

Samsung sticks it to Apple with Swiss Railways deal

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Apr 16, 2014

By Mark Milian, Bloomberg

Samsung Electronics sent out a press release last week saying its gadgets had been chosen for a technology buildout at Swiss Federal Railways. Starting this month, the South Korean giant will begin to supply 30,000 mobile devices to Switzerland's state-owned rail company.

These boring corporate one-offs are a common occurrence, and there's nothing particularly special about this one. Except that less than two years ago, Swiss Railways, which is also known as SBB, publicly accused Apple of copying one of its designs.

Shortly after Apple introduced iOS 6 in September 2012 with a redesigned clock app on the iPad, SBB said the software infringed a trademarked design created in 1944. The clocks, sporting black and red hands, hang in rail stations across Switzerland. SBB said a few weeks later that Apple agreed to license the design for an undisclosed fee. By the time iOS 7 came out in 2013, the Swiss clock was gone.

The history wasn't mentioned in Samsung's press release, but you can bet the timing of the announcement was no coincidence. A new trial kicked off on March 31 in Silicon Valley, where Apple is accusing Samsung of copying its designs for the iPhone and iPad. Apple's lawyers are trying to portray a culture of "fast following" at Samsung and to highlight Apple innovations. Needless to say, the Swiss clock probably won't be part of Apple's legal argument.

Samsung declined to comment, and Apple didn't respond to a request for comment. SBB didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Swiss Railways will use a smattering of Samsung gadgets — the Galaxy Note 3, Galaxy S4, Galaxy S4 Mini and Galaxy Tab 3 — for employee communication, as well as for ticket purchasing and other train services, Samsung said. The rail-station clocks will remain.

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