

Expanding Fast-Lane Rollout and Spark Integration for iOS Device Users

What

In 2015, Cisco and Apple announced a strategic partnership to enhance the mobile experience and improve the quality of service (QoS) for users of iOS devices on corporate networks that are based on Cisco technologies.¹ Since then, Cisco IT has been working closely with Apple to create the “Fast Lane” solution for iOS business users by optimizing Cisco networks for iOS devices (iPhone and iPad) and applications. We have been integrating Apple’s iPhone with Cisco enterprise environments, and working to make the smartphone an even more effective collaboration tool in Cisco voice and video environments.

Cisco teams working directly on these initiatives with Apple include Global Infrastructure Services (GIS), Global Information Technology Services (GITS), and teams from the Cisco Spark, Cisco Jabber, and Cisco WebEx business units.

Fast Lane was introduced in September 2016 to about 20,000 users on the Cisco Accelerated Collaboration Environment (ACE) platform. The solution ensures that employees connecting to Cisco VoIP and video applications such as Cisco Spark, Cisco Jabber, and Cisco WebEx from their iOS devices receive a better level of service while using those real-time apps. With device management tools, network administrators can select which voice- and video-enabled applications should receive higher QoS through Fast Lane.

“The technology from Cisco and Apple ensures that iOS users are always connected to the best Wi-Fi access points available when on a Cisco network,” says Paul Fidler, Architect Lead, Mobility at Cisco Systems. “The ‘best’ access point may not be the strongest one because signal strength doesn’t necessarily equal quality. Instead, the capability focuses on finding the access point that will support the best mobile experience for the user.”

On-Ramping More iOS Users—and macOS Users—to Fast Lane

As of June 2017, about 20,000 users at six Cisco locations were using Fast Lane. Over time, we will extend the service to all users of iOS devices within Cisco. By August 2017, Fast Lane will be supporting about 55,000 iOS devices across 150 countries. Also, Cisco and Apple announced in late June that we would be broadening our support for optimized Apple devices on Cisco networks, making the Fast Lane service available to users of macOS devices such as MacBook and iMac.²

Why

The consumerization of IT and bring your own device (BYOD) trends have led to Apple’s technology becoming more prevalent in enterprise IT environments. Cisco and Apple’s partnership is partly in response to that shift. It is also a commitment to improving QoS for iOS device users in enterprise environments who need to access Cisco collaborative applications like WebEx and Jabber to enhance their everyday productivity and efficiency.

¹ “Apple and Cisco Partner to Deliver Fast Lane for iOS Enterprise Users,” Cisco media release, August 31, 2015: <https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2015/08/31Apple-and-Cisco-Partner-to-Deliver-Fast-Lane-for-iOS-Enterprise-Users/>.

² “Cisco and Apple Announce New Features,” by Rowan Trollope, Cisco Blog “Executive Platform,” June 5, 2017: <https://blogs.cisco.com/news/cisco-and-apple-announce-new-features>.

As businesses digitize and become more software-based and mobile-centric, seamless performance of mobile applications, for all users, will become even more business-critical. That's another reason why Cisco's strategic partnership with Apple is so important. Fast Lane was the first major innovation to emerge from this partnership.

Fast Lane Leads to Dramatic Improvements in QoS for iOS Users

A UK-based Cisco IT team was the first to upgrade their Cisco Wireless LAN controller software to AireOS 8.3, which incorporates the Cisco and Apple Wi-Fi optimization and app prioritization capabilities. The 30-minute upgrade required no hardware changes.³

The team then conducted a series of tests in their office using the Cisco Spark app to quantify the impact of the upgrade on their QoS. The test was a basic video call between an employee roaming the office floor with an iPhone running iOS 10 connected to the local Wi-Fi network and another employee running the Cisco Spark app on a desktop computer.

The team repeated the test 20 times a day for several days before and after the software upgrade. Through this process, they found that the upgrade reduced significant quality issues by 83 percent and reduced call disconnections by 100 percent.⁴

Cisco Spark Integration with iOS Devices Helps to Ensure Compliance

Cisco IT also has been using iOS APIs to integrate Cisco Spark voice and video into iOS devices to provide a native experience for these users. For example, users who want to make a call using Cisco Spark can simply click on a contact in their iPhone directory, on their favorites list, or from their list of recent calls instead of having to switch to the Cisco Spark app.

For organizations in highly regulated industries, such as financial services, this default calling behavior is an important tool for compliance because every call made from a user's iOS device is channeled through the service that the IT administrator requires—for example, Cisco Spark or a native voice call. Enterprise users who don't need to worry about compliance with regulations such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act or about visibility into their call records can use device management tools to select which contacts they would like to call using the native experience in Spark.

"When we decided to enable this default calling behavior through Cisco Spark, we had to take a step back to consider what users would want," says Fidler. "We didn't want to impose the behavior on users, especially if it would be a big change from what they normally do. Ultimately, we opted not to mandate default calling behavior for all contacts."

New Features on the Horizon with the Introduction of iOS 11

Cisco IT will soon introduce new enhancements to Cisco Spark and Cisco WebEx for users of Apple's newly released iOS 11.

For example, iOS 11 users will be able to access these collaborative applications by simply tapping their iOS calendar or a meeting notification. When joining a Cisco meeting from an iOS device, users will be able to share their screen real time with other meeting participants. Also, guests and infrequent users of Cisco Spark or Cisco WebEx will be able to quickly join on Safari with full audio, video, and presentation viewing capabilities.⁵

³ "Wi-Fi Optimization Enhances the Mobile Experience for Cisco Employees by 83 Percent," Cisco case study, 2017: <https://www.cisco.com/c/dam/en/us/products/collateral/wireless/cisco-on-cisco-cs-r4.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Cisco and Apple Announce New Features," by Rowan Trollope, Cisco Blog "Executive Platform," June 5, 2017: <https://blogs.cisco.com/news/cisco-and-apple-announce-new-features>.

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