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Apple Watch and Apple Pay attract non-Apple converts at CTIA show

Worries about security persist over Apple Pay among attendees at Super Mobility Week event

By Matt Hamblen

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LAS VEGAS -- Announcements of the Apple Watch and Apple Pay on Tuesday caught the attention of hundreds of IT professionals at a keynote presentation during the CTIA's Super Mobility Week.

While Apple CEO Tim Cook was presenting new devices hundreds of miles away in Cupertino, California, CTIA officials decided to stream the Apple event onstage during a keynote at their event in Las Vegas. They then added commentary from several experts after Apple's event.

The audience paid rapt attention as Cook spoke, and clearly liked what they heard. Afterward, several IT professionals said they hope to buy an Apple Watch when the devices become available in early 2015, although some admitted they weren't big users of Mac products.

Even so, the Apple Pay system, enabled with near-field communication technology that Cook outlined, seemed more important than the smartwatches to many.

"The payment system Apple announced will be exciting and transformational," said Joe Basili, managing director of an industry trade group called Temia, as he left the darkened keynote hall. "Apple's taking the existing ecosystem they've built and pushing it out" to payments.

Basili said there's still a "big unknown" about how secure Apple Pay will be, especially after Apple had to defend its iCloud security after a recent nude celebrity photo incident where hackers obtained log-in credentials of movie stars.

James Martino, the CEO of Avotus, a wireless management provider, said he was concerned about how easy it might be for his children to someday use an Apple Watch to purchase a product that he hadn't expected them to buy. "I wonder about a kid using your account," he said.

Still, both Martino and Basili said they felt that in many ways, Apple could be trusted to be more secure than conventional credit card companies like Visa, MasterCard and American Express.

In the Apple demo that Cook showed, a woman buys something with Apple Pay via her iPhone without needing to show her credit card number or driver's license. "That alone sounds more secure," Basili said.

A number of people in the audience said they'd be willing to shell out \$349 or more for an Apple Watch, but many wondered how long the battery life would be for both the watch and the paired iPhone.

"I'm not wildly Apple," Basili said, noting he doesn't use a Mac laptop, but he does own an iPhone and hopes to get an Apple Watch. He said he already uses a Garmin smart band for running and swimming and would like to see similar functions on Apple's watch.

"I love the Garmin to swim with and to count my laps, so I'm not sure how waterproof Apple's device will be," he said. "Maybe that's the one downside to it."

While the Apple event was underway, competitor Samsung opened its booth and the Super Mobility Week event where it showed off a range of new smartphones and other devices. It did not show its latest smartwatch, the Gear S, however.

Samsung said it didn't have the Gear S on display because the company had already announced its plans for selling the smartwatch in the U.S. In the past year, Samsung has announced six smartwatches and fitness bands that run on either Tizen or Android Wear, apparently in hopes of capturing an audience in advance of the Apple Watch.

Samsung's booth did get an early crowd at the conference that seemed to ignore the Apple news, and many were interested in the new, larger 5.7-in. Galaxy Note 4 and Galaxy Note Edge smartphones, which were announced last week at the IFA trade show in Germany.

Members of the media were allowed to try out the new Gear VR headset, which incorporates the Note 4 and a headset to offer a virtual reality experience.

During a brief demonstration, this reporter found the video simulation almost alarmingly realistic, and almost had to sit down to avoid falling on a virtual helicopter ride over New York City. The lens seemed to fog up, however, at one point.

Samsung hasn't announced prices for many of the new products, which the company expects to begin shipping in the U.S. this fall.



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