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Apple patents haptics, fingerprint reader and RFID for iPhone

Future iPhone features revealed?

by Amy-Mae Elliott published on 2 July 2009

New patent applications uncovered by MacRumours reveal potential future iPhone plans from Apple, that cover tactile feedback for the touchscreen, biometrics and wave-and-pay possibilities.

Unlike rival's touchscreens the iPhone's multi-touch display does not currently give "haptic" feedback that provides a tiny vibration to let a user know they've hit the virtual button.

Apple's patent notes: "When the user is unable to view the display... the user can only feel the smooth hard surface of the touchscreen, regardless of the shape, size and location of the virtual buttons and/or other display elements. This makes it difficult for users to find icons, hyperlinks, textboxes or other user-selectable input elements that are being displayed, if any are even being displayed, without looking at the display".

The solution suggests a "grid of piezoelectronic actuators" that would offer the user variable feedback depending on what was displayed on the screen.

The biometrics-related patent covers fingerprint patterns that would recognise different fingers, rather than just different users, as many security application now do.

This would mean the phone would activate different functions depending on which finger the user held to the display, so the index finger might mean email, while the middle finger music, etc, alternatively different fingers could mean different actions, so again index finger might play music while the middle finger might stop it.

Lastly, a patent reveals Apple is looking into RFID



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technology, where an RFID antenna could be placed behind the phone's screen so that the device can be used as an RFID reader, similar to the NFC trials that have been carried out in the UK.