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Apple apologizes after outcry over slowed iPhones



FILE PHOTO: Different iPhone 8 models are displayed during an Apple launch event in Cupertino

(Reuters) - Facing lawsuits and consumer outrage after it said it slowed older iPhones with flagging batteries, Apple Inc (AAPL.O) is slashing prices for battery replacements and will change its software to show users whether their phone battery is good.
In a posting on its website Thursday, Apple apologized over its handling of the battery issue and said it would make a number of changes for customers "to recognize their loyalty and to regain the trust of anyone who may have doubted Apple's intentions."
Apple made the move to address concerns about the quality and durability of its products at a time when it is charging \$999 for its newest flagship model, the iPhone X.
The company said it would cut the price of an out-of-warranty battery replacement from \$79 to \$29 for an iPhone 6 or later, starting next month. The company also will update its iOS operating system to let users see whether their battery is in poor health and is affecting the phone's performance.
"We know that some of you feel Apple has let you down," Apple said in its posting. "We apologize."
On Dec. 20, Apple acknowledged that iPhone

software has the effect of slowing down some phones with battery problems. Apple said the problem was that aging lithium batteries delivered power unevenly, which could cause iPhones to shutdown unexpectedly to protect the delicate circuits inside. That disclosure played on a common belief among consumers that Apple purposely slows down older phones to encourage customers to buy newer iPhone models. While no credible evidence has ever emerged that Apple engaged in such conduct, the battery disclosure struck a nerve on social media and elsewhere.
Apple on Thursday denied that it has ever done anything to intentionally shorten the life of a product.
At least eight lawsuits have been filed in California, New York and Illinois alleging that the company defrauded users by slowing devices down without warning them. The company also faces a legal complaint in France, where so-called "planned obsolescence" is against the law.

Low salinity, poor water quality from Hurricane Harvey could impact coral reef Flower Garden Banks

About two months had passed since Hurricane Harvey deluged the gulf with trillions of gallons of freshwater, upsetting the salty environment to which the marine organisms are accustomed. And she had no idea what she would find. If Harvey's impact on the reef was anywhere near as bad as the 2016 Tax Day floods — which caused a mass die-off of coral and other marine animals — the reef and its inhabitants were in serious trouble. But her mind was put at ease as she dove deeper into the chilly October waters of the Gulf of Mexico. With the exception of a few areas, the reef appeared to be intact and thriving.
"Relative to the images we saw from the 2016 event, this was a happy dive," said Correa, a Rice University marine biologist. "You could see immediately there was not mass bleaching, there was not mass tissue die-off. You could tell this mass mortality event wasn't occurring." But that doesn't mean problems won't arise in the coming months, she said, which is why she and other researchers, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA),

Discoveries could guide policy makers on urban sprawl, greenhouse gas regulation

are gathering samples to determine how the habitat may have been impacted. "We're worried about all the floodwater that came off upland areas making it that far out," said Shelley Du Puy, NOAA education and outreach coordinator. Their discoveries, though still far from publishable, could help guide policy makers toward better ways to monitor urban sprawl and greenhouse gas regulation, Correa said.
The reef needs to be protected, she added, because it's "an incredibly valuable resource culturally, ascetically and economically."
Correa has spent years studying coral reefs across the globe, but she always finds the colorful, surprisingly intact Flower Garden Banks distracting. At a time when there is an 80 percent decline in stony coral cover at reefs everywhere, Correa encounters colorful coral the size of cars rising up around her on dives to the area. Sea turtles and lobsters can be found resting in the reef's nooks and crannies, with nearly 300 different species of fish — from barracudas to angelfish to mardi gras wrasse — swimming in and around the area, according to an August 2012 United Nations presentation. Manta rays glide gracefully over the reef, as moray eels pop out of the coral crevices when a meal comes into view.



Rice University PhD student Lauren Howe-Kerr, left, and sophomore Jordan Sims test coral samples taken from the Gulf of Mexico to study the health of the reef systems after the influx of fresh water from Hurricane Harvey Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2017 in Houston



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Star Wars: The Last Jedi is currently crushing in theaters, but its dominance in the toy aisle isn't as impressive. At least compared to Disney's admittedly high bar.

