

TECHNOLOGY

APPLE PEELS OFF ITS NICE-GUY MASK

The tech giant's link to a raid on a journalist's home has fuelled claims that its secrecy verges on paranoia, write Mark Harris and Dominic Tobin

Apple, the technology giant, faces accusations of heavy-handedness in a growing row over its efforts to suppress information about the next generation of its bestselling iPhone.

In a drama that has taken on a life of its own in the United States, the multi-billion-dollar corporation stands accused of persuading police to raid the home of a journalist who published

details of the new device. Apple apparently feared that revelations about the phone's advanced features could be worth millions to competitors.

More than 50m iPhones have been sold worldwide since its launch in 2007, generating estimated profits for Apple of \$25 billion (£16.6 billion). The eagerly awaited new version — with an extra camera, a much-improved touchscreen and longer battery life — is due to be unveiled this summer.

Matters began to snowball after the involvement of a Californian law enforcement agency called React (Rapid Enforcement Allied Computer Team), a specialist taskforce that includes members of the US secret service and the FBI, supported by officers from local police forces.

React was investigating the loss of a prototype iPhone, variously dubbed the "4G" or "HD", that had fallen into the hands of Jason Chen, a journalist at the US technology website Gizmodo (InGear, April 25). Said to be worth a large sum of money for the secrets it contained, the prototype had been left in a Californian bar by an Apple employee during a night of celebration. It was sold to Chen, whose team promptly dismantled it and published details on Gizmodo — to the delight of both Apple fans and the company's archrivals in Silicon Valley. The phone was returned to Apple after demands were sent out by its legal department.

The drama intensified when armed officers working for React broke down the door of Chen's home in Silicon Valley and seized his computers, cameras and hard drives. "My wife and I got back [from dinner] at about 9.45pm," Chen said. "When I got home I noticed the garage door was half open. When I tried to open it, officers came out and said they had a warrant to search my house. They made me place my hands behind my head and searched me to



Police go in hard — similar tactics were used in the raid on Jason Chen's home

make sure I had no weapons or sharp objects on me. They made me stand outside with my wife while they finished doing their sweep of the house for computers."

The raid was controversial for two reasons. It is said to have breached laws relating to the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech in the US. Those laws theoretically protect journalists' work computers from being confiscated as evidence. Second, it has emerged that Apple sits on a steering committee that guides the React taskforce. The committee, which also includes Google, eBay and Sony, provides React with advice, recommendations and "strategic input".

Tom Nolan, a Silicon Valley lawyer acting for Chen — who has yet to be charged with any offence — said: "We are always concerned about business interference with government operations and having some people with more power than others, and that is a very, very legitimate concern, especially in the high-tech industry."

The implications of the raid, on April 23, were quickly seized upon by commentators and satirists. Jon Stewart, who hosts The Daily Show, America's most popular late-night news

satire, devoted a nine-minute slot to the affair, entitled Appholes. In it he lampooned the hippie image associated with Steve Jobs, Apple's chief executive.

"Apple, you guys were the rebels, man, the underdogs. People believed in you. But now, are you becoming The Man? Remember back in 1984, those awesome ads about overthrowing Big Brother [a reference to a TV ad by Apple with the slogan: "On January 24 Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like '1984'"]? Look in the mirror, man. It wasn't supposed to be this way."

The broadcast, which was seen by millions on cable television and internet catch-up services, had Stewart appealing to Jobs to dispense with the "paranoid corporate genius stuff".

He continued: "Microsoft was supposed to be the evil one, but you guys are busting down doors in Palo Alto. Come on, Steve, chill out." Chen's lawyers are now demanding the return of six computers, three hard drives, two digital cameras, two USB memory sticks, one server and one Apple iPhone (the kind you can buy in the shops) that were impounded by React. The equipment is thought to

contain details about the man who sold the phone to Chen as well as other journalistic information. "I'm concerned about making sure the information seized isn't jeopardised and the sources aren't jeopardised," Nolan said.

Chen has gained some unexpected allies, including Steve Meister, a former US deputy district attorney, who compared Apple's actions to those of motor industry giants in the days when gangs of strike-breakers used force against trade unions. "It is no different from when Ford or GM would hire off-duty cops to come in and bust unions," Meister said. "These are goon squads, but this time they're carrying computers instead of billy clubs."

