

■ Tablets - Revisited

Last February we reviewed tablets but since the industry was just getting started (as far as mainstream technology goes), we focused more on an overview of the technology rather than specifics. We discussed tablet history, multi-touch technology, benefits and applications of tablets, and discussed four different types of tablet devices currently on the market.

Now that more products have been released, the direction is clear. Consumers and professionals want slates and they're willing to pay for them. Apple was

the first into the newfound tablet war and has sold more than 7 million iPads since April 2010 with a cost range of \$499 to \$829 each.

While the other types of tablets we discussed are still available and offer more computing power and features, they are not getting nearly as much media attention or consumer interest. It appears that the majority of consumers want a thin, lightweight, portable device which uses finger swipes and screen taps, and that can access the Internet and productivity software (programs or apps - downloaded applications sold or provided by manufacturers and third parties).

While many Smartphones have these capabilities, tablets are larger; Apple's iPad is 9.7" (diagonally). Most Smartphones are 4" or less. While you can surf the web on a Smartphone, many sites are difficult to navigate which limits productivity. Smartphones are better suited for voice calls, emails, texts, spur-of-the-moment photos/videos, and quick tasks like checking your calendar, getting directions, drafting notes, etc. For web surfing and productivity tasks while on-the-go, a tablet is a more efficient form factor. (Tablets or slates are still limited in their computing power though and cannot be compared to a true laptop, convertible tablet, or hybrid tablet).

So manufacturers are playing catch-up to Apple in the slate arena. Although the Apple iPad is popular, it has many shortcomings so if you haven't jumped on board yet, alternatives are either available now or will be released in the next few months. We'll go over some of these options in this newsletter and list the specifications for Apple's iPad as a comparison.

■ Tip of the Month

E-Readers Revisited

E-readers are a viable alternative to a tablet for many people who are interested in a portable, handheld reading device. They have made significant advancements since Amazon released their first Kindle in 2007.

The Barnes & Noble Nook now has a color screen, the third generation Kindle can hold up to 3,500 books and its battery lasts up to one month (with wireless off), and the Sony Reader Touch and Digital Editions offer expandable memory up to 32GB.

The biggest difference between tablets and dedicated e-readers is the type of screen. E-readers have a specialized e-ink screen that mimics real paper. Tablets still rely on LCD and other reflective surfaces that do not minimize glare. Many people find reading on a tablet to be a struggle over long periods of time or in direct sunlight so if you want a device primarily for reading (books, magazines, newspapers) your best option is still a dedicated e-reader.

Benefits of e-readers:

non-glare screen • lower price • lower weight

■ Websites Worth Watching

1. www.doityourself.com - Informative site giving advice on numerous projects to tackle yourself. Topics include electrical, plumbing, gardening, painting, auto repair, remodeling and much more.

Apple iPad

Apple's iPad (*Figure 1*) is serving to fill a niche between a Smartphone and a netbook. It can access the Internet and email, engage in modified productivity tasks like creating and reviewing documents, enable you to listen to music and watch movies, and download a plethora of specially designed "apps" or application software.

These apps, which can be downloaded from Apple's iTunes store, make the iPad highly individualized - from cooking and weather to directions and money management - apps enable people to get or process information while on-the-go or sitting on their couch in front of the TV. Many apps are free or low cost which greatly impacts their appeal.

Here's what the Apple iPad has under the hood:

- 9.7 inch LED capacitive multi-touch screen
- 1 GHz Apple A4 processor (single core)
- iOS 4.2 (runs Safari browser)
- Internal RAM: 256MB
- Internal storage: 16, 32 or 64GB
- Wi-Fi (802.11a/b/g/n) only or Wi-Fi + 3G models
- Bluetooth 2.1
- GPS (3G model only)
- Battery life: up to 10 hours
- Speaker, microphone, accelerometer, compass
- Works with most email providers; MS Exchange, Gmail, Yahoo, AOL, and POP or IMAP systems
- Weight: 1.5 pounds



Figure 1. Apple iPad - 3 views. The iPad can be used horizontally or vertically depending on your subject material. Browse photos, watch movies, read a book, check your email, or check stats in a spreadsheet - just some of the things you can do with this versatile device.

In addition to the virtual keyboard that is displayed on-screen, the iPad also has an optional keyboard dock that can be purchased separately.

The iPad does have some disadvantages; it does not have a camera or phone, it does not offer Flash support (some websites are flash dependent which makes them unreadable), it does not have a USB or SD card slot (no expandable storage), it cannot multi-task (have multiple programs open simultaneously), and it only works with AirPrint-enabled printers (visit: <http://www.apple.com/ipad/features/airprint.html> for a list of compatible printers - most are recently released).

Apple is currently producing a newer model that will address some of these shortcomings. If you are willing to wait, the newer version that includes cameras, ability to multi-task and possibly a USB port will be released in 2011.

If you want to get a hands-on feel, you can check out the iPad in the Apple store or at many retailers such as Target, Best Buy, Radio Shack, Verizon, and OfficeMax. Cost range: \$499 to \$829.

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Samsung Galaxy Tab

The Galaxy Tab (*Figure 2*) is the first real challenger to the iPad although it's smaller with a 7 inch touchscreen. All four major wireless carriers are shipping Wi-Fi + 3G versions now – AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, and T-Mobile. Prices range from \$399 to \$649 depending on carrier and contract. A Wi-Fi only version will be marketed next year.

