



BEST *of* 2017

the best of
mobile software
&
emerging
technology



"I read a study that measured the efficiency of locomotion for various species on the planet. The condor used the least energy to move a kilometer. Humans came in with a rather unimpressive showing about a third of the way down the list.

That didn't look so good, but then someone at Scientific American had the insight to test the efficiency of locomotion for a man on a bicycle and a man on a bicycle blew the condor away.

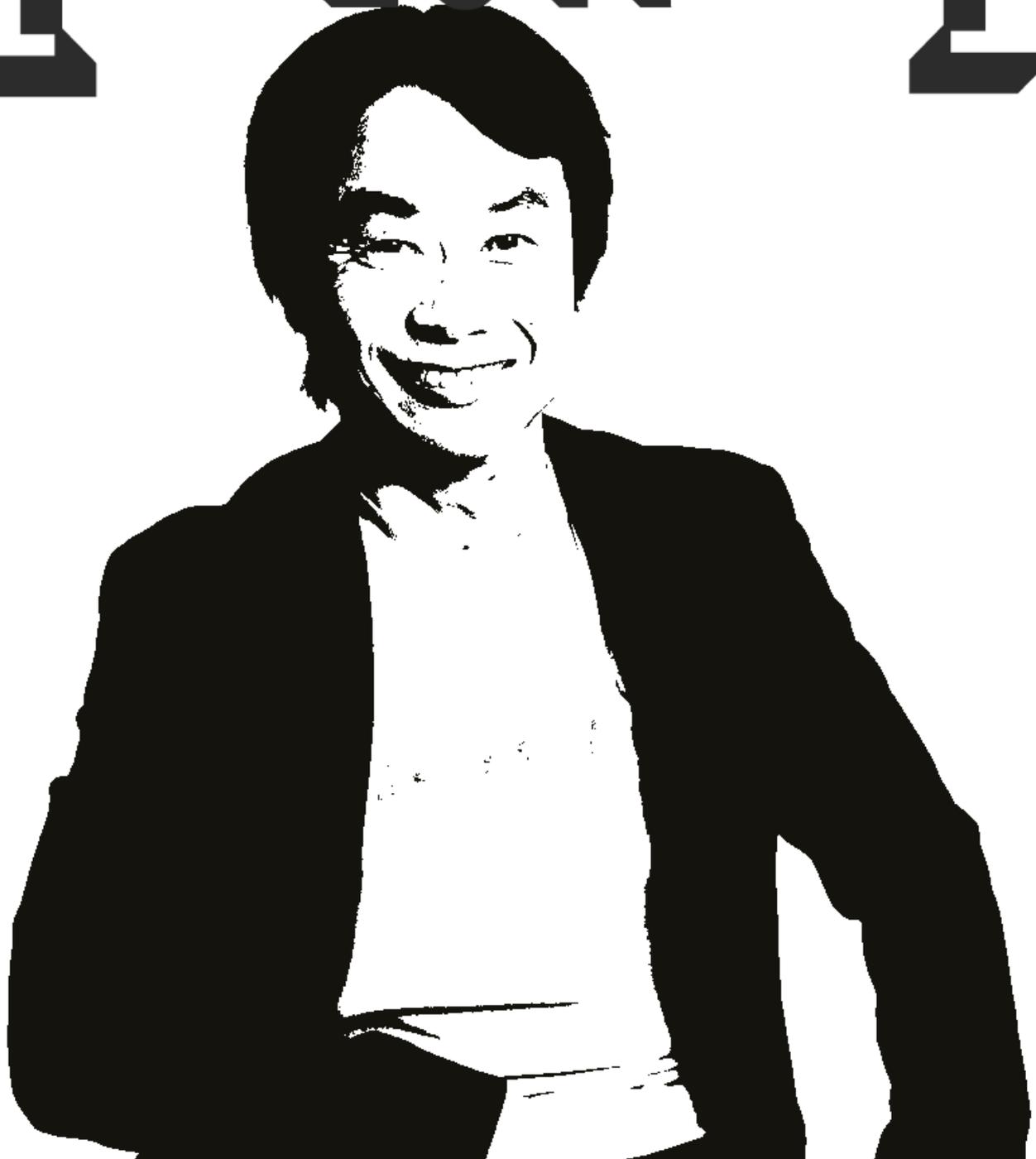
That's what a computer is to me: the computer is the most remarkable tool that we've ever come up with. It's the equivalent of a bicycle for our minds."

- Steve Jobs

TOP STORIES

from

2017





Person of the Year

Shigeru Miyamoto

When Shigeru Miyamoto, the legendary game designer behind classics like Super Mario Bros, and the Legend of Zelda, stepped into the post of the “Representative Director” for Nintendo in 2015, it was a challenging position for him. To start with he was stepping into the shoes of Satoru Iwata, Nintendo’s long standing director, and secondly, Nintendo wasn’t doing all too well either. The gaming giant was facing a challenge to stay relevant in the mobile gaming era.

Under Miyamoto, Nintendo began making their own mobile games. The first of the many to arrive on mobile devices was a rethinking of Miyamoto’s own, Super Mario Bros. for the mobile era. Miyamoto was seen taking the centre stage to promote it, be it interviews with American publications or be it the grand reveal at Apple’s Keynote earlier last year. Miyamoto was taking full ownership of Nintendo’s big move to mobile games. The game, which released in the late December 2016 was an instant hit.

