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12 May 2010

Philip Schiller
Apple, Inc.
Address Redacted for Publication

Dear Mr. Schiller,

I apologize for contacting you at your home address, but I bring to you a matter of truly urgent nature, one I fear could critically damage the future of iPad without your attention. Enclosed you'll find an account of our struggle over the past weeks to navigate the app review process and bring our app, a simple toolkit of functions like a calculator and to-do list, to market.

We adamantly believe that we are in compliance with every written guideline Apple has provided us with, and have spent innumerable hours and thousands of dollars creating a great experience for iPad users. Yet we have been placed in a review purgatory, judged unsuitable for approval and yet without the fault necessary for rejection. Even after submitting a revised and crippled version of our product that meets unwritten demands, we are being told that no app whatsoever with multiple features is acceptable, a standard Apple's own system apps violate.

We formed MegatonApps to help companies see the potential that Apple's mobile platforms hold for the future. After just a year in operation, we've met with executives from professional sports teams, the world's most famous theme parks, the biggest names in mainstream and digital media, and more. To each of these, we have professed the great potential iPhone and iPad offer, but based on our experience with Apple's review process, I fear we have been spreading a lie.

As a user, developer and shareholder I hope that you will ensure that the details provided in the attached document are placed in the right hands. We only ask that we be judged against the standards we have been provided, and that common sense might prevail.

I'm 22 years old and finished my master's degree while developing this app; my business partner is an entrepreneur with an imagination second to none. We want to drive the future success of your products, because we believe in their ability to make the world just a bit better.

But we need your help to do that.

Thanks for your time,



Casey Ayers
President, MegatonApps, LLC

12 May 2010

The “Multitaskers” Review Process

An Account by Casey Ayers, President, MegatonApps, LLC

Dear Mr. Schiller,

On April 14th, 2010, my company submitted our first app for iPad. Called Multitaskers, the app serves as a “Dashboard”-like toolbox containing many of the simple features notably missing from the iPad’s suite of system apps. These include a weather forecast, calculator, to-do list and more.

We took the greatest care throughout the development of the app to meet both the letter and the spirit of the guidelines made available to us, both in the iPad HIG and in the developer agreement documentation. Confident in the product we created after months of hard work and thousands of dollars invested, we eagerly awaited the approval process so that we could bring this unique suite of tools to users.

Imagine our surprise, then, when we received a call the following afternoon from Richard Chipman, informing us that the app, “Contradicted the iPad user experience,” and would therefore be unacceptable in its current form. Mr. Chipman said that if we modified Multitaskers to switch between the features, rather than display them on the screen at the same time, the app would then be acceptable for release. I informed Mr. Chipman that a number of apps currently featured by Apple appeared to give us precedent, both in terms of user interface and functionality. I emailed him a list of these apps, and he assured me he would review them and get back with me on the following Monday.

On April 19th, I spoke with Mr. Chipman again, who repeated his previous statement while failing to address the similarities between our app and those already approved and selling on the App Store. I asked to be escalated at this point, as I felt Mr. Chipman had not given us a fair shake, especially since seemed to not remember either my company or our app after a weekend away.

On April 23rd, I received a call from Anders Baecklund from Worldwide Developer Relations. I was unable to speak with him, however, until April 29th, as I was out of the country celebrating my father’s birthday. I felt that our conversation on the 29th was very productive, and that I was able to communicate to Mr. Baecklund the philosophy behind Multitaskers and the range of existing apps that we believed provided precedent for our method of operation.

Following this, we were going to have a phone conference with Mr. Baecklund and his director on April 28th. Regrettably, his director was pulled into an urgent meeting just prior to our call, which Mr. Baecklund said would have to be rescheduled. I did not hear anything again until May 6th, when Mr. Baecklund called to reschedule our conference with his director.

The next morning, Mr. Baecklund again called and apologized for the delay. He told us that a meeting was going to be held in the App Department that afternoon regarding the internal policies that had thus far prevented our app from being released. I viewed this as a positive development, and was optimistic that a decision would be made in our favor shortly.

I phoned Mr. Baecklund on Monday, May 10th, to inquire as to the results of the meeting. Mr. Baecklund told us that after deliberating, “We have come back to the same policy,” and that the

former ruling would stand. While this was upsetting news, I reminded Mr. Baecklund that we had submitted a new version of Multitaskers on April 28th that complied with the initial request by Mr. Chipman. This version displayed only one feature at a time, and should therefore be acceptable. Mr. Baecklund said he would check on this and get back to me.

