Choosing a Tablet PC – Things to Consider

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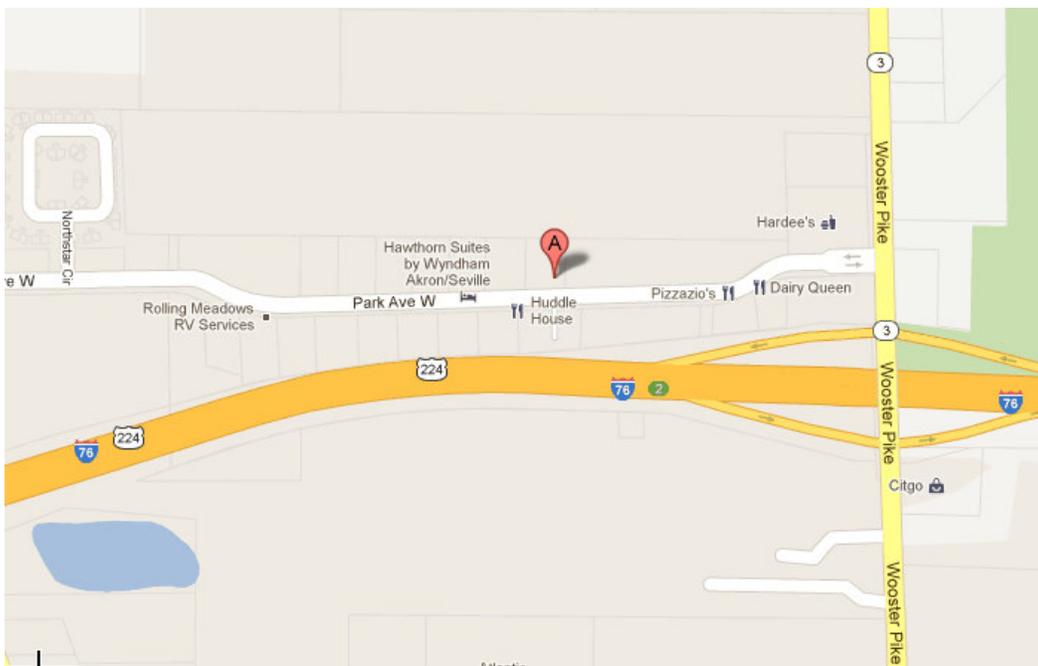
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Choosing a Tablet PC – Things to Consider

Class Description

Interactive discussion about what a tablet device is, including what they can and can't do. Identify factors that make certain tablet devices better choices to perform the types of tasks you expect to accomplish with a tablet. We will examine the typical features and specifications found in tablet devices and how those features might assist you in making better choices to buy and use a tablet device.

We will review many of the tablet devices available and break down the pros and cons of many of the devices as they might apply to your particular needs.

Day 1:
Overview of the types of features you can expect to find in the wide variety of tablet devices available in today's market.

Discussion about why certain features might be of value to your particular needs and how you might capitalize on the available technologies to do things you never knew were available.

Develop a plan for matching your particular technology needs and desires against the specifications found in tablet devices. We will discuss how to examine the tablet specifications and interpret them into something that can be used to make a knowledgeable purchase decision.

Day 2:

Review of the features, specifications and Apps of the many tablet devices available in today's market. We will try to examine which features of a particular tablet might be of most value to you and help you create a list of potential tablet devices to choose from.

Included in the discussion will be summary reviews by other technology review websites to offer a broader view of the capabilities of popular tablets.

Hands-on demonstration of features and apps that you might want to consider before making your purchase or to help you better use a tablet that you have already purchased.

Day 3:

More hands-on. Open discussion on using different tablet devices. Sharing of user experiences with their tablets.

Discussion of popular Apps and Widgets that you might be interested in using on your tablet.

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What Do You Want to Do With a Tablet?

This question is very important. Tablet devices are very useful and can be used in many different ways. No two individuals will use their tablets the same way. They are personal devices, configured to your personal needs and not generally used as shared devices like you might do with a desktop PC.

They are great multi-media devices plus there are thousands of applications (Apps) available for tablets that can assist you in performing many tasks. In general, they are easier to use than a PC, once you understand how to point and swipe with your fingers. Tablet devices are not replacements for desktop or laptop computers, but they can handle many of the daily functions that you might perform with those types of devices. Because you don't typically use a mouse or keyboard with a tablet, text input is much slower than with a PC. The light weight and small size of tablets make them very desirable mobile devices, but they can't run the types of complex software that can be run on a PC. Think of them as augmenting your PC but probably not replacing your PC.