But the fruits of Miyamoto’s efforts and guidance were really seen this year, when Nintendo’s Switch turned out to be the mega hit it was, and while he wasn’t directly involved in the development of the console, he definitely was the creative guide for the Switch team and helped with the games. But more importantly, it was Miyamoto again, when it came to creating the buzz around the release of the console. The result, Nintendo Switch is one of the most impactful devices to come out in 2017, reviving the Nintendo brand and putting Nintendo in the limelight once again.

Nintendo’s had a great year in 2017, and much of its credit goes to the firm’s creative fellow and representative director’s efforts to make Nintendo significant again!



1 Workplace culture finally get its due importance

2017 was the year when workplace culture, got the due attention. It started with Susan Fowler's blogpost detailing workplace harassment at Uber. But ultimately resulted in a much bigger discussion about Silicon Valley treated its employees and was backed by many more people coming forward about the severity of the problem in the valley. We also saw positive results of the widespread attention that this story gained. Employees were fired, VCs began doing the due diligence on harassment and we actually saw funding being withheld from a popular online trivia game because of the workplace culture. This is in many ways the most profound story of 2017.



2 Return of "Nokia"

An acquisition of Withings earlier this year, made Nokia an instant big player in the digital health and fitness space with multiple smart health and fitness devices coming under the banner of the Nokia brand.

Closely following on the heels of the smart acquisition, HMD the parent company for Nokia, introduced their slew of Android smartphones into the market and reignited the Nokia brand. And what's more, the devices themselves weren't just cheap Android phones but they were actually, well designed robust smartphones, that showed that great care was put into the making the hardware for those phones. It'll be interesting to see Nokia's progress in the next few years.



3

iPhone X begins era of proactive authentication

Perhaps the most exciting part of the iPhone X, is it's camera sensor tray (popularly called the notch). While the entire phone feels like a rethinking of the iPhone. FaceID is more interesting than it seems. Current authentication systems (even the image recognition features on other phones) have felt like reactive authentication systems where you need to perform a certain step to authenticate yourself. It's what I like to call a "Hey, it's me!" Authentication system, where a user is supposed to do something to tell the phone that it's him. With iPhone X's FaceID, this system moves to a more proactive authentication system, where the phone performs a check automatically, more like the phone saying "Hey! It's you!" to unlock certain functionality of the phone.

Such functionality, makes using the phone more efficient, and to the owner of the phone blurs the lines between locked and unlocked states and eases more of the pain points of an authentication system. While this isn't perfectly proactive yet, for example, iOS still requires the user to press a physical button while authenticating purchases, it's bound to improve in speed and performance over time, and is what excites me most about the iPhone X.



4

Rise of the Amazon Echo-System

Starting with CES where Amazon's Alexa based speakers and devices were present everywhere, Amazon's Alexa announced a proud dominance in the category of the smart home assistants. The year saw Amazon pushing its echo efforts even further, by launching more echo devices (including one that featured a screen to provide visual feedback) and expanding in more countries. With an expanded product range that starts at a dirt cheap price point, Amazon's Alexa attracted a lot of skill makers, that strengthened the platform further and created a pretty booming eco-system of skills (similar to apps on your phone) that had Audio interfaces.

Almost as a testament to Amazon's year of dominance, the company possibly enjoyed a very healthy holiday quarter with Amazon's Alexa assistant app being one of the most searched and trending apps on the App Store. 2017 is the year when Amazon's echo reached new heights compelling the competition to catch up to them.

7



5

Switch's a Hit

Nintendo's latest console Nintendo Switch launched amidst a lot of excitement, the company has been reeling for a while now and needed to provide something new. Nintendo's Switch did just that, proving that Nintendo was still capable of making really good casual gaming hardware.

With a mix of fun new games and old classics, bundled with modern hardware technology (including some really cool haptics), the Switch is an exciting package, and something that compels even the non-gamer audience to take notice. Switch's success is a welcome sign of relief for Nintendo and a breath of fresh fair in the gadget space that's becoming increasingly crowded by monotonous 'smart' appliances.

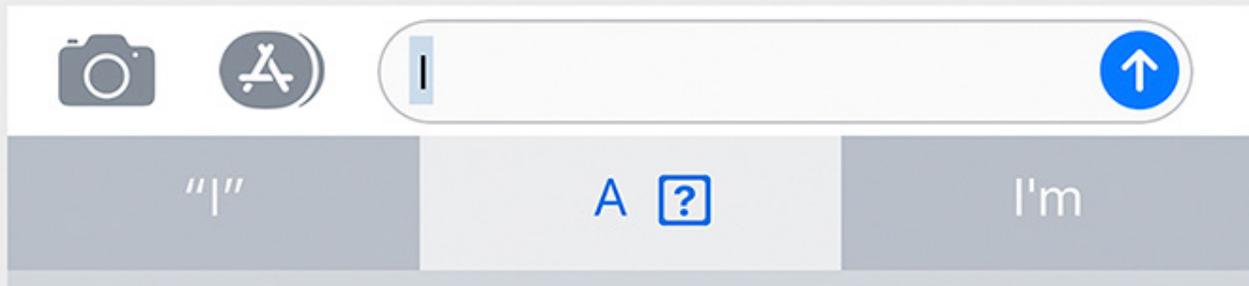


6

Uber Fiasco

What began as an ambitious year for Uber with their self driving fleet of cars beginning to start on-road testing, quickly turned into a nightmare that began with Susan Fowler's allegations of a toxic work culture, followed by lawsuits that claimed that a Uber exec stole trade secrets from Waymo. But that's not it, Uber's unethical practices to get data on customers and drivers were also exposed.

