

TechTalk



Navigating the world of technology one gadget at a time

Special Holiday Issue: iPad Fever

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What is an iPad and why should I care?

The iPad is a popular electronic tablet device manufactured by Apple (apple.com) which runs many of the same applications (apps) as the iPhone. Its screen is much larger than the iPhone's (9.7" vs. 3.5"), which increases its ease-of-use.

Apple sold more than four million in its most recent quarter (apple.com/pr/library/2010/10/18results.html), and estimates put the iPad's adoption rate as the fastest in history for a non-phone electronic device (cnbc.com/id/39501308). Needless to say, the iPad promises to be one of the hottest gadgets during this holiday shopping season.



The iPad's large and colorful touch-sensitive screen can display text, images and video.

What can it do?

In many ways, the iPad is like a big iPhone – minus the phone. It runs a version of the same operating system as the iPhone and iPod Touch (collectively called iOS), and as such, will be instantly familiar to anyone who has used one of these devices.

Apple iPad users can choose from some 300,000 apps, 40,000 of which have been written specifically for its larger screen (pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2373169,00.asp). This vast collection of apps means the iPad will allow you to read breaking news, check email, web surf, play an exotic variant of solitaire, retrieve stock prices, prepare an amortization schedule, learn a foreign language or watch movies. There's something for everyone.

Can the iPad display electronic books?

Yes. For some people, this is the iPad's main attraction. Its ability to display electronic books (eBooks) in vibrant color impresses, especially compared to the utilitarian black-and-white screens of many eBook readers.

The iPad is compatible with books sold by Apple as well as those from Amazon and Barnes and Noble (via free downloadable apps). This multi-format eBook capability gives the iPad a leg up over single-purpose competitors like the Kindle.



The iPad's color display brings books with illustrations and photos to life.

Even better, Overdrive (the Library's technology partner in eBook and audiobook downloads) is working on iPhone and iPad support for downloadable eBooks (overdriveblogs.com/library/2010/11/09/sneak-preview-overdrive-ebook-app-for-iphone). When complete, this will allow Library cardholders to download and read eBooks on the iPad.

It's not all good news, though. The iPad currently falls short of dedicated eBook readers in two notable ways:

- The **battery life** of the iPad is measured in hours, while many eBook readers can easily last for days between charges.
- The backlit LCD used by the iPad reportedly **causes greater eye strain** than the E Ink screens used in most eBook readers.

Can it replace a notebook computer?

Possibly. It is more than capable of performing many activities for which people use notebook computers: web browsing, email, instant messaging, game playing and watching video. In addition, its estimated battery life is between nine and ten hours. That's all-but-impossible to achieve on a notebook computer without an optional high-capacity extended battery. All of this functionality is available in a compact and lightweight package (about 9.5" by 7.5" by 0.5" and 1.5 lbs.), which makes it easy to take with you. The smallest notebook computers (known as netbooks) are often twice as heavy and thick as the comparatively diminutive iPad.

The iPad lacks the computing power of a full-fledged notebook computer, so it's not a good choice for demanding computing tasks like full-scale photo or video editing. Because of its lack of an integrated keyboard (it uses an on-screen keyboard for text entry), it probably isn't the best option for writing your doctoral dissertation, though it is perfectly acceptable for short spurts. Note: to make text entry easier on the iPad, you can connect to a Bluetooth keyboard, such as Apple's own \$69 Wireless Keyboard (apple.com/keyboard/).



Speed data entry on the iPad with a Bluetooth keyboard like the Apple Wireless Keyboard.

How much does an iPad cost?

The price ranges from \$499 to \$829. It varies according to memory capacity and whether the device has hardware to connect to an Internet-everywhere 3G cellular data network.

Apple iPad Product Lineup and Pricing (11/2010)		
Memory Capacity	WiFi Only	WiFi + 3G*
16GB	\$499	\$629
32GB	\$599	\$729
64GB	\$699	\$829

* A 3G cellular data connection requires a service plan (\$15 to \$25 per month).

If I purchased a lot of apps for my iPhone, do I have to pay for them again on the iPad?

Generally speaking, you can use your previously purchased iPhone apps on your iPad without repurchasing them. However, most apps will run in window on the screen that replicates the iPhone's screen, or optionally, in a zoomed mode which fills the screen but looks less crisp.

Certain "universal" apps (designated by a "+" sign in the app store), are capable of running optimally on both the iPad and the iPhone, so you're in luck if you own both devices.

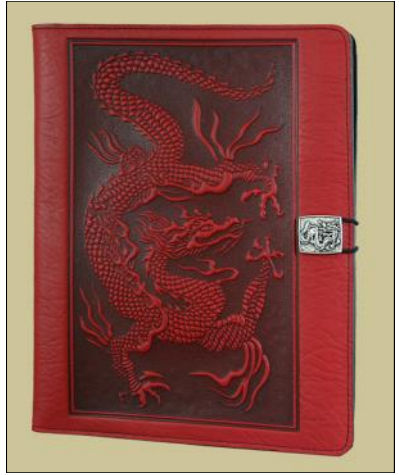


So in summary, unless your current iPhone apps are of the special universal type, you will likely be able to run them on the iPad, but they won't look perfectly sharp.

Universal apps run optimally on both iPhones and iPads. Look for the "+" sign in app store listings.

What kinds of accessories are available?

Most users will want to get some sort of a **protective case** (\$30 and up) to keep their iPads from harm. Check out ipadcasestore.org to get a sense of what kinds of cases are available. The **Apple iPad Camera Connection Kit** (\$29) will let you download pictures from your camera via a USB connection or an SD (Secure Digital) card (store.apple.com/us/product/MC531ZM/A). Some users have reportedly attached USB keyboards and mice to their iPads with this kit, so it may represent a great value. The **Apple iPad Dock Connector to VGA Adapter** (\$29) allows you to connect to a projector to display presentations or video (store.apple.com/us/product/MC552ZM/A) using compatible applications (see website for more information). Finally, a stand (\$10–\$50) might be a good investment, especially if you use the iPad with a keyboard or to display video.



This ornate leather iPad case from Oberon Design (oberondesign.com) costs \$130.

Conclusion

Apple's iPad offers a compelling mix of features in a slim and light package, so it's no wonder they are selling at a brisk clip. While the iPad probably won't be the only computing device in your home, it is well-suited as a secondary device to use on the sofa or the road.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email (moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info), or call me at 630.986.1976 ext. 225.

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