Typical functions people use tablets for are:

- surf the internet with WiFi or 3G
- social networking such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, email, etc.
- watch video and listen to music
- reading ebooks and documents
- play games
- get maps and directions

The majority of tablets can perform most if not all of the above functions. Some tablets will perform these tasks more efficiently than others. There are many factors to consider that will make a particular tablet device a better choice for meeting your needs. This class is meant to help you understand what factors you should consider to ensure the tablet you buy will meet your needs most effectively.

How Much Do You Want To Spend?

Tablet prices start as low as $99 and can run up to $1,000. The first thing to consider is setting a price limit on what you want to spend. Generally, the more features you want in a tablet, the more you will have to spend. Expect to find a very good tablet with lots of capability in the price range of $350 - $400.   You can spend more than that, but there isn't that big a difference between the sub $400 devices and the $500+ devices.

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Tablet Specifications

1. Operating System

All tablets run some version of an operating system (OS), just like your PC runs either the Windows or Apple OS. Different versions of operating systems support different functions. Many applications require a minimum level of an OS version to run correctly. At present, Android 2.2 is a minimum recommendation for Android tablets and iOS 4 is the version for iPad devices. Android 2.2 is the minimum recommended, because it supports Adobe Flash for video viewing on a normal webpage. Android 2.3 was a minor upgrade from Android 2.2. The Android 2.x versions are meant for smart phones but are also installed on many of the less expensive tablets. Android 3+ is the version of choice for large screen tablets in order to utilize the expanded capabilities of the more powerful tablet devices

2. Sceen Size

7 inch, 8 inch, 9.7 inch, 10 inch -- small size screens are lighter but the images are small when you watch video or browse the internet. Bigger size (10") screens are heavier but they provide a much better viewing screen, especially if you want to watch a movie. The ergonomics of screen size are a personal preference that you should decide upon based on the types of tasks you want to perform. Most of the screens support at least 720p video resolution and some support 1080p HD screen resolution. Bigger is usually better. Screen size is an important factor to consider for your tablet purchase because you can't change it once you buy it.

3. Higher Pixel Resolution

Many tablet consumers hope to use the device as an e-reader. However, without proper pixel resolution, reading PDFs or viewing websites in full page view can cause the text to be blurry.

If reading is a priority, limit your search to screens with a minimum of a 1024 x 600 resolution, with 1280 x 760 being more optimal. 1280 x 760 resolutions are only available via Android 3.0 tablets. The iPad 2 has 1024 x 768 resolution.

4. Powerful Central Processing Unit (CPU)

The CPU is a very important factor. It is a measure of the performance and influences the price of a tablet. Most Android 3.0 tablets come standard with dual-core 1GHz processors. For older Android tablets, you should expect to find a single core 1GHz processor. Lower speed processors will make the tablet run more slowly, while faster processors will consume more battery life. The iPad 2 runs an Apple dual-core 1GHz processor that is on par with the Android dual-core CPU. Asus has just released a new

Android tablet called the Asus Transformer Prime that comes with a very fast quad-core processor that has raised the bar on tablet performance.

5. Random Access Memory (RAM)

RAM is another important element that influences the performance of a tablet. The more system RAM, the better the performance of the tablet. 512MB is a popular size for the economy tablets. Most of the more powerful tablets come with 1GB of memory. If you are multi-tasking with your tablet, more memory will allow you to achieve better performance.

6. Multi-touch screen

Resistive touch screens are found on older style devices and require more accuracy and pressure when you touch a point. Many require the use of a special plastic stylus pen. Resistive touch screens are normally found in entry level tablet devices.

Higher-end devices use capacitive touch screens because they are faster (no delay when you type on the keyboard) and support multi-touch functions such as swipe, two finger stretch and shrink.

Multi-touch screens allow you to enlarge a picture, a webpage or documents by using two fingers. You can enlarge an image by spreading two fingers across the screen and you can shrink an image by squeezing two fingers together. Some devices also allow you to rotate an image by twisting your fingers on the screen. The swipe function for browsing between screens is only available on multi-touch screens. Resistive touch screens do not support these features. Capacitive touch screens are clearly a better choice.

7. Storage Memory

The internal storage memory is like the hard disk in a PC. The bigger, the better. Typical storage sizes are 8GB, 16GB or 32GB. Some tablets allow you to easily extend the memory capacity with a plug-in SD or MicroSD memory card. This is a nice feature if you want to be able to quickly transfer files to your tablet from some other device such as your camera or another computer.

8. Camera

The camera does not have much use in an Android tablet with an OS version less than 3.0 (Android 3.0 supports video talk). The Apple iPad 2 with iOS 4 provides video support capability. Most of the latest tablets come with a forward facing camera in the 5MP to 8MP range and a backward facing camera in the 1.2MP to 3MP range. Having a pair of cameras allows for using apps like Skype to have video phone calls.   The first iPad did not have a camera but the iPad 2 has both a front and rear facing camera.