In fact, even as late as November, it was discovered that Uber faced a massive security breach earlier in 2016, and they tried to cover it up by making deals with the ransomers. Uber admitted its fault in that case. But it's also indicative of the fact that Uber's 2017 fiasco may just be the tip of a larger ice berg.



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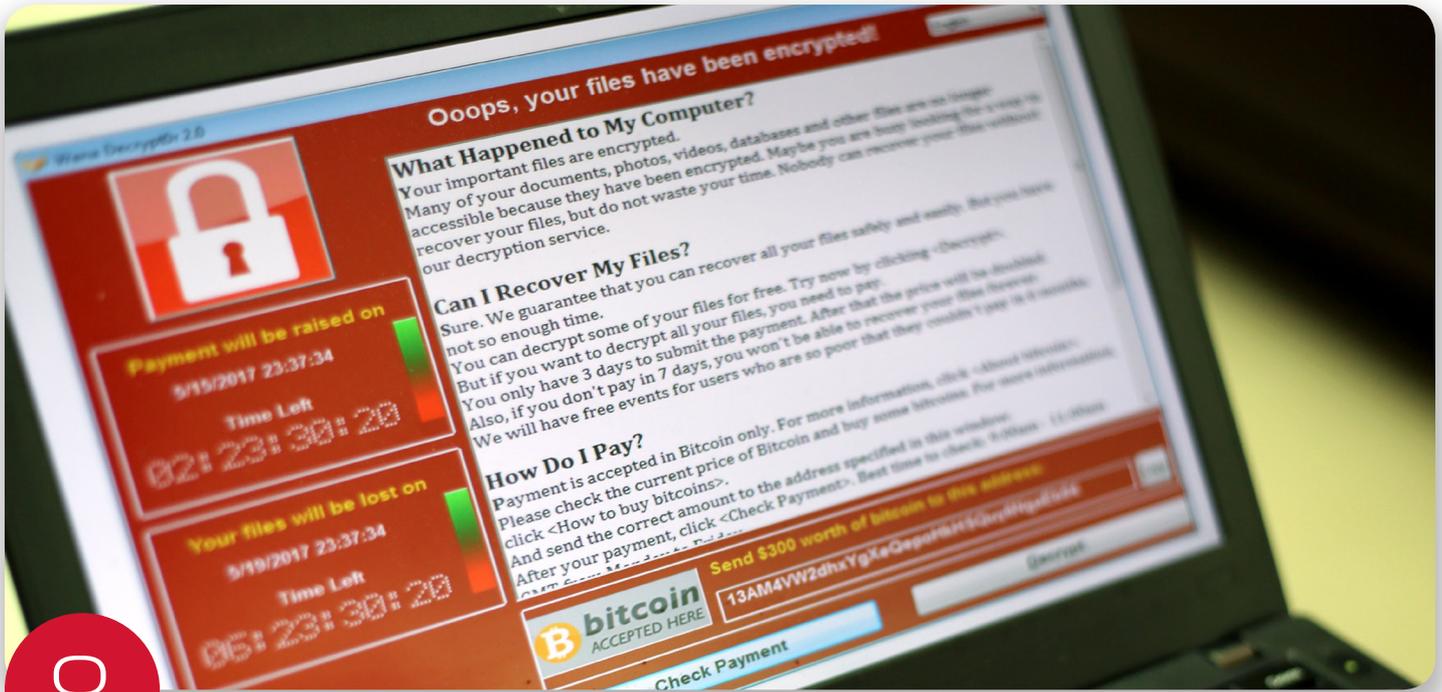
Apple's QA practices questioned

While Apple probably had a great year financially and in terms of the new devices it sold, 2017 was the year when Apple's Quality Assurance was questioned, scrutinised and its lapses exposed to the world at large. It began in October when some iOS users started experiencing the letter 'i' being replaced by a garbage symbol and the letter "A", the bug while patched quickly was one of a first of its kind in iOS.

But that wasn't all. Users witnessed another quality assurance hiccup from the tech giant, where their new calculator app failed to display correct results when the buttons were tapped quickly.

The larger issues came to light a few weeks later when first Apple had to patch a terrible root access bug that granted administrative access to anyone without the need of a password, and then followed by a date bug that crashed the springboard for some iOS users when notifications appeared on a certain date.

These quality issues affect Apple more than any other company. For a brand that's built on quality, and has a user base that trusts Apple to do the right thing and offer a quality experience, these hiccups give the company's reputation a severe dent.



