

Apple iPhone®: Almost Perfect

By Robert L Gallick
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I love my Apple iPhone. I acquired it last July and started downloading apps and creating a few book marks. I found myself downloading lots of free apps just to see how their human interface was put together. A couple months ago I bought another app only to realize it didn't appear on my iPhone after I synced it with my computer. Well, that is the day I learned that a user can only have 9 pages of 16 apps (144) plus the four integrated apps (phone, mail, safari, and iPod) on the iPhone. I had to start removing apps to make room for new ones. This was an inconvenience, but it wasn't a serious problem. There were a number of apps that I didn't really use but were kind of fun to have on the device to show it off. So the first issue to note is: there is a fixed limit on the number of concurrent applications that can be downloaded to the iPhone. So it doesn't matter that Apple is running TV ads indicating over 10,000 applications are available - one can only download 144 to the iPhone - assuming you don't have any of the 144 taken up with Safari bookmarks. In that case you can download even fewer apps.



So now that I have started to eliminate applications, I have some pages with no applications and some pages with 16 applications. Yes, you can drag icons

from one page to another, but this isn't very slick and it can be cumbersome. What is really needed is the functionality under iTunes to allow a user to sort and arrange applications in a simple drag and drop means. An analogy might be the "Slide Sorter" features for Microsoft PowerPoint. It would be nice to see all the screens and then drag and drop to a screen or to a "holding area" (a desktop like area the ICONS could be placed on while sorting) allowing the user to organize the look of their iPhone. So this is my second desired feature whether the application limit is addressed or not.

A Proposed Drag and Drop iTunes Features to Sort iPhone Apps



I would like to propose a couple of additional refinements to the arrange icon feature. First there are certain icons that I would not only like to be on a certain page but I would like them to be in a fixed position. Let's call it the ability to freeze an icon position on a given page and in a dedicated position. Why would I want this? Well for two reasons. If I know where to look for a specific application every time, it saves me time. Secondly, it would facilitate the user in grouping similar applications together. This could easily be accomplished with a location property being added to each icon and a flag indicating whether it could be re-arranged by the addition or removing of other applications.

I think this functionality could also be taken a couple steps further. One would be the ability to perhaps not only create a page and position for an icon but to be able to either define a page for specific types of applications and or the ability to create application groups. The first of these two would be to say Page 8 is my Safari Bookmarks. Page 7 is for Games. Page 6 is for Utilities. Another option would be to say that I have 8 financial programs on the iPhone. It would be useful and convenient to be able to group them together. Perhaps this is a group frame (a line drawn around the icons) or perhaps it is simply a shaded background color similar to that which is found behind the Phone, Mail, Safari, and iPod Applications.



Or background shading might appear similar to:



With that last thought in mind - that is the Phone, Mail, Safari, and iPod always remain on the first page, I suppose it would be useful for some users and for certain applications perhaps to allow an additional row to be “pin cushioned” to always remain on the front page. This would allow those users to define up to four applications that they would always want to see on the main page. Applications that are frequently needed would be always a click away. The bad thing about this is the limitation of the number of apps that would be visible with the horizontal scrolling of the screen.

Having nine pages of applications can be confusing. I am not sure how it

should be implemented, but just looking at the icon names is as confusing as looking at the tasks names in Microsoft's task manager. We one downloads lots of apps; it is easy to forget what they actually do. There once again is some sort of need to either quickly look at the installed applications in an annotated list or somehow enable a user definable pop up if an icon is quickly touched. In essence, a balloon popup could say "This app is more calculating monthly mortgage payments." In our example below we show that a single quick tap to an icon could result in an informative balloon indicating the app is the "Mississippi State Cowbell App."



Of all the human interfaces I have used in my life, the Apple iPhone interface is the friendliest. I have used Microsoft Windows Mobile phones in the past and they do not come close to the ease of use of the iPhone. I also find the touch interface much easier to use than any mechanical keyboard. I have some mixed emotions toward allowing more applications. In one sense, you would think Apple would encourage the device to support more applications - considering they are making money off the sale of the applications. However, I can see their point in limiting the currently downloaded apps. The iPhone isn't a personal computer and trying to make it into one may tarnish the user experience. The iPhone is a great product. Apple has left the door open for many improvements and I am excited to see what the next generation device will bring the user in terms of features and functionality.

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