

Apple renames mixed-reality software 'xrOS' in sign headset is approaching

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Apple Inc. is ramping up work on a mixed-reality headset, its first major new product category since the Apple Watch, and has renamed the accompanying software in the latest sign of an approaching debut.

The company plans to introduce the headset as early as next year, along with a dedicated operating system and [app store](#) for third-party software, according to people with knowledge of the matter. Internally, the company recently changed the name of the operating system to "xrOS" from "realityOS," said the people, who asked not to be identified because the project is still under wraps.

The new software name is a nod to the headset's mixed-reality capabilities. "XR" stands for extended reality, a term that encompasses both augmented and [virtual reality](#). Augmented reality overlays graphics and virtual information over the real world, while virtual reality is an all-encompassing experience for gaming and watching video.

Apple's push into the market sets it up for a showdown with Meta Platforms Inc., the owner of Facebook and Instagram, which is betting on the metaverse in part to decrease its reliance on Apple devices. The move is also part of a perennial search for Apple's "next big thing." With the Apple Watch, released in 2015, the company turned its wearables business into a division that now generates more than 10% of its sales—contributing \$41.2 billion in the last fiscal year.

A representative for Cupertino, California-based Apple declined to comment on its headset plans.

In offering both AR and VR technologies, Apple's new headset takes a different tack than most existing models from companies like Meta and HTC Corp. But Meta does have a newer headset, the Quest Pro, that blends the two approaches.

The mixed-reality operating system will offer new versions of core apps—like Messages and Maps—and will work with a [software development kit](#) that third parties can use to create their own apps and games, Bloomberg News has reported.

The headset and its accompanying operating system and apps are developed within what the company calls its Technology Development Group, or TDG, a secretive unit led by executive Mike Rockwell. The operating system has been overseen by Geoff Stahl, a senior engineering manager and nearly 24-year Apple veteran who has led work on gaming and graphics software.

Recent job listings revealed that Apple is looking to create its own 3D-based "mixed-reality world." People with knowledge of the company's plans have said the device will offer virtual collaboration tools and a VR version of FaceTime, rivaling services like Zoom and Meta's Horizon Workrooms. Apple recently enlisted the head of engineering for its iWork productivity apps, Notes app and Apple News to work on the headset.

When Apple started developing the operating system about seven years ago, the company internally dubbed it "realityOS"—or "rOS" for short. Apple recently started referring to the software as "xrOS" inside the company. The new name, unlike the more generic-sounding "reality" moniker, could help Apple lay claim to the nascent mixed-reality market.

Around the same time as the name change, a secretive shell corporation named Deep Dive LLC filed to trademark the brand "xrOS" in several countries internationally and is trying to secure the name in the U.S. If Apple is indeed behind the filings, that suggests it's considering using "xrOS" as its public product name as well.

Deep Dive, which was registered by yet another shell corporation in 2017, first applied for the name in Switzerland in March. It recently expanded registrations to the UK, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Ukraine, Philippines, Australia, Japan, Canada and the European Union. In September, a law firm representing Deep Dive filed to oppose a March

U.S. trademark application for the xrOS name by an unrelated Chinese company.

The shell company has made the trademark claims for classifications that include "head-mounted displays" and devices that provide "virtual reality and augmented reality experiences." Those same classifications were used for the original trademark of the name "realityOS" last year.

Trademarking a name via a shell company in several foreign countries follows Apple's usual strategy for establishing a brand, though the decision to start in Switzerland is somewhat out of character. Apple typically files for trademarks in countries like Jamaica, Liechtenstein or Trinidad and Tobago, which don't easily allow the public to peruse registrations.

For instance, Apple recently trademarked the iPhone 14 Pro "Dynamic Island" name in Jamaica. But its applications for "Reality One" and "Reality Pro"—possible names for the headset itself—are also available online, as is the filing for "realityOS." In both cases, Apple was behind the filings, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

Even so, there's no guarantee Apple doesn't ultimately move forward with "realityOS" or another name as its consumer-facing brand.

Apple wouldn't be the first company to use the name "xrOS." In an awkward coincidence, Meta had a team of about 300 engineers developing a mixed-reality operating system by the same name. But that company doesn't appear to be behind the latest trademark filings.

Apple Chief Executive Officer Tim Cook has touted his interest in augmented reality for the last several years, and the company has built a related platform called ARKit, allowing iPhones and iPads to run AR apps.

Its first device in the space is expected to be far pricier than existing mainstream competitors and include ultra-high-resolution screens for VR and several external cameras to handle the AR elements. It will also have hand tracking capabilities and run a processor based on the M2 chip—the component featured in the company's latest Macs.

In a sign of development progress, Apple previewed the device to its board of directors earlier this year.

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