8

Windows XP users “WannaCry”

Who uses Windows XP anymore? Turns out, a lot of people. Especially, in critical enterprise industries. In an industry such as that, it'd be a shame if the computers were held hostage as it'd disrupt many services. The problem was increased if the users aren't too tech savvy either. This is exactly what happened to users affected by the WannaCry ransomware. The WannaCry ransomware cryptoworm encrypted the user's data and demanded ransom payments in Bitcoin.

The ransomware affected primarily those computers which had not been updated for a while and ran unsupported versions of Windows. The impact was widespread, affecting various Hospitals and medical equipment, the ransomware also affected car manufacturers which were still relying on older systems for condition monitoring and CAD simulations. Various banks and government offices were also affected.

Possibly the most significant malware attack of recent times, it was also a lesson for most organisations to keep updating their systems and not ignore critical security updates.



9

Back to Pro for Apple

This year saw Apple moving back to more professional grade computers for their product lineups. Earlier this year, Apple announced that they're in the process of making a new Mac Pro. A rethink of the cylindrical pro that many professional users were hoping to see an update for. Apple also released an iMac Pro, that had the casing of an all in one computer with the feisty internals of a professional grade machine. While the Mac Pro would offer more flexibility, it's not hard to overlook the fact that a lot of professional applications would find the iMac Pro to be a valid pro-machine. Apple's renewed focus towards professional macs encourages it's loyal but off-late angsty professional user base which'd have otherwise switched to PC in search for more lucrative machines that could actually run their heavy duty applications.

Apple's focus towards professional computers wasn't just restricted towards macs though. They also released two new iPad Pro devices, for the professional iOS users. These devices boasted of new technology (including Promotion displays that offer a really high-end touch screen experience, and faster chipsets) and were supported by a new completely revamped iOS for the iPad, making the iPad suitable for doing professional work like audio editing, writing and publishing, graphic designing, and photo editing. With apps like Affinity Photo, Scrivener, Ferrite, Linea and Procreate helping the iPad users to build their workflows around the touch device.



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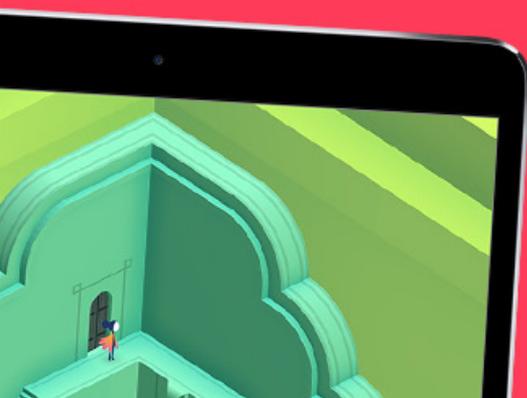
Neutral Internet receives severe blows

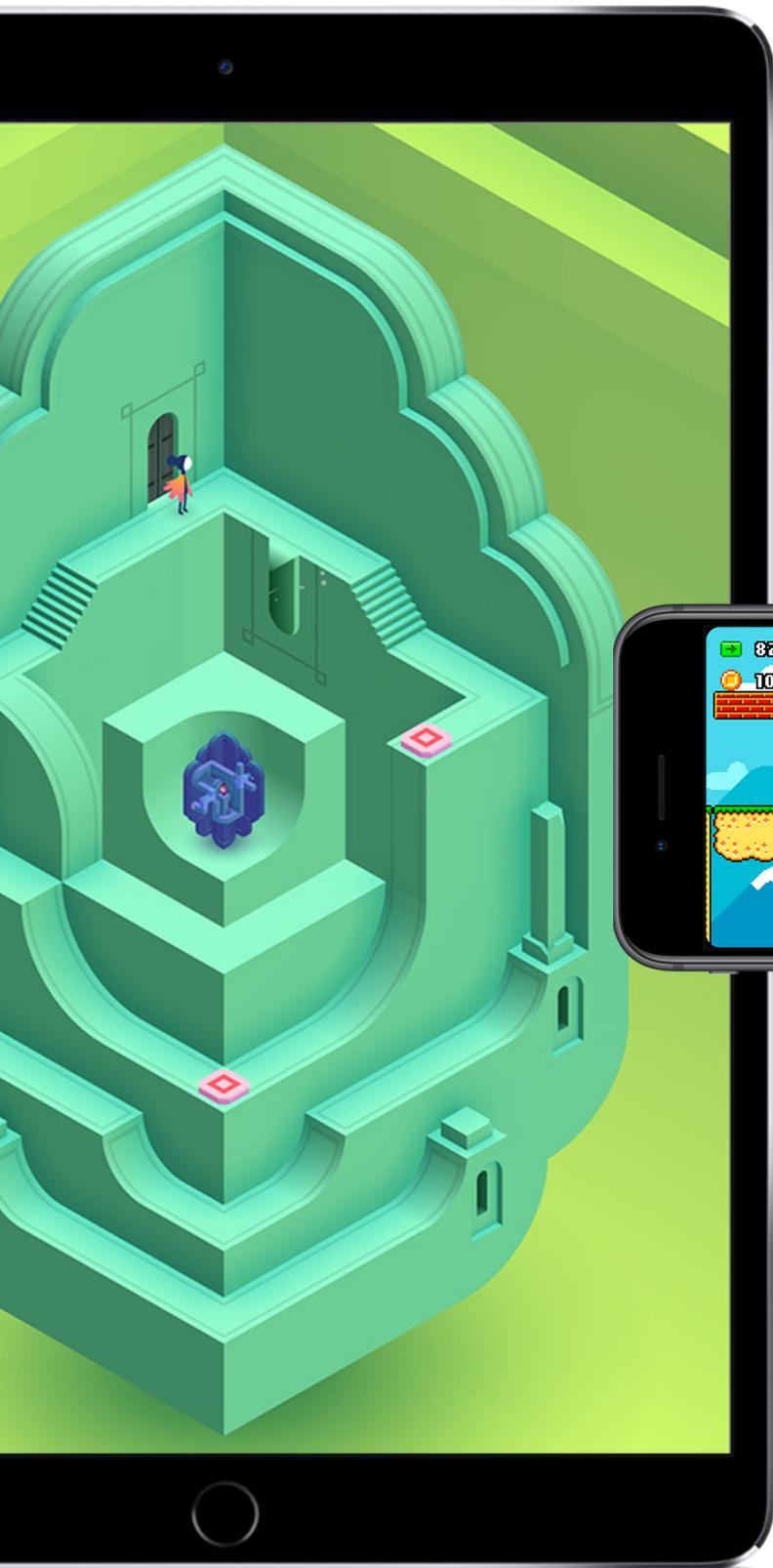
Earlier this month, the FCC, now headed by Ajit Pai, decided to repeal several limitations put in place by the previous administration to provide telecom and internet service providers with more freedom on how to shape their internet offering. One of the most significant changes was the allowing of Fast and Slow Lanes for internet access, and the allowance for offering only a limited selection of websites to the users. Basically, blowing away all the restrictions that ensured a free and open internet for everyone.

