

Which "Pad" to buy?

Posted At : November 30, 2012 11:03 AM | Posted By : Admin

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What a difference 30 months make! In May 2010, I wrote about my initial experiences with the first Apple iPad. I was really excited about what it could do and how content could be read or consumed nearly anywhere. There had been a few "pads" built prior, but nothing like the iPad. All the big pieces came together with a very readable color screen, highly accurate touch technology, a fast processor, plenty of storage, and thousands of available "apps". Access to information happened over WiFi or a cellular connection. Most everyone raved about the iPad and it validated what has become known as BYOD (bring your own device) to the corporate world.

So, here we are 30 months later. There are now over two dozen different choices in tablets from virtually every major computer and consumer hardware manufacturer. Even Google and Microsoft have entered the fray. Apple has two different iPads out there and the iPad mini. Google, Samsung, Kindle, Nook, and many others have competing models. Not surprisingly, the choice of what to buy isn't so obvious any more.

We're getting asked: "Which one should I buy?" and "Should I wait?" So, what to do? This reminds us A LOT of choosing a laptop or netbook computer. The most important question to ask is: "What am I going to do with my tablet?" The answer will drive which device or devices to consider. I say devices because in some cases, a single pad might not be the right solution for everything you want to do. I'll use my wife Trudy as an example. She inherited my Apple iPad 2 when I got the "new" iPad. (Being able to better read aviation charts and manipulate photos on the new iPad's retina display made it a great choice for me.) The iPad for Trudy replaced her laptop computer. Trudy rarely creates new content other than emails, but consumes a lot of information from the Internet and reads Kindle books. She quickly found when reading, especially outdoors in the summer, that the iPad's backlit shiny color screen is really hard to see. So enter in a Kindle eReader. She inherited an older Kindle eReader from our son Brian. It's small, inexpensive, and the front-lit ePaper becomes easier to read the brighter the ambient light. And not only will Kindles sync books between devices, it will even sync the location in the book where you are reading. So going between devices for Trudy's books is incredibly easy.

That's just one example for one person. Mixing and matching devices with everything being relatively low-priced seems to be quite common. So, here are some general rules of where to start:

- If you're already using a smartphone, consider a "Pad" that uses the same operating system. iPhone users will have an easy time using an iPad or iPad mini. Android smartphone users will match up well with Google Nexus, Kindle Fire, or the Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.
- Are you going to be using your "pad" primarily to run Windows office applications in your business? Microsoft's release of the new Windows 8 operating system makes running Windows apps on tablets running the new OS incredibly easy. The Microsoft Surface is an excellent example of what can be done with Windows 8. However, it appears that Microsoft has priced the Surface and Surface Pro more toward the corporate market allowing for lots of other manufacturers like Acer and HP to have highly competitive products. Look for the HP ElitePad 900 to be released in January. It's going to have the full version of Windows 8 (not RT), and will fit really well with many applications already in use in businesses with little or no modifications.
- Some of the eReaders are truly a specialty device. Personally, I really like the ePaper readers from Kindle and Nook for reading and managing books. They are quite low cost and if you look at the Amazon or Barnes and Noble websites, some of the discontinued

units have been refurbished and are perfect for the budget buyer. Most of the ePaper readers aren't all that good for general web browsing, etc.

- Mini (7inch or so) or full-size (9-10 inch) screens? Do you want the smaller size for convenience and the lighter weight weights of the mini Pads? Most screens have gotten so good, that it's really up to the user which is better for them.
- We are suggesting that you stay away from the really low cost (sub-\$100) pads (low cost e-readers are OK) from "no name" manufacturers. Their screens are pretty marginal, the processors are really slow, there isn't much storage, and the number of apps may be very limited.

So, figure out what you want to do, what are the apps you need or want to run, what form factor works best for you, and what's your budget. Try to get a look at many of the choices. Oh and if you decide to wait - there will definitely be more choices that will be faster, better, and cheaper. That's just the nature of technology. Have fun.