

The iCology

Apple has done a remarkable job in creating innovative products. Part of this comes from the ability to define the entire experience. Apple can fund this innovation by being able to tap into value created using its platforms – its own iCology in which you use Apple tools to develop products for Apple platforms for Apple users. It's not hermetically sealed but it is insular.

With the initial Macintosh Apple was able to charge a premium and license peripherals. With the iPad and the iPhone it has been able to exert even more control. The approval process for the iPhone reminds me of the days when ATT was able to ban "[Hush-a-Phone](#)" which was essentially a box you put around a phone to ensure privacy. ATT argued that it damaged ATT reputation.



I am concerned that Apple is following the phone company [playbook](#) in creating a closed, siloed eco system. It's not hermetically sealed but it does limit third parties' ability to redefine the platform.

I get concerned when I [read](#) that Apple is patenting "Dynamic Carrier Selection". The patent is [questionable](#). Imagine if only Apple were able to offer least cost calling.

Apple has long fought to protect their iCology. For example you can't officially create a virtual Macintosh. While you can "liberate" an Apple TV by jailbreaking it, it is still primarily an iTunes delivery device with an Apple tax on others' content like the "Cable TV" model.

What makes this frustrating is that the devices have so much potential as building blocks. I can imagine all sorts of uses for the iPod Nano form factor even if it may be narrowly engineered for its intended application.

Apple is far from alone in building a local ecosystem without worrying about the larger world. I once asked Craig McCaw about taking all the features of the cellular world and making them basic features of the larger phone network. His answer was simple and to the point – he only makes money on cellular.

That is a "reasonable" response from those focused on business. Why indeed should they think more widely?

But there is a cost to society in that it leaves us with a much smaller world. Thinking more widely creates opportunity far beyond the profit of a single business.

You can think of it as a form of taxation. Sure we don't want to give part of our well-earned money to the government. But imagine a world without bridges and roads and any public infrastructure.

That is the world we get when we make everything a profit center and not only is there no incentive to share but sharing is seen as a tax.

We see this in standards committees which think no further than the one problem they are solving. Even if we put aside gaming the process to give one participant an advantage; we still lose when we don't think beyond the narrow confines of the problem we are trying to solve.

Now we have the idea of protocols and devices that work only if you remove the wire because we are using the term "mobile" as something in itself rather than treating mobile as a general case that includes fixed devices with wires.

In honor of Apple, I propose the term "iCology" because Apple is so very good at the process of carving out a closed niche and excluding others. The word icology has been used but doesn't have any definition that precludes its use for donating such a boxed-in system. Using an intracap as iCology makes the point more clearly.

PS: For more on building blocks you can read [Maker Disconnect](#).