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Without Much Fanfare, Apple Has Sold Its 500 Millionth iPhone

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Apple has been known to mark big numerical milestones, celebrating the [50 billionth download from its App Store](#) last May and the [30th anniversary](#) of the Mac earlier this year. But it appears to have quietly let a big one pass within the last few weeks as somewhere on earth, the 500 millionth iPhone was sold. Despite much consternation in the media that the high-end of the market is reaching saturation, this data point demonstrates that iPhone sales continue to accelerate for Apple even if the rate of that acceleration is less breathtaking than it had been in the past.

Once upon a time

When Apple launched the iPhone in 2007, Steve Jobs did something rare for the company. He put out a sales goal of 10 million for 2008. There were doubters. “They’re going to have a difficult time” making it, Edward Snyder, an analyst at Charter Equity Research, [told the *New York Times*](#) in March of that year. Snyder pointed out Nokia sold more phones in a week than Apple had sold up to that point. And he looked like a genius when sales were dreadful in the next quarter — the worst ever for the iPhone with just 717,000 sold. (Apple, incidentally, sells that many iPhones every 2 days currently. By 2012 Snyder was calling Nokia a “dinosaur” and, to complete the reversal of fortune, Apple sold more iPhones last quarter than Nokia has sold Lumias ever.) Oh, and back in 2008, Apple exceeded Jobs forecast with 13.7 million phones sold.



Still, it took a while to reach 100 million. In fact, the iPhone was on sale close to 4 years before it happened, sometime around February 2011. (All the estimates for the month the milestones occurred assume sales were approximately linear throughout the quarter, except where noted.) From there, though, iPhone sales really began to take off. It took just one year to reach 200 million, very likely in the middle of February 2012.

The 300 millionth iPhone was sold before the calendar closed on 2012, though Apple's fiscal year had moved into 2013 as the company's financial reporting is based on a year ending in September. The big sale was very likely in December that year because while Apple finished with 47.8 million iPhones sold and a cumulative total of 318.8 million, holiday shopping likely makes that quarter "lumpier" than others. It's safe to say Apple had a happy Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas as it took less than 10 months to sell 100 million iPhones.

Happily ever after?

But 2013 would mark further acceleration. Number 400 million was right around the end of July; very close to 8 months later. Making the estimate for the half-billionth iPhone is a bit fraught as we don't have sales figures from Apple for the current quarter. Analysts are mixed, with Katy Huberty of Morgan Stanley [looking for 42 million](#) as Forbes' contributor Chuck Jones noted and the consensus forecast around 38 million. The consensus would have placed the milestone sale around March 8 given that entering the quarter Apple had sold 472 million iPhones. So even if it proves a bit high as it did last

quarter, we've crossed the point where it's safe to assume that Apple has sold 500 million smartphones in less than 7 years. And the most recent 100 million took somewhere between 2-6 weeks less than the previous 100 million did.

We'll have better perspective on how much the trend is gaining steam when Apple reports its quarterly numbers a month from now, but there are reasons to believe it isn't done yet. Rumors about a larger-screen iPhone 6 later this year are likely to bring about a significant number of upgrades as well as allow Apple to reach the portion of the market that wanted an iPhone but didn't consider one because of the display. Further, recent moves in emerging markets to re-launch the iPhone 4 and [offer a less expensive iPhone 5c](#) suggest the company will compete somewhat more aggressively on price even though it will almost certainly ignore calls for a truly cheap product.

The launch of the next iPhone seems likely to again fall in September, despite numerous rumors placing it earlier in summer. But either way, the 600 millionth iPhone will arrive very near the end of Apple's fiscal year and around what would be the typical launch window. It wouldn't be entirely shocking to see it arrive with the opening weekend sales of the new iPhone, in fact. And if you want to place a long bet, the billionth iPhone seems likely to arrive before the calendar turns to 2017. Just don't quote me on that.

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