By repealing net neutrality laws, Pai's not only given control to ISPs and Telecom to provide internet services with greater freedom, but armed these giants with weapons that'd allow them to prevent the rise and proliferation of upcoming internet services that may harm their own competition. For example, Time Warner would be more inclined to give more bandwidth and faster access to something like HBO Go instead of say, Netflix Or any other streaming service.

One can only hope that the such ammendments are carefully scruti-nised & possibly overruled as they hardly benefit users in the long run.

EPIC MOBILE GAMES





Monument Valley 2

A successful follow up to the 2014 hit, Monument Valley. The sequel also includes the character of Ida's mother, and has more sophisticated illusionary architecture to support it. Just as engaging as it's predecessor, Monument Valley 2 is well worth its price.



Stagehand

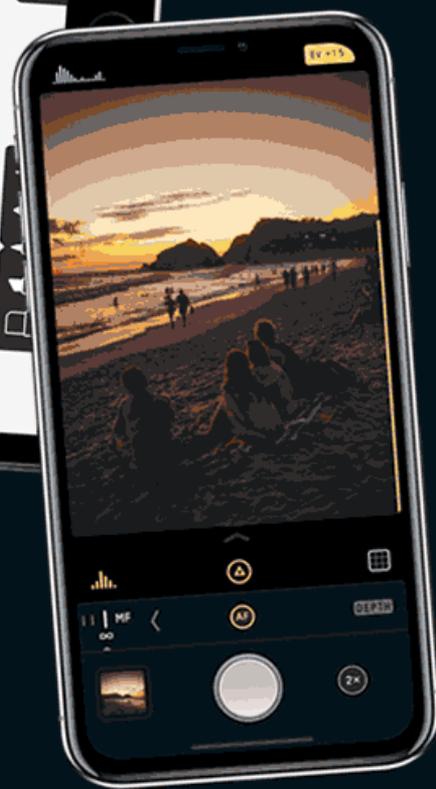
Stagehand takes the platformer genre on its head, by making the universe interactable, instead of the character.

Stagehand's creative gameplay and retro look and feel make for an engaging and innovative experience.