Finally, on May 11th, I received a call from Mr. Baecklund stating that the iPad HIG and approval policies were being changed. Under the new policy, apps would not be allowed to offer different functions to users, even if they were on different screens or fixed in place.

While continuing our conversations with Apple, a competitive app called Desktop was rewritten to display two functions at once in a “fixed-view” mode, where each function filled half of the iPad screen. This type of behavior would no longer be allowed, nor would apps like Calc XT, which displays a calculator next to a notepad in landscape mode. Apps like StickIt would be allowed to remain because it represented, “Just a bunch of the same thing”, in this case sticky notes, despite that fact that their object movement system is nearly identical to the one used in Multitaskers.

A policy against apps being able to do several things is, simply, stunning. I pointed out to Mr. Baecklund that Apple’s own Clock app for iPhone would be in violation of this policy, as it can function as a world clock, stopwatch and timer, three features of Multitaskers. Consider USA Today for iPad as an example: under such a broad policy, providing a weather forecast in the top bar with an unrelated news story below could be found in violation, and apps like Epicurious that offer both recipes and shopping lists may also be disallowed. Mr. Baecklund stated that apps in violation were in the process of being taken down, but under such a broad policy, I would wager that this would entail more than half of the available apps for iPad and a large percentage of iPhone apps, if the letter of the rule were followed.

Meanwhile, for more than three weeks, we have been unable to deliver Multitaskers to iPad users despite the fact that we have never been formally rejected. The fact is that our app was developed to match both the letter and the spirit of the guidelines Apple made available to us throughout its production, and because no policy violation can be pointed to, the review staff has seen fit to simply leave us in a permanent review purgatory.

As an iPad user and developer, I am appalled at the specter of such a policy being enforced, as it will devastate the innovative potential of the platform. As a longtime shareholder, I am outraged that those in charge are making such damaging decisions in a manner that seems, to put it kindly, improvised and ill considered.

As you and I both know, a lot of apps available for iPhone and iPad just aren’t very good. But, they have been approved and made available for sale because they met the guidelines Apple provided. In our case, we have spent innumerable hours building a product of quality, something that we’d hope Apple would be happy to have on this incredible new platform. We have met the guidelines and have still been blocked in a manner that leaves us with no method of recourse.

We haven’t set out to change the world or to push against the boundaries; we’ve simply tried to bring a few simple tools to iPad in the most natural way possible. To wit, which makes more sense: filling the 10” iPad screen with a dollar-store, senior citizen’s calculator, or using that space to create an efficient workspace where users can do such preposterous things as check the weather and add a few numbers at the same time?

To be forced to release a crippled version of our app, where only one function appears at a time, would have been bad enough, but to be actively prevented from releasing our product in any form is a fatal blow to our fledgling development studio. It will certainly force us to halt all future development for Apple platforms, and likely drive us into bankruptcy.

When I set out with my company's co-founder to form MegatonApps, neither of us had any experience developing applications, but we were able to see clearly the incredible potential of iPhone OS. Since then, we've met with clients large and small, from professional sports teams to the world's most famous theme park group to some of the biggest names in online and traditional media. To each of these, we have professed our adoration for Apple's mobile platforms, and the great potential that each held. Based on my experience with Multitaskers, though, I'm left to fear that we were simply professing a lie.

Having guidelines and standards ensures the stability and quality of iPhone OS platforms, and is something that we think is healthy. But when objective standards are ignored and when the target of acceptability is purposely shifted time and again to ensure that your strongest of supporters can never meet the goal, we are all left with a platform that is not secure, but inaccessible and without a future.

In the opinion of this humble developer, who wants nothing more than to make great apps for great devices, our experience represents a tipping point for the future viability of iPhone and iPad. A line has been crossed; no longer is Apple acting in the interests of the user, but is instead involved in the active obstruction of common functionality. It was Mr. Jobs that said the future utility of the iPad would be discovered by developers and users. For that to hold true, the guidelines for iPhone and iPad development must be clear and open, and those in charge of the review process must be better educated or replaced.

To that end, you'll find a copy of my résumé enclosed. If you see that Multitaskers is approved as originally submitted, as it will be when judged by the provided guidelines, I'd consider offering my consultative services so that Apple could see through the eyes of an independent developer and rebuild the approval process to be fair and just. For the good of us all, I hope that Apple can remember what it feels like to be a crazy one, a misfit, a rebel, a troublemaker, a round peg in a square hole, once more. We still see things differently. I hope you do, too.

Best Regards,

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