




iPad and iOS

Upgrades Guide For Beginners

Everything you need to prepare for iOS and iPadOS 26

An iPad and an iPhone are shown against a blue and green abstract background. The iPad screen displays a white text box with the title 'Are you ready to upgrade iOS and iPadOS?' and a paragraph of text. The iPhone screen shows the standard iOS home screen with various app icons.

Are you ready to upgrade iOS and iPadOS?

Apple releases major iOS and iPadOS versions every year. IT and security leaders need to provide end users with these new systems and features – without breaking workflows or slowing productivity.

Why an Apple upgrade is different

Contrary to other operating systems, major versions of Apple's operating systems (OS) – also known as an upgrade – are released annually. This includes macOS, iPadOS, iOS, tvOS, watchOS and vision OS. When devices run out-of-date software, consistency, security and user experience could be compromised. And when IT teams have to support a variety of device types and multiple geographies, it's even more important to upgrade devices easily and timely..

A combination of the simple upgrade path and zero cost for Apple OS upgrades help drive industry-leading adoption rates for consumers. End users are excited to access the new features; yet, you're responsible for maintaining security controls and an accurate systems inventory at all times.

As most IT teams know, this may be easier said than done, especially when it comes to upgrading at the pace your Apple users are expecting. Now for the good news.

At Jamf, we've been doing this for over twenty years, and are here to provide step-by-step guidance for successful Apple upgrades — regardless if it is your first upgrade season or a pro looking for a quick refresher.

There are four key reasons organizations should embrace upgrades and empower IT or end users to update devices when new operating systems are released:

1. **Reduce security vulnerabilities**
2. **Keep end users happy**
3. **Keep users productive**
4. **Access new IT management features**

This guide provides you with a thorough explanation of how to prepare for and implement a new operating system for iOS and iPadOS devices. You'll learn how to minimize disruptions and eliminate unplanned downtime, while gaining the knowledge to deliver organizational value and support users through upgrading their devices to iOS and iPadOS 26.



Get ahead with beta

Arm yourself with previews of upcoming releases from the Apple Beta Software Program to get an early look at how new OS versions and features will impact your organization.

Participating in the beta program provides months of testing ahead of an operating system release. Apple offers both paid developer and free public beta programs for macOS, iPadOS, iOS, tvOS, watchOS, and visionOS.

Why join beta programs?

- 1. The beta cycle for these operating systems typically occurs in multiple phases.** Participating early and submitting feedback to Apple increases the likelihood that the features and issues that impact you most will be addressed. And, if you are the first to submit a bug report to Apple, you'll have visibility into the status of your ticket whereas duplicate bug reports are closed.
- 2. Participating in the beta not only gives you early access to test new features and compatibility, but it also offers a deeper understanding of how the end user experience will be impacted.** Knowing which new settings have been added, any features that have moved, or changes to labels can inform necessary updates to your training materials, onboarding kits, IT policies, and more.

This helps your organization best prepare for changes to the end user experience, so you can execute a more user-centric support model and communication plan accordingly.

- 3. Lastly, in addition to new OS settings and features, application, infrastructure, management and security compatibility testing is critical for continuity with current software offerings in your environment.** We recommend you run Apple's betas to test their deployed apps for issues. Reporting any issues to the associated vendors upon discovery will help ensure the apps work upon Apple's official release.

If you have not joined in [Apple's Beta programs](#), you always can for free and you will get benefits for future OS testing. The feedback you provide on quality and usability helps Apple identify issues, fix them and make Apple software even better for you and your users.

Testing

For best results and to ensure the upgrade won't impact any unforeseen aspects of your end users' workflows, be sure to test your entire tech stack including:

1 Infrastructure

Includes anything outside of your application stack, such as VPN or testing printer drivers, which should always be tested with new operating systems. Testing infrastructure is less of a concern for organizations moving toward cloud-hosting services.

2 Applications

Includes both web and non-web-based applications. If you don't have time to test all apps, prioritize based on an application vendor's statements related to compatibility. For vendors who don't proactively promote planned compatibility on their website, in documentation or within direct communications, it is best to validate the apps yourself.

3 Management

Includes device deployment and management solutions (MDM, EMM, UEM, etc.) Check that your device management solution offers the ability to test new restrictions, management capabilities and features.

4 Security

Includes identity and access, endpoint protection, threat prevention and content filtering. Similar to your management provider, check that your security solution offers the ability to test new security capabilities and features.

Prioritizing your tests

Chances are your organization is using a variety of different apps. After all, you have a variety of teams that are using devices in vastly different and individual ways. Prioritizing your app testing is critical to success.

Some choose the route of ranking apps into priority buckets of high, mid and low levels of importance, while others look at the usage of each app and prioritize accordingly. Once that is decided and broken out, recruiting representation from each department (Developers, Marketing, Finance, etc.) to test can help understand the differences in their users' day-to-day needs and make sure things go as smoothly as possible.

Due to the architecture of iPadOS, iOS and tvOS apps, light testing might be more appropriate for these platforms compared to macOS.



Upgrading to OS 26

When it comes to actually rolling out and executing the upgrade for iPad and iPhone devices, there are two options. You will simply determine if you want users or IT to be in charge of the upgrade.



Before we dive deeper into each upgrade option, note that if you are still testing or not ready to upgrade, you have the option to defer updates for up to after Apple's release if you are using a management solution such as Jamf. With the deferral in place, users won't be able to upgrade their device. Once you decide to update, you can choose to deploy a specific operating system version.

Ready to upgrade?