Old Man's Journey
& Splitter Critters
Other Noteworthy Games

The Best Mobile APPS



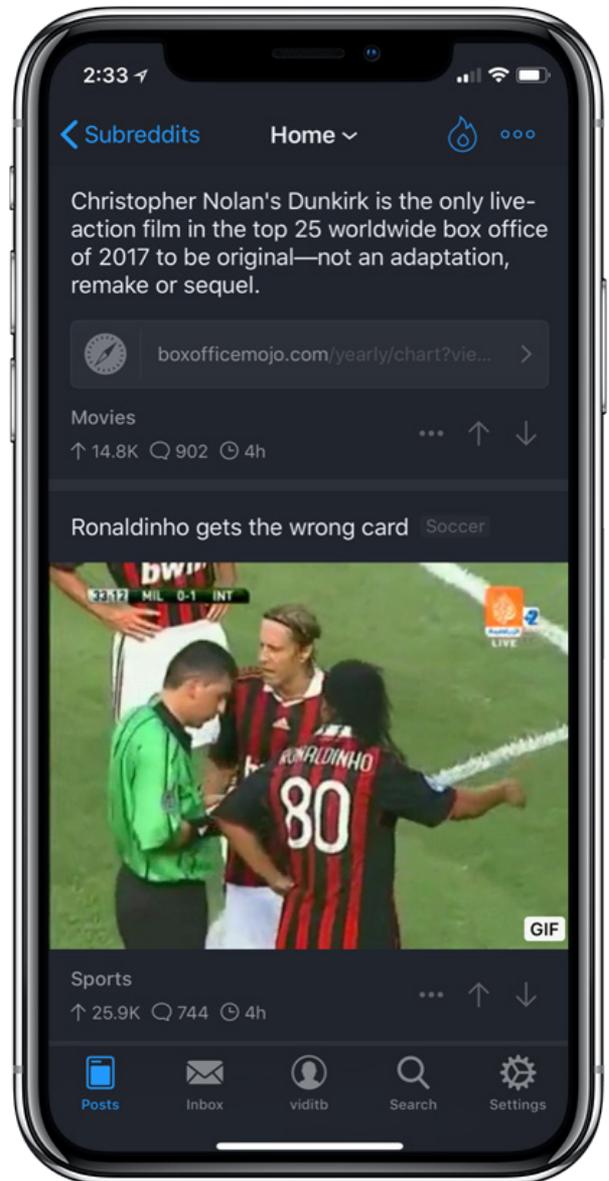


Halide

Professional Photographers have forever gloated on tweaking ISO, Exposure, white balance etc, giving their photos more flexibility to look better. But what if an app were to bring these complex tools to the iPhone and make them easier to use? Halide does just that. Halide's finish makes it look like a work of art. It's a beautifully designed app, that makes complex tools appear so easy to grasp.

Apollo

Providing a simple and easy to use interface, Apollo religiously follows the HiG and creates an experience that feels native to the iOS platform. Apollo is pretty much the poster child of how following good UI practices can produce great results. I've found my self using Reddit more often after I downloaded Apollo. It's my favourite Reddit app by a mile!





AutoSleep

An early entrant to the list, AutoSleep is an innovative app that performs advanced sleep tracking without the need of having an Apple Watch App. It's more accurate if you're wearing your watch to sleep but works without it too. With the watch on your wrist, the App accumalates a bunch of data to analyse your sleep, and offers it in a decent form.

Rheo

While their AppleTV app launched earlier last year. Rheo went through a major revamp and introduced their iOS Apps in June this year. I don't watch shows by Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Kimmel or Seth Rogen, they aren't too accessible in India, but Rheo's snippets of their shows are just what I need for some good entertainment. An interface that helps proliferate consumption of content more than interaction on the TV, and just the right amount of interaction on the phone, that makes Rheo look so polished.

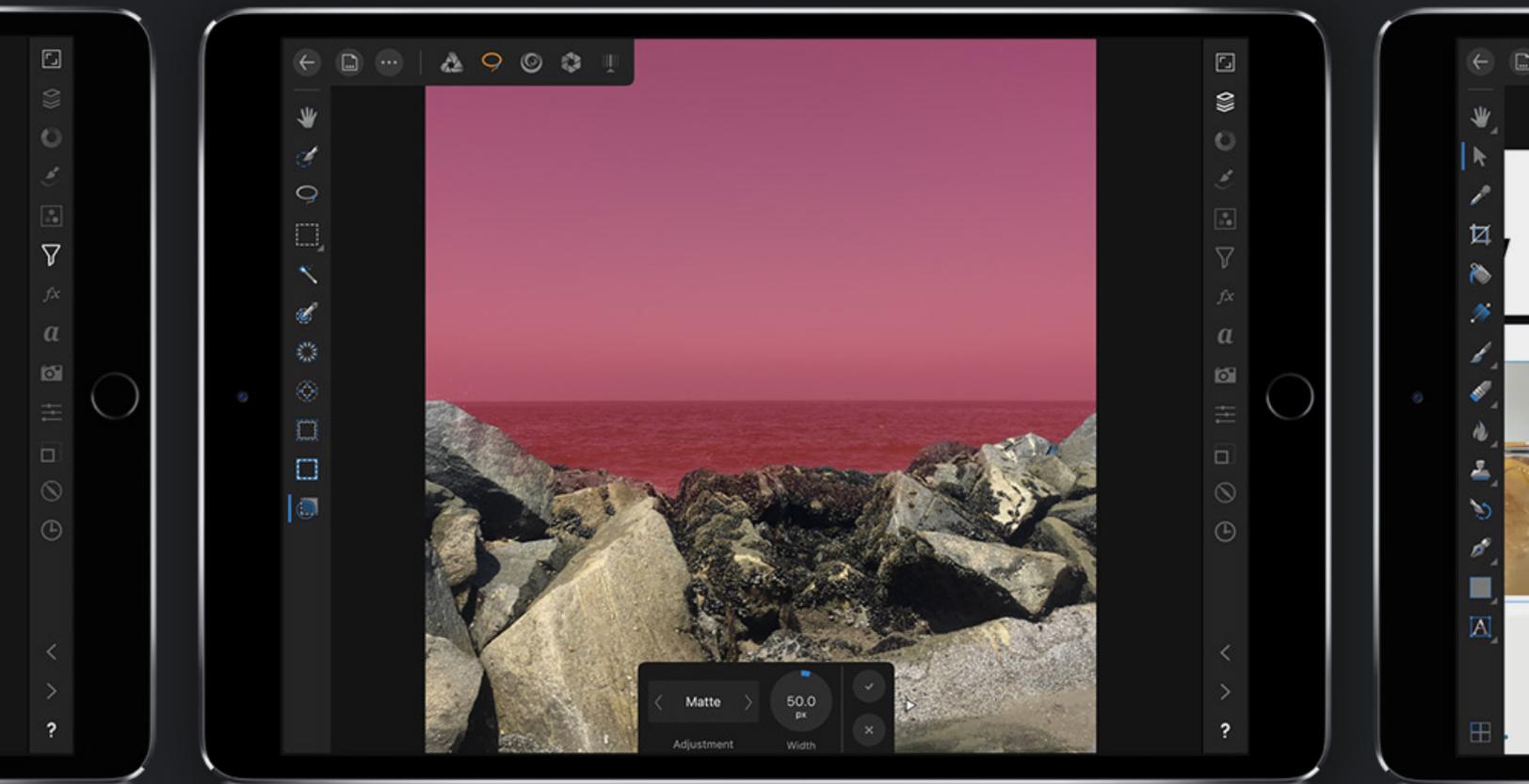
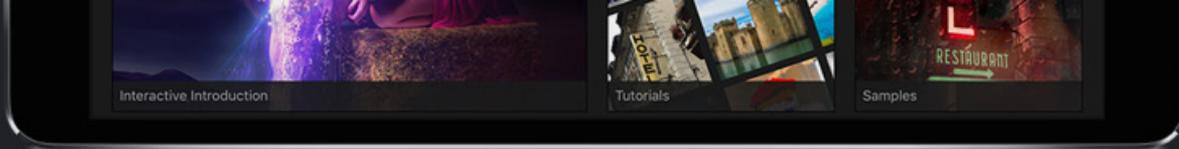




