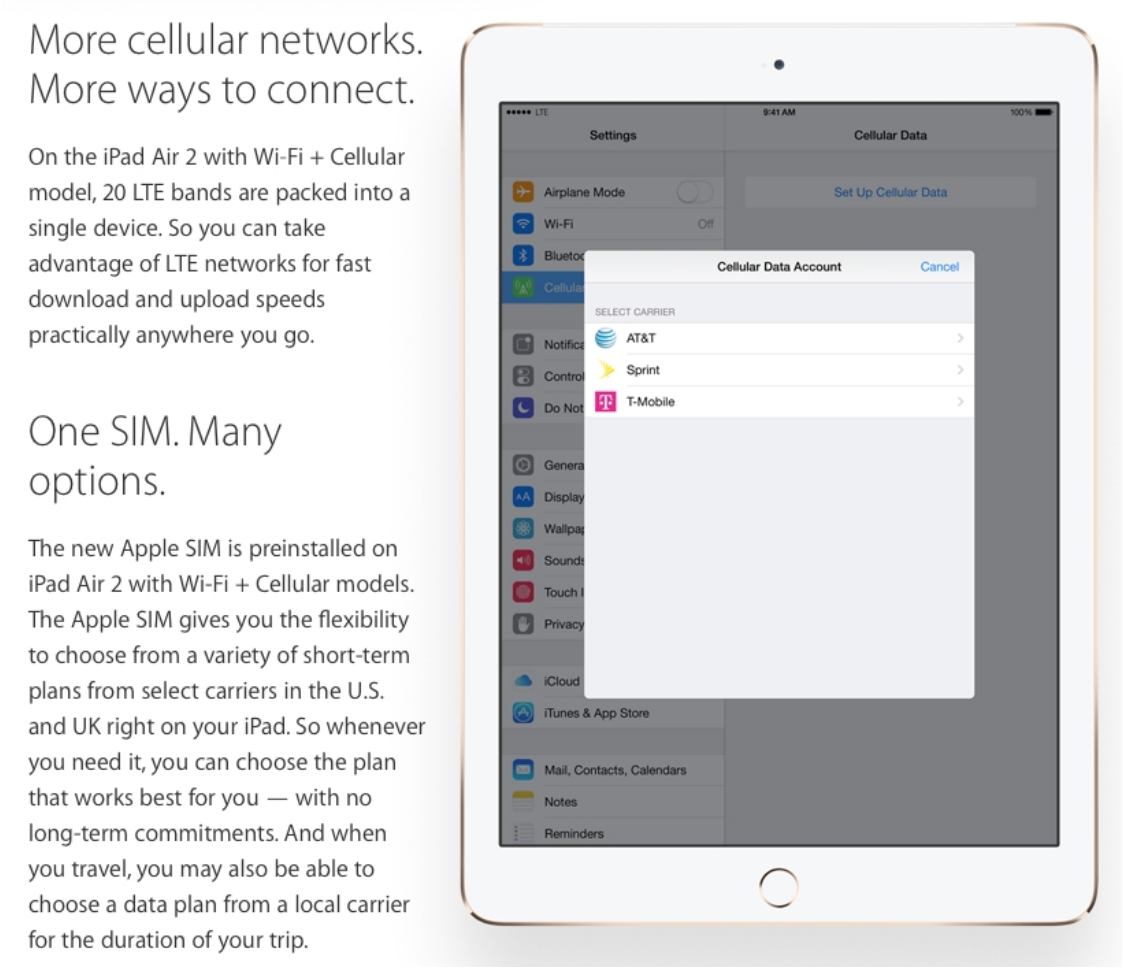
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Apple quietly slips in the iPad Air 2 a new approach to cellular connectivity with the Apple SIM. I n a totally unheralded snippet not flagged in Apple's iPad launch presentations or press releases, t
his gives users
the flexibility to choose from a variety of data providers directly from the iPad, rather than having to source each SIM from the carriers
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This snippet is hidden away on Apple's website in the wireless section for the iPad Air 2. This is almost certainly deliberate, as the company would prefer a softly softly approach, rather than appear to directly challenge the carriers for control of the customer.

In the short term, this is probably designed to make sales of cellular-enabled iPads easier through non-carrier channels, as no separate stock of SIMs needs to be maintained.

It also delivers direct and real customer benefits, as they are able to select and switch between carriers as required, with far greater ease than previously. It can also allow travellers potentially to choose a local data plan when abroad, with significant savings made as a result.

To start, this option is only available from three US carriers, plus EE in the UK, but it seems likely that others will quickly come on board, or risk losing business. It is also only on the iPad, so only for data, but we can expect Apple to want to extend Apple SIM onto the iPhone in the future.

In the larger scheme of things, this is yet another salvo fired in the direction of the telcos, who are all too often painted as over powerful. The tech industry has long desired a way to bypass the control these players exert - Steve Jobs was rumoured to have considered building a rival WiFi-based network for the original iPhone.

More recently both Google and Facebook have looked at ways to deliver services directly, ostensibly to reach areas of the globe not yet covered. But their approaches - low-orbit satellites and solar-powered drones - once established could be expanded to challenge the telcos more directly.

However so far the carriers have continued to reign supreme, dominating the sales channels for smartphones, and in most countries, successfully tying in the bulk of customers to long-term contracts. Only time will tell as to whether this latest Apple initiative will start to swing the balance of power.

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