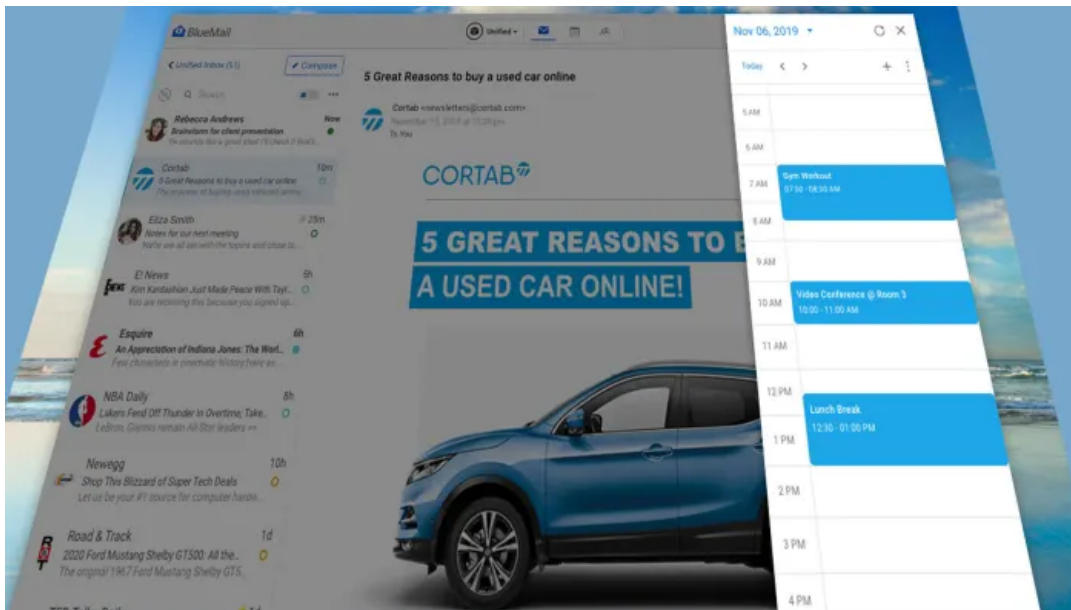


Apple Inc

Blix calls for developers to revolt against Apple

Start-up claims it is one of 'thousands' of developers to see ideas reappear in tech giant's products



Apple said it ejected BlueMail from the MacOS store because of security concerns

Patrick McGee in San Francisco 5 HOURS AGO

A software developer that is suing Apple for allegedly copying its app has called on other small companies to rise up against what it claims are strong-arm tactics by the iPhone maker.

Blix said that it added a feature to its email management app, BlueMail, in August 2018 to allow users to sign in to websites with an anonymous email if they do not wish to disclose their personal email.

But in June 2019, Apple unveiled a similar feature at its annual [developer conference](#) called “Sign in with Apple”, allowing users to sign into websites without revealing their real address. Blix alleges Apple took its ideas “without permission, payment, or credit”.

It sued Apple in October for patent infringement and illegal monopolisation, claiming that in addition to copying its function, Apple “suppressed” its iPhone app in search results and ejected its desktop app from the app store altogether.

But the start-up said that the slow legal process worked in Apple’s favour. It said other developers that share its concerns, but are fearful of retribution, should speak up.

“We are considering all options, including a class-action lawsuit,” said Ben Volach, who co-founded Blix with his brother Dan. “We are going to make sure this is resolved. We are sure there are

thousands [of developers] that are suffering from this.”

Apple said it ejected BlueMail from the MacOS store because of security concerns. “We have attempted on multiple occasions to assist [Blix] in getting their BlueMail app back on the Mac App Store,” Apple said.

Apple denied that it manipulated the search results in the app store. “We provide all developers with a fair and level playing field on which they can compete,” the company said.

Blix is not the only small company to complain about Apple developing its own version of an existing app or function. The practice became known as “Sherlocking” in the early 2000s after Apple updated its desktop search tool, Sherlock, with features that also appeared in an app called Watson.

Since then, there have been dozens of occasions when Apple has introduced features first pioneered by others. At a developer conference in June last year, the Verge counted [nine examples](#) at that event alone.

Blix and other developers claim that Apple competes unfairly, given it is both a rival and the operator of the marketplace.

“The pattern is that they see what’s popular, they implement it into their device, they bundle it, and they use private APIs [a programming protocol] that others don’t have access to — so their version has a leg-up on the competition,” said Matt Ronge, chief executive of Astro, whose tool to turn the iPad into a second monitor preceded a product that Apple itself then introduced as Sidecar.

When Apple last year launched Screen Time, which lets parents set limits on their children’s phone usage, multiple third-party apps that already performed such functions found their rival tools ejected from the app store. Apple claimed it had discovered the apps had “put users’ privacy and security at risk”.

“We thought it would be the end of our business,” said Viktor Yevpak, chief executive of Kidslox, a parental control app that launched more than four years before Apple unveiled Screen Time.

Kidslox was unable to provide updates to its app for about a year-and-a-half, but Apple changed position after Mr Yevpak and a rival took their “[Abuse of Dominant Position](#)” complaint to the European Commission early last year.

Blix said it decided to call for developers to take on Apple after a Congressional hearing in Colorado last month suggested that antitrust concerns were gaining traction.

At the [hearing Kirsten Daru](#), general counsel of the tracking device maker Tile, described how Tile had an excellent relationship with Apple since 2015 but that it took “an ominous turn” last year

when Apple shifted from highlighting its product to competing against it.

She said Apple hired the very engineer Tile had sent to Cupertino for the co-design of a product update, dropped its products from Apple retail stores and altered some settings, after which its products began sending frequent prompts to customers, causing frustration and implying that Tile “shouldn’t be trusted”.

In response, Apple described location data as sensitive information deserving of privacy. “We’re currently working with developers [. . .] to enable that feature at the time of set-up in a future software update,” the company said.

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