

OpenAI 'sucking blood' from Apple: An unprecedented talent migration

OpenAI is luring a host of veteran hardware engineers from Apple, including former design chief Jony Ive, to develop the next generation of AI devices. Apple faces a serious brain drain.

Last May, OpenAI shocked the tech world when it spent \$6.5 billion in stock to acquire the design startup of Jony Ive – the legend behind Apple's iconic products. This deal not only brought Ive to OpenAI's team to develop mysterious AI devices, but was also seen as the clearest start for the famous AI company's ambition to expand into hardware.

But that's just the first shot. According to The Information, OpenAI is accelerating its efforts to recruit more hardware talent directly from Apple. The package? Hard to refuse: over \$1 million in stock, a less bureaucratic work environment, more collaborative processes, and the chance to work on 'really big' projects instead of the incremental upgrades that are typical at Apple.

Notably, the influx of talent wasn't just prompted by OpenAI. On the contrary, many Apple engineers also actively sought out OpenAI, attracted by the opportunity to work with Jony Ive on bold hardware AI projects – and more importantly, to escape the boredom of Apple's incremental changes.



The list of Apple stars who have left is long: Tang Tan, the former director of product design, who helped shape the iPhone for 25 years; Cyrus Daniel Irani, director of user interface design; and Erik de Jong, head of Apple Watch design. Now, all are under the same roof at OpenAI.

Apple is certainly not sitting idly by in the face of this 'brain drain'. It has reportedly even cancelled its annual offsite trip to China to reduce the risk of its employees coming into direct contact with OpenAI.

However, OpenAI's ambitions go beyond just poaching Apple employees. The company has also expanded into the supply ecosystem, luring major Apple partners in China such as Luxshare and Goertek – familiar with assembling iPhones, AirPods, Apple Watches, and HomePods – to participate in manufacturing its hardware.

Clearly, with the backing of Jony Ive and Apple's veteran 'stars', OpenAI not only wants to create ChatGPT in physical form, but also bets on rewriting the hardware game, where Apple used to be the 'absolute ruler'.

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