9. G-sensor (gyroscopic sensor)

The G-sensor is a great creation from Apple. It performs a basic function for all tablets that allows you to not only rotate the screen or menu, but also play G-sensor games.

10. Adobe Flash

Tablets that support Adobe Flash enable you to watch video on webpages just as you would with your desktop or laptop PC. Without Adobe Flash support, the tablet must view a webpage like a mobile phone that can only display a text version of a webpage. The Android versions starting with 3.0 support Adobe Flash. Apple iOS does not support Adobe Flash media. Websites that contain Flash video do not play on iPad devices. If you plan to watch a lot of media that contains Flash video, then the Android devices are the best choice. Unfortunately for iPad owners, the majority of websites use Adobe Flash for their videos.

11. Voice Commands

Both iPad and Android devices support voice commands. You can speak to your tablet and give it commands to carry out without having to type on your device. This is useful when you are mobile and can't use both hands to operate your device. For an Android device you need at least Android 2.2 (Froyo) installed.

Android Voice Action Commands:

- send text to [contact] [message]
- listen to [artist/song/album]
- call [business]
- call [contact]
- send email to [contact] [message]
- go to [website]
- note to self [note]
- navigate to [location/business name]
- directions to [location/business name]
- map of [location]

The iPad also has extensive support for voice commands.

12. USB Connectivity

As USB is the standard for most external devices, having an optional USB port is something to be considered. If you want quick and easy access to flash drives, printers, recharging devices or other wired connections, having a USB port available can be an important consideration. However, as more and more devices allow for wireless connections, USB ports may diminish in value going forward. Not all tablets come with a USB port. In order to reduce tablet weight and create thin tablets, engineers omitted USB ports in many of the more expensive tablets. In some cases, they created their own proprietary input ports that require the purchase of expensive cables made by the tablet manufacturer.

13. HDMI Ports

As multi-media devices, tablets offer the ability to watch live streaming video from such sources as Amazon or Netflix. While watching movies on a 10" screen is OK for one person, it isn't the best way to share your videos with others. The more expensive tablets will offer some form of connectivity to allow you to view your streaming videos on larger HD screens such as your LCD flat screen TV.

Consider looking for a tablet with a HDMI interface if you want to watch your streaming media on a large screen TV. Most of the LCD TV's built in the past three years use HDMI ports for connecting devices like your cable box, DVD player or other external media devices. A tablet device with HDMI support will allow you to quickly connect the tablet to a TV and watch streaming media on the TV.

14. Streaming / Sharing Music, Photos, Video

Probably the most popular use for a tablet device is to stream media directly from the internet or between your tablet and another PC wirelessly in real-time. "Streaming media" means to transfer and play a particular type of media, whether it is a music file, a photo, or a video onto your tablet or to some other device from your tablet in real-time so you can hear or view the media at the same time as it is being delivered.

Streaming can be accomplished in a variety of ways. One method is to subscribe to an internet service like Netflix or Amazon that provides the ability to stream media to your device for a price or subscription. You can do this with both iPad and Android devices.

Another form of streaming is to connect your Android device to your home wireless network and stream your personal media files to and from your tablet and your PC. There exists an electronic media sharing standard, known as the Digital Living Network Architecture (**DLNA**), supported by just about every Android tablet device, Windows Media Player, and HD TV and stereo electronics manufacturer that allows you to effortlessly transfer your music, photo and video files between the devices.

DLNA allows you to transfer and play any supported media file between your Android tablet and your home computer by just selecting the file from your tablet's screen. This technology allows you to store all of your personal media files on a home computer and then access those files from your Android device via your WiFi connection in your home. You can upload or download and play any music, photo or video directly from your tablet. No wire connection is required between the devices, just a WiFi network in your home with Windows Media Player configured to share your media files.

The Apple iPad does not support the DLNA standard. iTunes music can not be streamed to your iPad device from your home computer. Media sharing between your iPad and your home computer is done via the iTunes software and a USB connection.

15. Updates, Backup and Recovery

What if you have a problem with your tablet device? Where is your data stored? How do you retrieve your data if you need to reset your device to the factory settings? Good questions to consider once you own your tablet device.

Apple handles all iPad updating and backups through a USB connection between your home computer and your personal computer running the iTunes software. You can backup and restore your files via iTunes. You get system updates from Apple through your iTunes connection. Thus, you need to also own a personal computer if you plan to own an iPad.

Android tablets support a USB connection to your personal computer and the individual manufacturer usually supplies connection software to manage your device. You can also backup your files in real-time over a home WiFi network using available apps or you can backup and recover your files to the Cloud. The term "Cloud" refers to an internet service that you can connect to and backup or recover files on your tablet device. These services can be free or you can subscribe to a particular Cloud service for a fee.

Android tablets receive their OS updates from the manufacturer via your WiFi connection. You do not need to own a personal computer to get updates to your Android tablet, just a WiFi connection.