

Apple's AR is closer to reality than Google's

Google's Tango is about the future whereas Apple's ARKit is about the present

By Vlad Savov | [@vladsavov](#) | Jun 26, 2017, 6:40am EDT



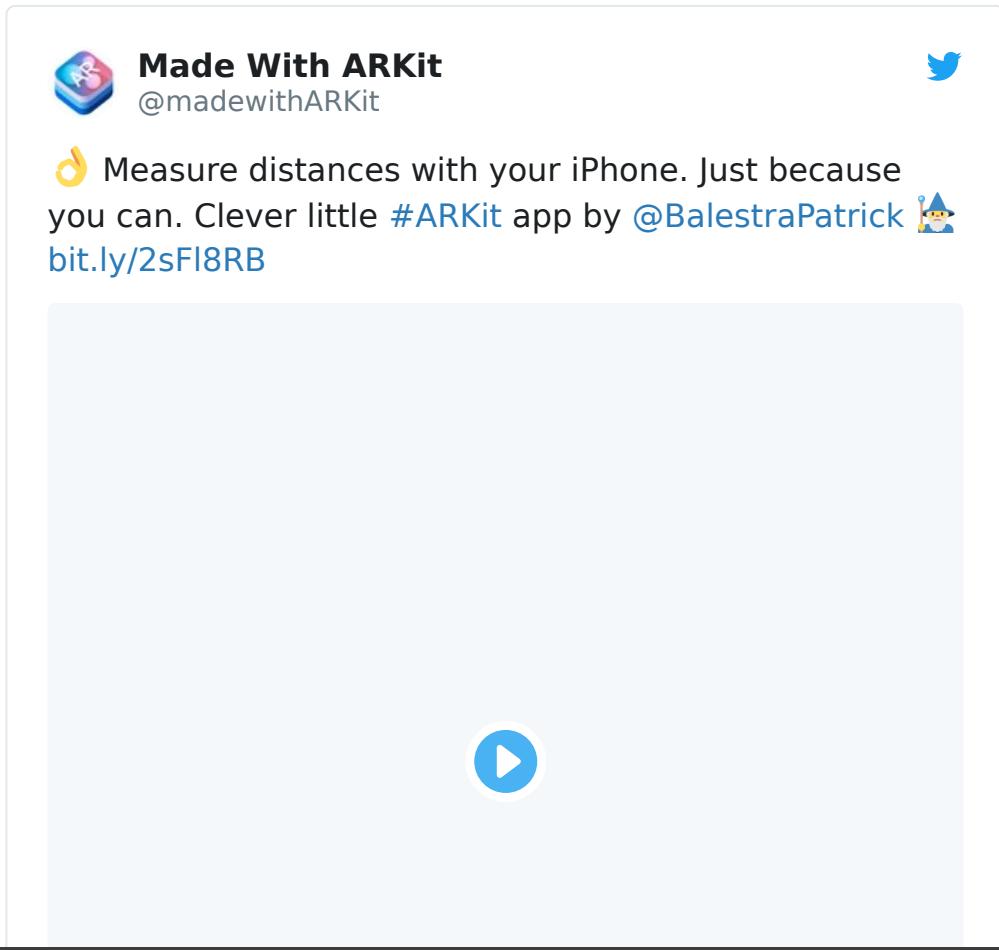
Apple has often been accused of acting like it invented things that others have been doing for years. That complaint is not without merit, however Apple can lay claim to **transforming** existing things into mainstream successes, which takes no small amount of invention in its own right. Fingerprint authentication

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The chronic problem with augmented reality has always been one of practicality. You could have the most basic forms of AR on your regular phone, as provided by apps like [Layar](#), which has been around since 2009, but those have never been particularly compelling. Or you could have more sophisticated and appealing augmentations, as presented by [Google's Tango project](#), but you'd need a big fat phablet to lug around to make them happen. Apple's difference is to combine the convenience of your daily phone with the appeal of advanced AR.



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Measure distances with your iPhone. Just because you can. Clever little #ARKit app by @BalestraPatrick 🎉
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Play

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measure out basic distances, and there have indeed been many wonky apps trying to do that in the past. But measuring with AR, as already shown off by [Google Tango phones](#), allows you a much more intuitive method for doing it. Having the phone actually aware of the three-dimensional space in its view allows for precise measurements, which can be represented with a neat hologram of a measuring tape. Apple's advantage in the contest for doing this best is simple: while Google Tango demands special hardware, ARKit requires only that you have a recent iOS device. At WWDC earlier this month, Craig Federighi described ARKit as "the largest AR platform in the world," and he was right.

Apple's AR will immediately reach millions of people who already have the requisite hardware. And while it looks to be functionally as flexible and capable as Google's Tango (check out some early examples of [fanciful experiments with ARKit](#)), its broader audience makes it much more enticing for serious developers to invest their time and money into. Google's Tango is about the future whereas Apple's ARKit is about the present.

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Considering how little time it took to develop two convincingly accurate AR measuring apps with the iOS 11 beta, and reading the comments from their makers, Apple also appears to have an advantage in the ease of development with ARKit. It's exciting to think that there are still three months before the release of the next iPhone and the accompanying finalization of iOS 11, by which time Apple's big-budget app developer partners are likely to have a deluge of AR-enabled apps for people to play with. That's how stuff goes mainstream: as a big wave of change that touches everyone from casual *Pokémon Go* players to serious home DIY geeks figuring out how to arrange their living room furniture.

For the people who don't care about incremental changes in phone specs or design, the differentiator between devices has always been in the unique things that each one can do — or, failing that, the convenience and ease of use of common features. Apple's iPhone is more convenient than Google's Project Tango devices and with iOS 11 it'll have much better AR capabilities than its nearest premium Android rivals. So if we're looking for the AR innovator that will take the technology into the mainstream, Apple once again looks like the likeliest suspect.

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