Linea

Linea is a quick sketching app. It's not meant for hi-fidelity mockups but for quick sketches. Even with a simplistic UI, Linea offers a host of features and can generate really hi-quality sketches. Linea's expansive range of export options and an easy to use interface make it an ideal tool for taking sketch notes, doodling or generating low fidelity mock-ups.

I've found my self ideating in linea more often than I originally hoped to use.



Affinity Photo

Affinity Photo is a tool for professional photographers. Providing a range of options, that pretty much match Adobe's Photoshop, Affinity Photo provides a complete professional photo editing experience while taking advantage of the iPad Pro's promotion display and Apple Pencil Support. Even though the interface doesn't feel native to iOS, it's an apt touch-screen experience anyway.

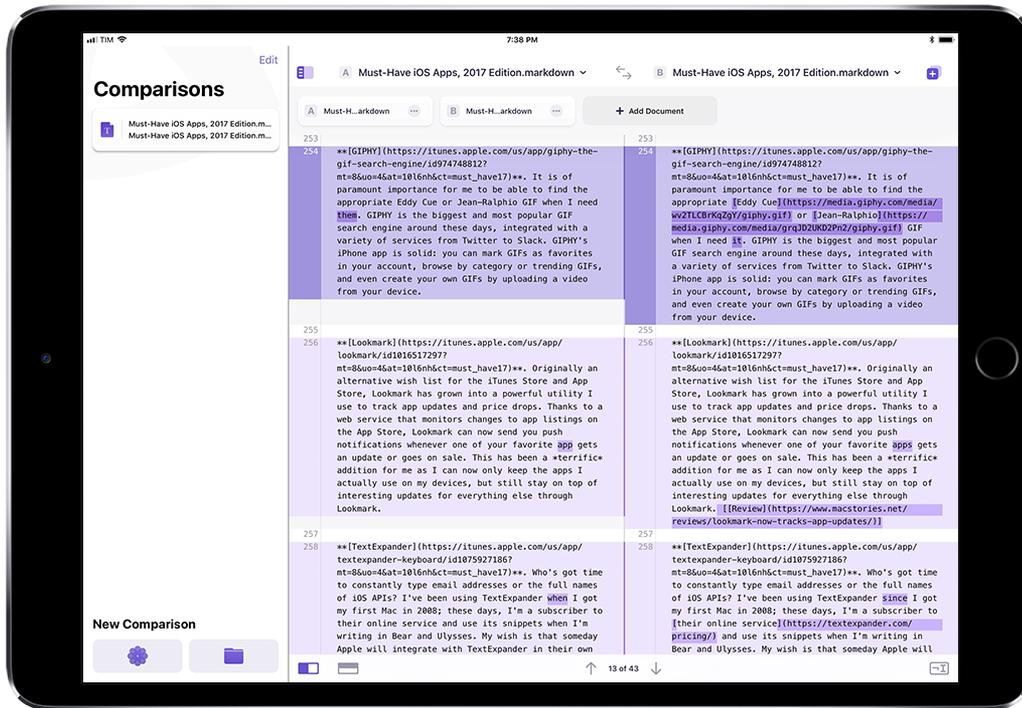
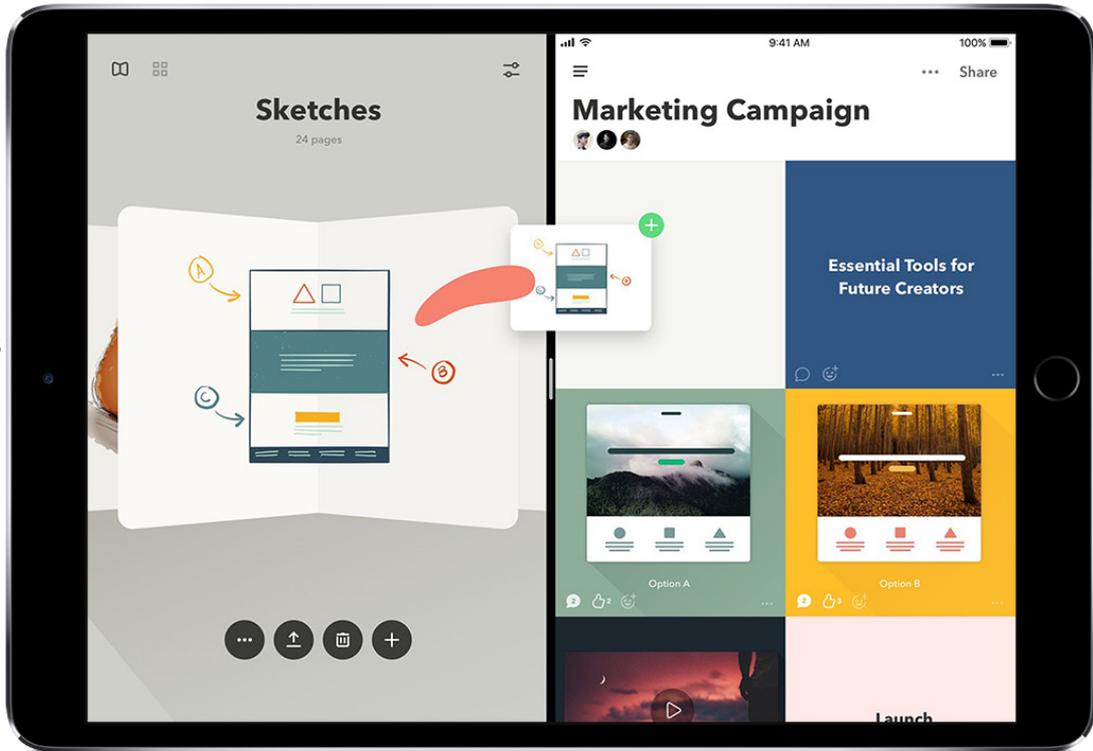
Affinity Photo is a must have for photographers and graphic designers, and a great power tool to have on the go.