Here's what you get with the Galaxy Tab:

- Android™ 2.2 Froyo (Operating System)
- 1 GHz Cortex A8 processor
- 598 MB RAM
- 2GB user memory + 16GB flash memory
- 7 inch multi-touch TFT-LCD touchscreen
- Wi-Fi (802.11 b/g/n) + 3G
- Cameras – 1.3 megapixels on the front (videoconferencing); 3.2 megapixels on back (still shots and 720p video)
- Adobe Flash 10.1 and HD video support
- USB port and Bluetooth
- microSD card slot (up to 32GB)
- Stereo speakers, accelerometer
- Battery life: up to 7 hours
- Weight: 13 ounces



Figure 2. Samsung Galaxy Tab

As with the iPad, you can surf the web, read e-books, check your email, watch movies, browse photos, and view PDFs and other documents. With the Tab, however, you can also engage in video chats, easily download and transfer data, and watch widescreen movies with its 16:9 aspect ratio.

To test drive before purchasing, visit a Best Buy location.

Research In Motion Blackberry Playbook

Figure 3.
Research
In Motion's
(RIM)
Blackberry
PlayBook
Tablet



The RIM PlayBook will feature:

- 7 inch LCD, capacitive, multi-touch screen
- Blackberry Tablet OS
- 1 GHz dual core processor
- 1GB RAM
- Onboard storage: 16 or 32GB
- Dual HD cameras (3 MP front facing, 5 MP rear facing)
- Wi-Fi (802.11 a/b/g/n) + Bluetooth 2.1
- Support for Flash 10.1, 1080p video, audio
- Ports: microHDMI, microUSB
- Weight: 14 ounces (.9 lbs)

The much anticipated Blackberry PlayBook Tablet from RIM (*Figure 3*) will be released in early 2011. Although it is being marketed towards business users like Blackberry smartphones are, the PlayBook is an excellent option for anyone who wants a full featured, responsive, and secure multi-media device.

The first model will only offer Wi-Fi but 3G/4G models are in the works. With 1GB of RAM, the PlayBook multi-tasks well and is very responsive to user inputs whether browsing, watching HD video, or listening to music through the stereo speakers. RIM has included two impressive cameras enabling you to videoconference as well as shoot 1080p video.

One of the most intriguing features for current Blackberry users is the ability to use a Blackberry smartphone and PlayBook tablet simultaneously without having to sync or risk duplicating data. The PlayBook will also sync with Blackberry Enterprise Server making it a robust and efficient business tool.

ARCHOS

ARCHOS (Figure 4) offers Internet tablets with screen sizes ranging from 2.8" to 10.1" (the model number corresponds to the screen size). Most run Android™ apps and offer Wi-Fi for connecting to the Internet and email. The ARCHOS 9 is PC based, includes Windows 7 Starter Edition, and is priced at \$430 (MSRP). The 28, 32, and 5 are also available now - prices range from \$100 to \$450 (MSRP); the 7, 43, 70 and 101 are shipping soon.

Android Tablets Major Features

- TFT LCD screens - 70 (7.0" screen) and 101 (10.1" screen) have capacitive, multitouch screens
- Wi-Fi (802.11b/g/n) and Bluetooth (28 only offers Wi-Fi)
- Android™ v2.2 (Froyo) or v1.6 (Donut)
- Read or edit documents, PDFs, e-books, browse the web, check email, watch HD videos, listen to music, view photos - some models offer an HD camera
- Built-in microphones, speakers and G-sensors for stability
- Ports: USB (all), microSD card slot, HDMI (70 & 101)
- Tethering: connect your cell phone equipped with a 3G data plan to the ARCHOS 70 or 101 tablets via USB or Bluetooth and surf the web while on-the-go (no need to worry about staying in range of a Wi-Fi network).
- Storage: The 28, 32, and 70 versions offer 8GB of flash memory. The 101 offers 16GB of flash memory. The 70 offers a 250GB hard disk drive option. The 5 comes in three versions: 8 or 16GB flash memory or a 500GB hard drive.



Figure 4. 3 options from the ARCHOS Internet Tablet line - ARCHOS 101 (back), ARCHOS 70 (front right), and ARCHOS 43 (front left).

PC Tablet Major Features - ARCHOS 9

- 8.9 inch resistive touchscreen (works best with fingernail or stylus)
- Wi-Fi (802.11b/g) and Bluetooth 2.0
- Windows 7 Starter Edition (OS)
- 60 GB Hard Drive
- 1GB RAM
- Video, audio and image playback
- 1.3MP webcam, stereo speakers
- Replaceable, rechargeable Lithium battery lasts up to 5 hours
- Built-in leg stand
- Ports: USB, Ethernet (via port replicator – purchased separately), DC-IN, 3.5mm audio

Looking to the Future

With the release of Apple's iPad, manufacturers have scrambled to get competitive products on the market. We should see many worthwhile products released in the next year due to the high demand. Two tablets that are promising but haven't been released yet are Viewsonic's Viewpad 10, which includes a dual boot OS – Windows Home 7 and Android 2.2, and the Cisco Cius, which will be geared for enterprise with full Wi-Fi, 3G/4G, Bluetooth, USB and Ethernet ports and Cisco's Security VPN client.

Another option that looks promising is the Velocity Micro Cruz line - they currently offer a tablet but it uses a weak processor and doesn't have access to the Android market like the Samsung Galaxy Tab. Without

a responsive processor and downloadable apps, this tablet is severely limited for most users. Newer versions will be released early in 2011 and the updated specs look promising.

Tablets are definitely here for the long haul so if you haven't jumped on board yet, don't worry. There will be plenty of new options available in the coming year as the technology matures.

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