According to data company Panjiva, which tracks the giant shipping containers that hit U.S. ports, 6,587 such containers holding Star Wars items came into the U.S. in the 7 months leading up to The Last Jedi. That's an impressive number, but that is down 47% from the seven months leading up to Rogue One (via THR).

It's also down 56% from the seven months leading up to Star Wars: The Force Awakens, but to be fair no movie, even a Star Wars film, is likely to equal those lofty numbers again.

After the shipments land in the U.S., they are distributed to stores like Walmart, Amazon.com, and Toys R Us. Panjiva research analyst Chris Rogers actually identifies that last store as one of the issues with the drop. Toys R Us recently filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and as a direct result, they have ordered less product this season as they look to restructure. A retailer that size shrinking orders will have an effect on anyone, even Star Wars.

Rogers also identifies the market as a factor, saying that retailers are trying to get a sense of "what the steady state" of Star Wars is. The Force Awakens isn't exactly an accurate barometer, as the series was just returning after a long hiatus.

The consumer products and interactive media division isn't a critical piece for Disney, but that doesn't mean they don't want to fix the issue and get some positive momentum. That division reported operating income of \$373 million, which was a 12% decline. Much of that can be credited to the disappointing sales of Cars 3 toys, but you don't want to follow that up with a fumble of one of your biggest properties either.



There is good news though, as the Star Wars Lego empire seems to be continuing its dominance. They've shipped just as much Star Wars product as last year, and

Star Wars 'Last Jedi' Toy Shipments Down Sharply From 'Force Awakens'

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



continue to be something that appeals both to collectors and kids.

Don't expect Star Wars: The Last Jedi toys to go anywhere anytime soon, but it wouldn't be surprising to see Disney make some adjustments to reverse the downward trend.

Star Wars: The Last Jedi is in theaters now. (Courtesy <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/>)

Related

For what it's worth, it's no surprise Star Wars toy sales are declining

With a new Star Wars movie on the horizon — "The Last Jedi" hits theaters Dec. 15 — a whole new wave of Star Wars toys and memorabilia will be in stores on Sept. 1, a day commonly known as "Force Friday." What other movie has a marketing day all to its own? It's a day gaining as much popularity (if it hasn't already) as Black Friday.

According to Fortune Magazine, Jan. 20, 2016, Star Wars toys generated more than \$700 million in the U.S. in 2015 when the highly anticipated movie Star Wars: The Force Awakens came out in December that same year.

But last month, the New York Post published an article stating that "Star Wars fatigue may be settling in." Just in time for Force Friday, too.

It stated that the franchise is "choking" the \$20.4 billion toy industry. And that the merchandise — from action figures to plastic light sabers — have started to decline this year.

However, as the article states, sales were up by 3 percent in the six months until June 30.

The same article claims the reason for the

"fatigue" stems from Disney's release of Star Wars movies in consecutive Decembers. "The Force Awakens" came out in December 2015. "Rogue One" was released the following December. And the newest film will be out soon.

When is too much of a good thing actually good?

Though marketing experts believe toy sales could very possibly be better than they were when the movie Rogue One came out last year, they certainly won't reach the same level they did when The Force Awakens was released.



Toy company Kenner, which became defunct in 2000, first released Star Wars action figures in 1978 following the release of the first

movie in 1977. The original line of figures ended in 1985 as sales declined. And if there's one word I could use to describe all the Star Wars figures that have come out since then, it would be "overwhelming."

Between 1977 to present day, there are approximately 28 different lines (or collections) of Star Wars action figures. Star Wars figures came back to toy shelves in 1995 with "The Power of the Force" line of toys. "Shadows of the Empire" line came next, followed by toys for the movie 1999 Star Wars movie "The Phantom Menace." Then the "Power of the Jedi" line came out, followed by "Star Wars Saga" series, the "Clone Wars" series, a line for the animated series. Soon after that, the "Trilogy Collection" hit stores. The list goes on.

Right now on toy shelves, consumers will find figures for "The Force Awakens", "Rogue One", and a line called "The

Black Series."

I can't find an exact number of how many individual Star Wars action figures have been released since 1978. But to help put it into perspective, since that time, there have been more than 30 variations of the droid character R2D2 released.

