transcribe the callers, and picked up when there was a meaningful offer on the table.

That said, there's one caveat to using Live voicemail and it's the fact that not everyone is as receptive to speaking to an automated voice bot. When you activate the feature, a chatbot communicates with the caller and tells them you're unavailable to pick up the call at the time. In most cases, callers hang up a second or two into the message. To be fair, I would, too, if I didn't hear an actual person picking up.

5. iMessage features (Autocorrect, the "F" word, Swiping to text)

Usefulness score: 6/10 | Gimmick score: 4/10



June Wan/ZDNET

Changes to iMessage in iOS 17 are rather subtle but amalgamate into a more personal and burdenless experience.

My partner and I both speak two different languages, so we often use a combination of English, Romanized

Chinese, and Romanized Korean in our text messages. It's chaotic, but it's what we've been doing for years now.

On iOS 17, I've found the new adaptive autocorrection particularly reliable, no matter what the language is that I'm typing, so much so that I've felt comfortable enough to leave it on.

I can't relate to the users thrilled that iMessage no longer autocorrects the F word into "duck" or "ducking" now, but that's a thing on iOS 17, and I'm happy for them.

You can also swipe on messages to start a reply, which is especially useful when responding in group chats, where the chronological order of texts means nothing when there are multiple conversations happening at once.

6. Personal Voice

Usefulness score: 5/10 | Gimmick score: 5/10

I have mixed feelings about AI-generated voice recordings, but that's basically what the new Personal Voice feature is. Found in the Accessibility settings, the iPhone will have you record 150 phrases aloud, which took me about 15 minutes to complete.

Afterward, you can use the Live Speech toggle when in iMessage, FaceTime, Phone, or other communication apps to have your artificially-produced voice read your texts.

From what I've heard, Personal Voice sounds more like myself than the chatbot who reads your captions on TikTok, but it's not perfect. I made phone calls to my family and friends with my Personal Voice and was often asked if I wasn't feeling well.

7. Contact Posters

Usefulness score: 3/10 | Gimmick score: 7/10



Apple

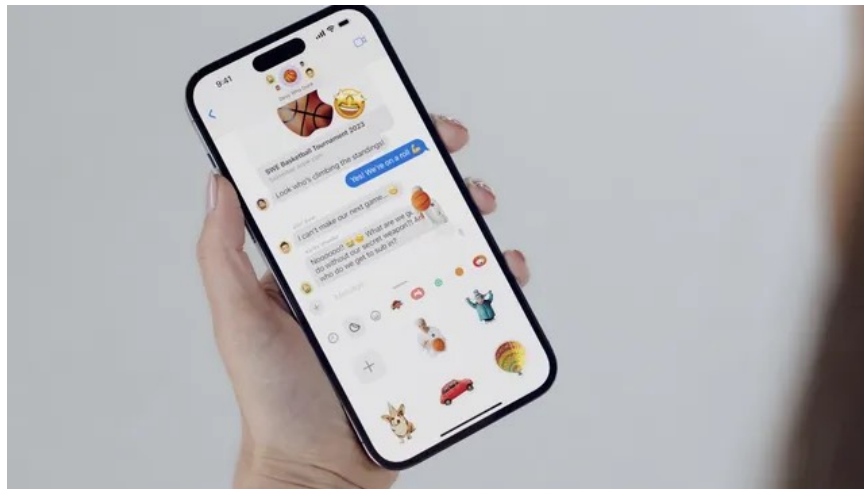
When Apple released personalized lock screens with iOS 16, the eventual transformation into Contact Posters was inevitable. You can think of Contact Posters as large-scale profile pictures. Setting one up allows other iPhone users to see what you look like (or what you'd want the recipient to think you look like) whenever you exchange phone numbers.

The good news is that you can turn Contact Posters off, or set it to share automatically to either contacts only or always ask you before doing so.

So, the next time you're at a business expo or trade show, that image of you chugging a glass of beer won't be the first thing that appears when you exchange contact information.

8. Animated stickers

Usefulness score: 2/10 | Gimmick score: 9/10



Last year's Remove subject from background feature was one of my favorite things to come out of iOS 16. With a tap and hold on an image, the iPhone can recognize (or tries to recognize) the subject from the background and crop it so you can paste the cut-out in a text message or another image.

iOS 17 takes things a step further, letting users save those cropped images of people, pets, and other objects as stickers. This works with live photos and videos, too, rendering animated stickers instead.

What you decide to do with the fun, animated stickers is up to you. I've now become the "react with a sticker" guy in my family group chat, and my mom can't wait to do the same once the official version of iOS 17 releases later this year.

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