Meister criticised the growing trend for big business to play a role in guiding US police investigations. "A lot of retired FBI agents and high-level detectives are working for Apple, Google or other tech companies," he said. "That's not a big problem in itself. But the very presence of these companies on the advisory board of this taskforce threatens the independence of its judgment and the professionalism of law enforcement. The reality of undue influence is inescapable."



Chen revealed details of the next iPhone on the Gizmodo website

Matt Zimmerman, a senior staff attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a civil liberties group that focuses on digital law, said there had been a clear breach of rules protecting freedom of expression. "Federal and California law both protect reporters against police searches aimed at uncovering confidential sources or seizing other information developed during news-gathering activities," he said. "This search warrant should never have been issued. The police appear to have gone too far."

It has been left to Stephen Wagstaffe, chief deputy district attorney for San Mateo (the California county where the React officers were based), to defend the actions of his department and React. Wagstaffe denied the raid had been carried out under pressure from Jobs or Apple. "Apple called up and reported it [the theft of the phone]," he said. "Their people were interviewed by detectives and we haven't heard from them since."



Police are just trying to trace that phone from the time it was taken from the restaurant until it ended up back in Apple's hands. They're trying to find out who dealt with it and what knowledge those people had when they did so."

Nevertheless, it will be hard for Apple, which recently posted record profits of \$3.07 billion (£2.05 billion), to maintain its image as a company staffed by free-thinking technology buffs who prefer T-shirts and chinos to corporate suits and ties. Behind its laid-back exterior, Apple takes leaks extremely seriously. In 2007 it succeeded in shutting down a blog called Think Secret, which had revealed details of a new Mac Mini computer. Last month the company fired an engineer for briefly showing its new iPad tablet computer to Steve Wozniak, not only a current employee but the inventor who co-founded the entire company back in 1976.

That code of secrecy appears to have spread to Apple's manufacturing partners. Last year another missing iPhone prototype led to the suicide of a worker at Foxconn, a Chinese manufacturer. Sun Danyong killed himself after being detained and interrogated by Foxconn security personnel. The company denies mistreating him.

The Sunday Times contacted Apple for a reaction but the company declined to comment.



Matt Bingham

We find all the best software for your smartphone. This week: the best apps for Android handsets.



THICKBUTTONS Free; Android
The iPhone's virtual keyboard is great. So great that Apple won't let software developers mess with it. The touchscreen keyboard on Android phones is harder to hit with accuracy, but because the Google-backed software is open-source, anyone can have a go at designing an alternative. ThickButtons shows the power of this approach. Tell Android you prefer it to the existing software and you'll have a keypad better than an iPhone's. It works by anticipating the next letter(s) in a sequence: tap in, say, "sh", and the keypad visibly morphs to give twice the space to the vowels and "y". Difficult to explain but — take my word for it — it works.



DOLPHIN BROWSER Free; Android
iPhone owners can use only the Safari and Opera Mini web browsers, but a dozen alternatives exist for Android. Pick of the litter is Dolphin, which describes itself as a "social browser" because you can share shortcuts to web pages with your Twitter followers from within the app — much quicker than cutting a URL and pasting it into

your Twitter software. Other smart ideas include an option to save pages for later reading offline, and a pop-up window in which to post comments on each site for other Dolphin users to read. Expect such ideas as part of all browsers soon.



STITCHER RADIO Free; Android, iPhone, iPod Touch, BlackBerry, Palm
Stitcher should be one of the first apps you download to a new Android phone. You use it to "stitch" together your own speech radio station by choosing from its hundreds of free podcasts — a far quicker operation than downloading and playing them one at a time. Podcasts start to play almost immediately when streamed to the phone, so you'll need a 3G or wi-fi internet connection initially, but as they also download in the background, they'll continue without a break if you lose that connection. Podcasts are sensibly grouped by topic or country of origin; select your favourites, then assemble them into a playlist to enjoy hours of seamless talk radio.



BUZZ DECK Free; Android, iPhone, iPod Touch
This news and gossip app brings together RSS feeds — news reduced to a headline and one-sentence summary, on which you can click for the full story — as a series of visually pleasing "cards", themed by subject, such as technology or celebrities. You can add to, remove or reorder dozens of cards to create a sort of flick-through newspaper, updated as often as every five minutes. Buzz Deck grew from a competition held for Android app developers and is at its best on Android rather than Apple handsets, thanks to the option of being able to create new cards that act like miniature browser windows within the Buzz Deck software. Powerful stuff indeed.