Once you have decided to move forward with an upgrade, you need to determine if you want users or IT to be in charge of the upgrade.

Upgrade by user

If you are having your users complete their upgrades, they will simply go to the System Settings app on their device(s) and start the installation — no IT interaction required.

Upgrade by IT

If your devices are managed by Apple Business Manager or Apple School Manager, IT has the ability to send an MDM command to download and install a new operating system — no user interaction required.

This command can be sent to individual devices or groups, giving you the control to match your customized upgrade plan.

Note: *If there is no passcode, you can perform the installation automatically. If the device has a passcode, Jamf Pro or Jamf School queues the update and the user is prompted to enter their passcode in order to start the installation.*

Upgrading to OS 26

Blueprints simplify the management of Apple devices.



Powered by the Declarative Device Management protocol, blueprints help IT admins upgrade iPhone and iPad with a structured workflow approach, the ability to combine multiple steps in one process and simplifies complex deployment scenarios.

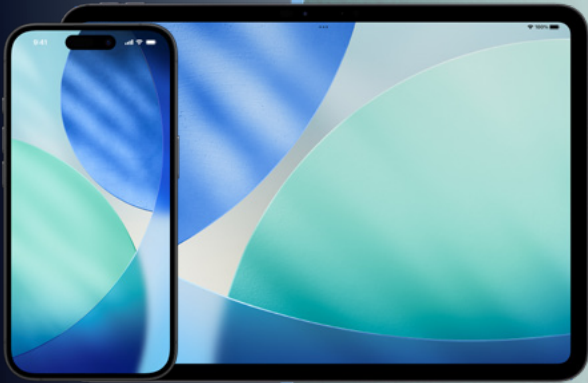
The workflow is simple. IT admins create the blueprint, define target devices and OS version, choose the installation option, and configure the user experience. And since blueprints uses the DDM protocol, the device will proactively and automatically give feedback to Jamf Pro regarding the update's progress.

For major OS upgrades – like upgrading to iOS and iPadOS 26 – it's recommended to use the Software Updates declaration to enforce those updates at the date and time that works best for your organization.

Blueprints is available for Jamf for K12, Jamf for Mac, Jamf for Mobile and premium cloud customers.

[Learn more about deploying iOS upgrades and updates with blueprints](#)

Managed Software Updates with Declarative Device Management



Jamf Cloud customers can **download and schedule to install** an upgrade using managed software updates, powered by the declarative device management protocol, which allows you to use Jamf Pro to easily target a specific update version and deadline to a group of devices in one action.

Once the update plan is defined, iOS will handle user notifications and reminders communicating the eventual enforcement deadline and update to the end user. Devices proactively and automatically give feedback to Jamf Pro regarding the update's progress.

Requires mobile devices with iOS 26 or iPadOS 26 or later. tvOS, visionOS, and watchOS do not support the download and schedule to install workflow. Available for Jamf Cloud customers only.

Not ready to upgrade?



Ready when you are but with same-day security

Apple's RecommendationCadence key within configuration profiles allows IT admins additional options when considering updates for users.

By updating devices to a new operating system when it's released, you ensure that users have all the latest features and security settings as soon as they become available. Sounds great, but what if you are not ready to roll out in your production environment and need more time? What if there are security updates that need applying before you take the leap of a full update?

Well there is an option for this. IT admins are able to choose to let devices continue using previous operating systems but still update with the essential security settings. For example, if your supervised iPhone devices are running iOS 18.5, you have the option to update to iOS 18.6 before performing a major upgrade to iOS 26.

This gives you additional time to make the move when you are ready, without fear of missing security updates.

Communicating to end users

A final note, and one to be very conscious of throughout this process, is that it is essential to communicate openly, transparently and often to your end users about what will happen with their devices and their role in the upgrade.

Whether you are communicating to them about when they can upgrade, what the process will be or why they won't be able to upgrade for a set period of time, opening a two-way communication line with end users will lead to a smoother process.

One of the major aspects that communication may help control is the number of help desk tickets or calls you receive on this topic. Additionally, getting ahead of these requests and calls will keep your end users happy, as well as engaged in the process should you need their assistance at some point.

Steps to preparing end users

- 1.** Not every end user is aware of the time it takes to upgrade. Inform users of the average upgrade time and provide tips on the best time of day to upgrade.
- 2.** Recommend that your end users back up their device(s) before they update. This applies to localized and iCloud backups.
- 3.** Implement a policy to require end users to update within 30 days from the start date you determined or let them know you will update for them. PCIDSS compliance requires 30 days.

Use email, your company's intranet, or your Jamf Self Service app catalog, to give users plenty of warning and recommendations prior to OS upgrades. They'll thank you for it.



Upgrade, enhance and enjoy

iOS 26 and iPadOS 26 are bringing improvements and workflow enhancements to make your devices the flexible, customized machine you need and expect from Apple.

Providing a seamless upgrade process to your organization not only ensures security measures are met, accurate system inventory is maintained and downtime is eliminated, it will make IT look like the heroes they are. A purpose-built Apple management solution equips you with the tools you need to take advantage of the latest Apple OSs without negatively impacting end users or putting abundant strain on IT personnel.

Jamf is the only management and security solution of scale that automates the entire lifecycle of Apple, including operating system upgrades without breaking workflows or negatively impacting the end-user experience. Jamf hangs its hat on same-day support for Apple operating systems with over 20 years of support and compatibility on OS release dates.



Get Started

Or contact your preferred authorized reseller of Apple devices to take Jamf for a test drive.