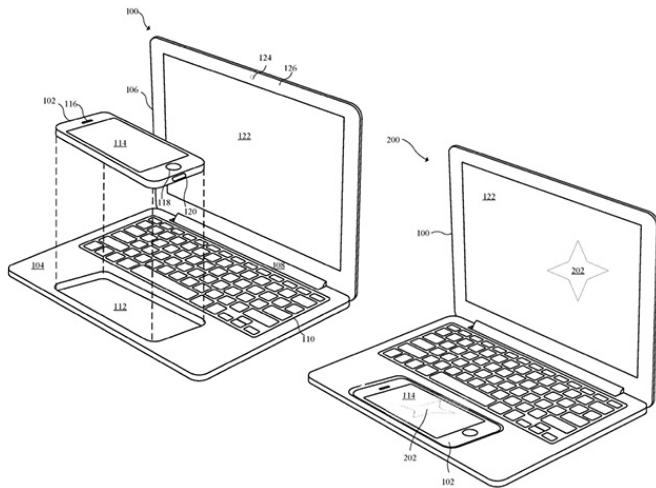


Laptop to smartphone: I feel like an empty shell without you

25 March 2017, by Nancy Owano



Credit: United States Patent Application 20170083048

(Tech Xplore)—In patent news, what are all these Apple-centric headers about this week? Something about turning an iPhone and iPad into a laptop? A phone-powered modular MacBook? A superdock?

The application in the spotlight is simply titled "Electronic Accessory Device" and was published March 23 by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. It was first filed back in September last year and the inventor is listed as Brett Degner.

Patent talk for the uninitiated is difficult to understand, so translations from Apple watchers in English that breathed some life into diagrams and descriptions in the patent were highly appreciated.

The patent's abstract stated that "The present application describes various embodiments of systems and methods for providing internal components for portable computing devices having a thin profile. More particularly, the present application describes an electronic accessory [device](#) available to extend and expand usefulness

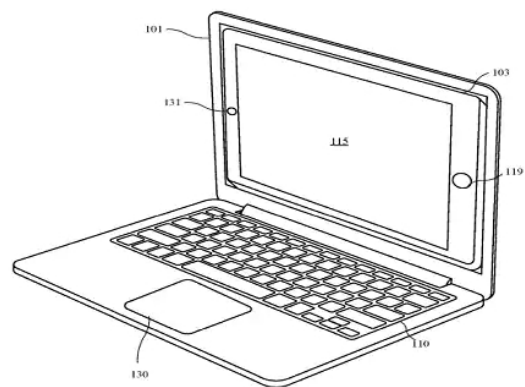
of a portable computing device."

One interpretation: Imagine you have your keyboard and screen unit but your iPhone is doing all the work.

Over to *AppleInsider*: "An Apple patent application published Thursday details a so-called 'thin' portable hardware accessory that boasts the components necessary to act as a laptop surrogate for iPhones and iPads."

Mikey Campbell further discussed what he thought this was all about.

"Specifically, the IP covers a 'thin' accessory, a kind of 'headless' device that contains traditional [laptop](#) hardware like a large display, physical keyboard, GPU, ports and more, but is incapable of functioning without a host. In this case, an iPhone or iPad would slot into the laptop-esque piece of kit to fill the role of CPU."



Credit: United States Patent Application 20170083048

Gerald Lynch, Associate Editor of *TechRadar*, noted how "The case would essentially be useless

without a smartphone housed inside it." The phone would take on the role of being the CPU core for the shell.

More information: ELECTRONIC ACCESSORY DEVICE, [United States Patent Application 20170083048](#)

In one embodiment, Campbell said, "the accessory includes a port shaped to accommodate a host iPhone or iPad. Located in the base portion, this slot might also incorporate a communications interface and a means of power transfer, perhaps Lightning or a Smart Connector."

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Lynch in *TechRadar* said, "[Communications](#) and shared power between the two devices could be transferred over Lightning or a Smart Connector port, with the iPhone acting as a trackpad with Force Touch haptics."

Tyler Lee in *Ubergizmo* said the application talked about the smartphone, such as the iPhone, being used to dock inside a [slot](#) on the laptop "in which not only would it power the device, but it will also double up as a trackpad for the computer as well."

So what are the chances this [patent](#) idea would eventually be advanced to a real product?

AppleInsider suggested we should not hold our breath.

"Considering Apple's stance on portable computing, especially recent advertising campaigns touting iPad as a laptop replacement, it is highly unlikely that today's published application will make its way to market. That said, the invention suggests Apple is, or at least was, mulling an expansion of its iOS device lineup to a point that blurs the line between handheld device and [laptop](#)."

Lynch seemed to have a similar verdict. He said, "with the iPad Pro already existing as Apple's halfway home between a mobile and work-focused device, the Cupertino seems to already have the base covered that this curio would be looking to hit."

While it may or may never become a product, Paul Lilly in *Hot Hardware* said Apple "might be testing the design in some lab in Cupertino, along with other experiments. It's certainly an interesting [idea](#), though."

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