Apple WWDC: What to expect from the online-only event

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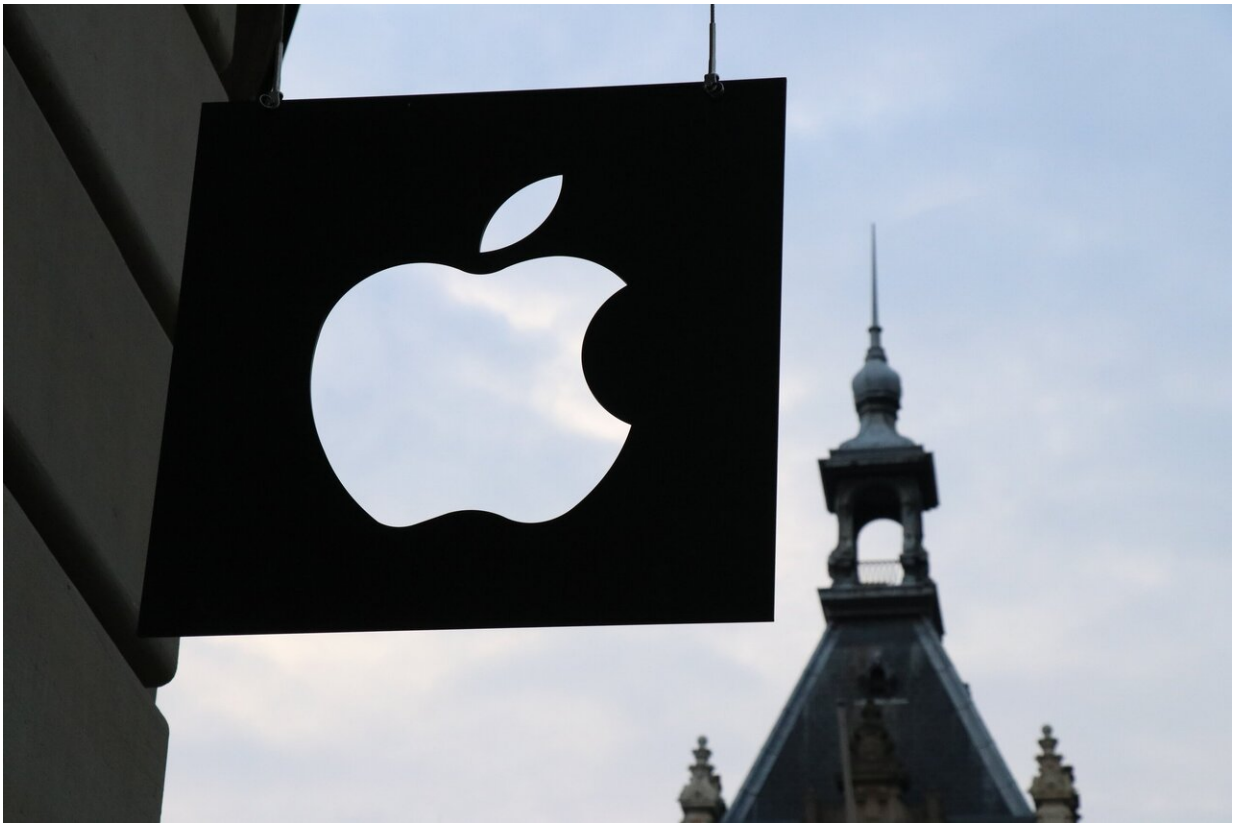

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The coronavirus crisis may be preventing Apple from holding its annual worldwide developers conference in its traditional setting in front of a huge crowd of adoring fans, programmers and content creators, but that

doesn't mean Apple has given up on the tech-centric gathering.

Beginning at 10 a.m. June 22, Apple will kick off its conference, called WWDC 2020, with an online keynote address, likely involving Chief Executive Tim Cook. It will be the first time in the 31-year-history of the WWDC that the event won't take place in front of a live audience.

Instead, in order to ensure the event as accessible as possible to what Apple says is a community of 23 million developers, and anyone else, the company is making Monday's keynote from the Apple Park campus in Cupertino available to watch on YouTube, the Apple Developer app, the Apple Developer website and the Apple TV app.

Other events, such as what is being called a Platforms State of the Union keynote, and more than 100 engineering session, will be available to watch via Apple's developer apps and website. The company is also hosting forum with Apple developers, and one-on-one developer labs, which are available by appointment.

"Developers are the hearts and lungs of the Apple ecosystem," said Dan Ives, managing director with Wedbush Securities. "WWDC is setting up the next stage of growth for Cupertino and its platforms."

Apple has said that by streaming its keynote, and holding the entire conference online, it expects this year's event to be the largest in its history. Last year, in addition to streaming the WWDC keynote address, more than 5,000 attendees from 86 countries came to Apple's event at the San Jose Convention Center.

This year's WWDC will also be free, as opposed to prior years where attendees have paid around $1,600 after winning a lottery for tickets to the event.

Apple's WWDC historically focuses on hardware, software, applications and a preview of the next version of the company's operating systems for the iPhone, iPad and Mac computers. The company only occasionally reveals new products at the event.

For example, last year, one of the WWDC highlights was Apple announcing plans to separate iTunes into three standalone versions of the Apple Music, Apple Podcasts and Apple TV apps.

Gene Munster, of Loup Ventures, said he's expecting Apple to show off several features for the upcoming release of iOS 14, the operating system behind Apple's mobile devices. Among the features Munster said he is looking for are an updated fitness app, a language translator for Apple's Safari browser and the ability to recall iMessages.

Ives described any mobile system upgrades as "a drumroll ahead of a major hardware release schedule ahead across the Cupertino product portfolio with iPhone 12." Apple typically has an event in September to unveil the next iteration of the iPhone ahead of the year-end Christmas and holiday shopping season.

But, the event's biggest announcement could be with regards to its line of Mac computers. Apple is expected to say it will replace the Intel processors it has used in its Macs since 2006 with its own ARM chips, with the first Macs running on ARM processors possibly being available in early 2021.

Munster said that moving away from Intel chips would be "meaningful" for Apple, and that it would be "no surprise, given the company already makes its own chips for the iPhone and iPad."

"It puts Apple in control of the timing of Mac hardware updates and should improve performance while reducing costs," Munster said.

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