There were more than 100 different figures released between 1978 to 1985 alone. Some of which were the same character, but with different features than previously released.

And since the first days of Star Wars toys, a large portion of the character gallery in action figure form have been characters who had no significant role in any of the films other than a quick appearance in the background of any particular scene in any of the Star Wars movies or TV programs.

And with Disney now owners of the franchise, it's no surprise they would saturate the market with what's already a big money-maker.

Toy collectors like myself may take an interest in new figures being released as new movies are produced. But I can't imagine parents buying Chewbacca for instance from The Force Awakens for their kids, and then buying him again because he



now comes in The Last Jedi packaging with, maybe, different accessories. With the average price of action figures at the store being \$10, most parents aren't going to buy the same figures over and over again.

I started collecting action figures myself about 10 years ago after finding some of my old action figures I had as a kid back in the early 90s, from the Warren Beatty film "Dick Tracy". It was a hobby I grew passionate about — focusing on collecting the toys I had as far back as the 80s — HeMan and the Masters of the Universe,

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, ThunderCats, and especially Star Wars. The pop culture of my youth. And toys I no longer had.

Though I keep my collection to what are generally called "vintage," when it comes to Star Wars, I do get a few newer figures from time to time.

I was at Walmart on Force Friday back in 2015, when people were waiting anxiously for "The Force Awakens" to come out. I was checking out the new figures for the movie, seeing what was out. I overheard two people who were looking over the new figures asking each other "what'll be worth something in the future."

I wanted to intrude and tell them "nothing."

When it comes to Star Wars action figures worth money, whether they're old or recently released figures, there aren't much that are actually worth anything over \$100.

Just in the original line alone from 1978, the number of action figures worth a decent amount of money because there's a substantial amount of collectors wanting them, is not very high. I could probably count the number of valuable figures on both hands.



If any new figures released in the last 10 years that would have monetary value to them are very few and far between. Toys today produced in much larger quantities than they used to be. So, demand for them after they're taken off shelves is going to be low. There's too much emphasis on what Star Wars toys might be worth in the future. Old Star Wars told have that money-aura about them. But a lot of it is something like an urban legend. In reality, there's a ton of old toys available at low prices at garage sales, eBay and antique stores.

Otherwise, fatigue in Star Wars merchandise is completely understandable. It'll be interesting to see what sales look like when The Last Jedi comes out. And Disney is a creative industry. I'm sure they'll figure out how to market those toys in a more unique way to appeal to audiences and fans. The toys have lasted this long, after all. (Courtesy <http://www.jcdailyunion.com/news/>)

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A Snapshot Of The World



A woman walks through Times Square as a cold weather front hits the region in Manhattan, in New York



A woman stands next to a festive decoration for the New Year in Sevastopol



U.S. President Trump spends his holiday vacation in West Palm Beach



People shout slogans during a protest after two miners died while working in a clandestine coal mine, in Jerada



Polish mountaineers pose for a team photo prior their departure for the expedition to scale K2 in the winter, at an airport in Warsaw



Supporters of President-elect George Weah of Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) celebrate after the announcement of the presidential election results in Monrovia



The London Stock Exchange Group offices are seen in the City of London, Britain



Palestinian demonstrator hurls stones toward Israeli troops during clashes at a protest near the West Bank city of Nablus



People dressed as Father Frost take part in a march celebrating the coming New Year in Moscow
CHRISTMAS-SEASON/RUSSIA

Delivery Companies On Overdrive This Holiday Season

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



NEW YORK -- 'Tis the season to be shopping and shipping at Li-Lac Chocolates in Brooklyn where more than 20 percent of their sales will be shipped for the holidays.

"Getting gifts on time is super important they just can't be late, we really rely on the carrier to deliver when they promise they will," co-owner Anthony Cirone said.

This year Christmas lands on a Monday, giving retailers one less day to get gifts delivered on time. UPS, FedEx and the U.S. postal service are working on overdrive to collectively deliver over 60 million packages a day -- even weekends -- a 50 percent increase over normal volume.

DHL hired 6,000 additional workers to keep up with demand on this year's shipping orders that have climbed up 26 percent over last year.

"Are you seeing any glitches in your delivery system?" CBS News asked Jeff Ivory, DHL's vice president of sales.