Affinity Photo is a great achievement in professional touch screen applications.



Paste by FiftyThree

FiftyThree Inc's second app after six year's is an innovative collaborative presentation tool that allows teammates to make collaborative presentations and share notes. Relying heavily on Images and pre-formatted text options, Paste simplifies the presentation experience for iPad. You don't have to spend time adjusting the layout, you just need to type in the text, drag images and you're done. The app as usual offers a great user experience.



Kaleidoscope 2

A great app for conducting comparisons between text and visual files. Kaleidoscope offers powerful comparison tools in an easy to use interface. It's a neat little utility that users'll find useful while organising large projects. The app comes with a 14 day free trial and is definitely worth giving a shot!

Pixel Quiz December 2017

Vidit Bhargava

Q1. “During those bubble years while the stock price was going up 30 per cent a month, we would have all-hands meetings, and I would ask employees, ‘Please do not feel 30 per cent smarter because the stock went up 30 per cent, because when it goes down 30 per cent in a month, we’d have to feel 30 per cent dumber’.” This was the message from the CEO of one of the more successful Internet companies to his employees in 2000. In those days, this company also made investments in web properties such as living.com and pets.com. These only led to losses; the company was forced to lay off 1,300 workers when the dotcom bubble burst in 2000. Who is the CEO and which company?

Q2. Originally launched in 1993 as an IRC bot, this website’s extraordinary growth in the 1990s made it an attractive site. Satyam took a 25% stake in the company. It receives over 7 million hits daily on average and records in excess of 250 million pageviews per month. Which Website?

Q3. Set in December of 2633 AD, the game starts with the player taking control of an armed commando named Bill Rizer, or his partner Lance Bean, as they are sent to infiltrate the island headquarters of an alien army calling themselves Red Falcon and thwart their plot to invade the Earth. Much of the game’s popularity came from its two-player simultaneous gameplay, which was an uncommon feature in video games at the time of its release. Which game?

Q4. Citizen, formerly known as “Vigilante” is a Snapchat / Instagram stories clone, where users can login and watch videos shared by people, in a snapchat stories like format. The difference being that this is for a different, more specific purpose. People sharing the video can also add more information in the form of a subtitle. Location sharing is compulsory. Just explain what are the videos being shared about.

Answers to Pixel Quiz
November 2017

1. Flash

2. Internet of Things

3. Netflix

4. Yatra[dot]com

5. Leet

Q5. X has said to have used a software program internally codenamed “Hell”, for tracking its rival Y. X used it to figure out if someone was working both for X and Y, and what he/she was being paid when working for Y. A similar situation had surfaced in 2016, when X’s “God View” program had been exposed. Identify X and Y.