

Microsoft is Challenging Google on Apple's iOS Devices

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Microsoft Word Flow

(Tech Insider/Jeff Dunn)

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Microsoft is taking aim at Google with a number of updates to its third-party iOS keyboard app, Word Flow.

Swiping left on the keyboard opens up a range of new options — including searching for GIFs, images, contacts, and the web — via Bing, Microsoft's proprietary search engine. The move comes just months after Google [launched](#) its own third-party keyboard for iOS, dubbed Gboard.

Attaching a search function to iOS keyboards serves two purposes for the companies:

- **It could drive iOS users to their mobile search.** The default mobile web browser on Apple products is Safari. This limits companies' ability to track web usage on these devices and serve effective ads to users. Baking search into Word Flow and Gboard will help solve this problem by making it easier for iOS users to access

their search platform whenever they want to type something.

- **It will help both Microsoft and Google remain relevant in the rapidly maturing mobile ecosystem.** Users spend about 90% of their time on mobile devices in-app rather than surfing the mobile web, according to Flurry. This puts the two companies at a major disadvantage; the mobile web is often sidelined by other apps like Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat. Attaching the keyboard to a core iOS function (e.g. text) may help drive up the amount of mobile web searches. The draw is that the keyboards will provide a seamless and streamlined alternative to switching out of and between apps to search the mobile web. The need to remain relevant in the mobile space is particularly important for Microsoft, which recently has had a slew of failures in the space.

Keyboards play an important role within mobile operating systems. This is because they work across multiple apps and can collect keystroke data, which is some of the most valuable personal user data available. Google and Microsoft now have among the best third-party keyboards for the iPhone, [according](#) to Product Hunt. As a result, the companies may have found a way to capture at least some of the data users are inputting on iOS devices.

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