A conveyer belt at DHL's warehouse in

New York City.

CBS NEWS

"One of the challenges that we always have is people actually going to be home when we go for delivery. We have to cope with deliveries by putting on more flights

to make sure that we have the appropriate amount of seasonal workers for delivery," Ivory said.

It's been non-stop for shipping companies this holiday seasons as e-commerce orders have exploded. Friday will only add to the shipping craze as more businesses are offering free shipping.

ffering free shipping.

Ordering gifts in time for Christmas? These dates are key

Max Wolff, Phoenix Group's chief economist, said shipping companies are struggling to keep up with online growth.

"The sheer volumes are so high and if you are growing your ecommerce 30-40 percent, year over year, are you growing

your trucks and drivers 30 percent year over year? The answer is no," Wolff said.

The surge in holiday shipping has caused some delays. Companies say they'll deliver packages right up until Christmas Eve with some even allowing customers to pick up their presents on Christmas Day. (Courtesy https://www.cbsnews.com/news)



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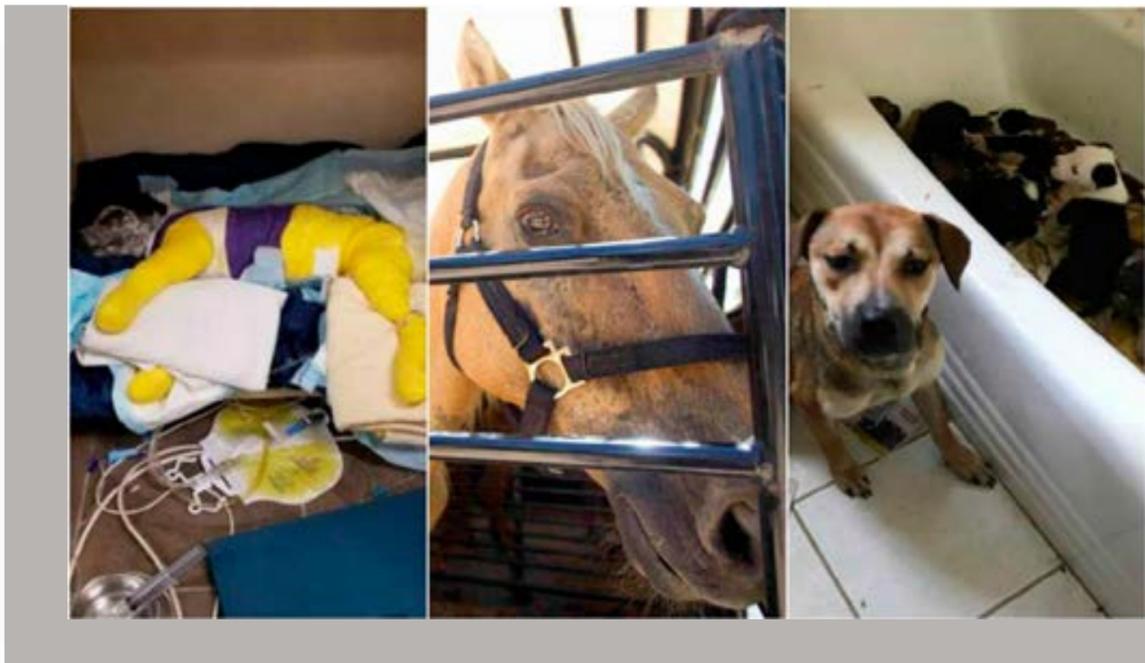
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Texas lagging badly in educating workforce



Children are the future, according to the old platitude, but Texans apparently don't much care about either. The latest statistics from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board confirm that educational achievement continues to lag in Texas...



The animal abuse cases that rocked Texas in 2017

A Midland home where two people found the carcasses of 16 dogs inside of cages turned out to be one of the worst cases of animal abuse Midland County Sheriff Gary Painter said he's seen in his 32-year career.

shocking cases of animal abuse that happened during 2017 in Texas. Be warned that some of the images are graphic and heartbreaking. Here's hoping that Texas sees less cases of animal abuse in 2018.

sentence, Painter said. "This is the worst case I've ever seen," said Painter, who has been sheriff since 1985. "The stench from the feces was horrible. They were just bones and hair."

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