GAMES

New titles this week

Alan Wake
★★★★★
Xbox 360; £50. Age 16+

The titular Alan Wake is a writer of Stephen King-like mystery novels and this action-adventure game, appropriately, has all the hallmarks of a classy supernatural thriller. You play the rugged Wake, who finds that his wife has vanished from their retreat in a backwater town. You must run through sumptuous forest landscapes to find clues to her eerie disappearance, while humouring your literary agent along the way. The trouble is that by day the FBI is chasing you, and at night there are machete-wielding creeps everywhere. These zombie-like characters react badly to light, so you can shine your torch to weaken them before you shoot, or hide in plain view under a streetlamp. Wake seems to be caught up in one of his own plots, and strewn around him at every turn are pages of a mystery he has yet to write. The game certainly looks great, thanks to its mountain backdrops, top-notch lighting effects and convincingly animated characters. It is, however, hindered by several clichés: the nick-of-time rescue, the Mickey Finn drink and Hitchcockian flocks of homicidal birds. Even so, this is pulse-quickening entertainment with a complex yet compelling plot. Alan Wake strikes the ideal balance between exploring, solving puzzles and seeing off the bad guys. Unputdownable. **David Phelan**



3D Dot Game Heroes
★★★★☆
PS3; £40. Age 7

This ingenious slice of retro nonsense drags an ancient console game into the 3-D age. Facing a future of undignified obscurity, the king of the mythical land of Dotnia has decreed that his two-dimensional kingdom must become 3-D, with its square pixels being transformed into cubes. Unfortunately, this process awakens ancient evils that only you can lay to rest. To do so, you must wander the kingdom, fighting monsters, exploring dungeons and solving puzzles while you gather the items you need to slay mightier foes. The game's clever visual style is its most obvious asset, as a world constructed from 3-D blocks meets 21st-century graphics, but the gameplay is every bit as charming. Most of the plot is, to be charitable, a cheeky homage to the original Legend of Zelda game. There's not much to 3D Dot Game Heroes and the game is overpriced for what it is. Older games might lack sophistication but they had a simple verve that maybe today's titles miss; this certainly delivers a warm, nostalgic glow to gamers who still remember when Sonic was the new kid on the block. **Stuart Andrews**



IPHONE GAMING

Stuart Dredge reviews big new games for the iPhone and iPod Touch

FOOTBALL MANAGER HANDHELD 2010
★★★★★
£6.99

The best football manager game for the PC and for Sony's PlayStation Portable has just made the leap to the iPhone — with its addictiveness intact. It doesn't stint on features, taking in tactics, transfers and training, with a huge database of real-world players ready to live out your trueskited dreams (or, if your team play badly, relegation nightmares). If you're used to the PC or PSP versions, the iPhone controls take a bit of getting used to, but the game itself is outstanding, not to mention long — it's the biggest battery sapper in the App Store.



CHAOS RINGS
★★★★★
£7.49

The Japanese studio behind this is best known for its Final Fantasy console games, the first two episodes of which — originally released in the late 1980s — recently made their debut on the iPhone. Chaos Rings is an all-new role-playing game made exclusively for Apple devices, including the iPad, and has impressive graphics and gameplay. In it you play a pair of characters (a choice of four boy-girl teams) as you fight creatures in the mysterious Ark Arena, collecting treasure as you go. There are all the ingredients that make a great role-playing game, as well as controls designed for the iPhone's touchscreen rather than adapted from a console joystick. Expensive, but provides hours of immersive fun.



SWORD & POKER 2
★★★★☆
£1.19

If you find the role-playing conventions of Chaos Rings a bit hardcore, how about a game that wraps those elements around a game as accessible as poker? That was the gist of the original Sword & Poker for the iPhone, now buffed up for a sequel. Once again you battle fantasy monsters using poker hands — the better your cards, the more damage you dish out. It's accessible even if you've never played a role-playing game or poker, as it explains the rules of each. Poker games rarely work well on the iPhone because of Apple's policy of not allowing you to play for money. This substitutes the gambling element with the challenge of developing your character; the result gives a surprising depth to the game.

