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Apple iPad Promises Media Revolution

The early speculation is that the tablet brings publishers hopes of new revenue for digital content while ushering in a shift in how users interact with the Web.

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[Apple](#) on Wednesday unveiled a tablet computer to the surprise of almost no one and the celebration of many. It's called the iPad. It arrives filled with the hopes of publishers and other content creators that a new device can change consumer habits and open wallets for digital goods.

It looks and behaves much like an iPod touch or iPhone, scaled up to almost the size of a letter page.

[[Click for our image gallery from Apple's Big Product Launch.](#)]

"It's the best Web experience you've ever had," declared Apple CEO Steve Jobs [at the iPad's unveiling](#) in San Francisco. Leaving no superlative behind in Apple's press release, he also called it "magical and revolutionary."

For years, Apple watchers have been anticipating the arrival of such a device. In recent months, rumors about the tablet's characteristics have led to thousands of thinly sourced news stories.

The actual hardware is much as expected: A beautiful slice of glass, plastic, and electronics that offers mobile Web browsing, media viewing, and apps on an ergonomically friendly scale. Its touch-based keyboard may find a few detractors, though the use-case for the iPad is unlikely to involve heavy data entry.

The full capacitive multi-touch screen is a 9.7-inch IPS display. The device is 0.5 inches thick, and weighs 1.5 pounds. It runs on a 1-GHz Apple A4 chip, a clock speed comparable to Google's Nexus One and significantly faster than the 600-MHz processor in the iPhone 3GS.

Its storage capacity ranges from 16 GB to 64 GB of flash memory. It comes with Bluetooth 2.1 + EDR, Wi-Fi 802.11n, an accelerometer, a compass, a speaker, a microphone, and a 30-pin connector. It boasts 10 hours of battery life during active use or a month on standby mode. Like Apple's recent model computers, it's free of various toxic materials like mercury, arsenic, brominated flame retardants (BFR), and polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

There are two optional 3G wireless plans, one offering 250 MB of data a month for \$14.99, and the other offering unlimited data for \$29.99 a month. Both are available from AT&T, Apple's carrier of choice for the iPhone in the U.S.

The device itself costs \$499, \$599, and \$699 for 16-GB, 32-GB, and 64-GB models respectively. A 3G wireless transmitter/receiver adds \$130, making the price points \$629, \$729, and \$829.

The iPad will be available in late March.

What's significant about its arrival is its implications for producers of digital content, particularly publishers of news and books. It's no secret that publishers have had a tough time making the adjustment from selling printed matter to electronic bits. Shuttered newspapers and declining circulation have led to Congressional hearings about the fate of journalism and have put Internet companies like Google on the defensive. Book publishers have been fighting to retain their power and revenue stream as Apple, Amazon, Google, and others have laid the groundwork for better digital distribution.

Apple in particular has been a pioneer in this area, proving with its iPod and iTunes Store that people will buy digital music online if the experience is simple and convenient. When Apple opened the iTunes Store in 2003, there was still widespread skepticism that music could be sold online when it was widely available for free on file-sharing services.

With Apple's new tablet, publishers now have a framework to deliver and present high-value digital content. Apple has even designed a special app for books on the iPad, called iBookstore.

"For years, people have been concerned that the Web will put publishers out of business," said David Wertheimer, CEO and executive director of the Entertainment Technology Center at the University of Southern California, in an e-mail. "If you saw the *New York Times* on the iPad today, it should give you great hope that high-quality publishers will be able to build an entirely new business model on devices like the iPad, especially when publishers focus on what makes them relevant on a high-performance interactive platform, [as opposed to] a passive reading/viewing canvas like print."

There are no guarantees, however. Getting people to pay for digital content remains difficult.

In an [online post](#) on Tuesday about his hopes for Apple's tablet, Web designer Derek Powazek succinctly frames the dilemma facing those seeking to publish digital content. "The problem for the Web ventures has always been how to pay for it," he says. "And as someone who's designed site after site hoping to get consumers to open their wallets, I can tell you: It's not easy. Print still has a tangible, innate value. The Web does not. That's why I publish *Fray* on paper -- because people won't pay for it any other way."

Proof of that surfaced the same day when the *New York Observer* [reported](#) that *Newsday*, a Long Island, N.Y., daily newspaper, spent \$650 million putting its content online and behind a pay wall and had a mere 35 paying subscribers after three months.

Apple meanwhile has had over 3 billion apps downloaded from its iTunes App Store in the past 18 months. It has sold over 6 billion songs. Its online ecosystem for digital content provided the proof of concept for Amazon's MP3 Store and a variety of similar ventures. Its iPod touch and iPhone have led to the creation of over 140,000 apps. Apple knows how to move bits. This explains why digital content purveyors outside the music and video business have hitched their wagons to Apple's gravy train.

App developers have something to look forward to as well. "Apple's announcement of the iPad today offers developers exciting new opportunities to create native and Web-based applications for a new type of mobile device," said Raven Zachary, president of iPhone development consultancy [Small Society](#), in an e-mail. "iPhone developers, Web developers, and content creators are going to be spending the next few weeks understanding the impact of the iPad and what it means for existing and new apps."

"It's going to be a great new canvas for a lot of people to take advantage of," said Walter Luh, co-founder of Anasca Mobile, maker of the [Corona](#) development framework for iPhone apps, in a phone interview.

In contrast to the snack-sized apps that are typical for the iPhone, where use-time may be only a few minutes, Luh foresees more involved apps emerging for the tablet. "The applications you develop are going to have more substantial features," he said. "They'll be designed so that you'll interact with them for a longer period of time."

And that, he expects, will allow developers to charge more for iPad apps. The average price of paid apps sold in the iTunes Store is about \$3.63, according to Flurry.

Luh also anticipates that iPad apps will be useful for content creation as well as content consumption, the former being more challenging on the iPhone and iPod due to their small form factors.

Apple clearly believes in this possibility and has ported its iWork productivity suite to the iPad to prove it. While the iPad may not yet be ideal for professional graphic design or Photoshop work, which remain heavily dependent on mouse and keyboard input, it's likely to make the creation of reports and spreadsheets easier for professionals on the go.

The iPad with iWork may not be enough to challenge the supremacy of Microsoft Office, but it could give many enterprise business travelers second thoughts about lugging their laptops around.

"It's a new interaction model," said Luh. "We're going to see very, very new ways of dealing with this kind of computing."

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[Full Nelson: Apple's Tablet Is Naturally Corporate](#)

[Apple Tablet Details Leaked](#)

[Live Blog From Apple's iPad Launch](#)