

Tablets: Apple iPad has strong head start, but Samsung gaining ground

December 7 2010, By Jim Rossman

This time last year, tablet computers were just remembrances of clunky laptops with articulating hinges that really failed to sell.

But as it has happened several times in the past, a genre of gadgets doesn't really take off until Apple is ready to jump in the market. Can you name a popular MP3 player before the iPod? Or a smart phone before the [iPhone](#)?

And jump into the tablet market Apple did in a grand fashion this spring with the announcement of the iPad, which sold 3 million units in the first 80 days.

To be fair, Apple had the tablet market to itself for most of 2010. We're just now beginning to see other companies release their own tablet computers to compete with the iPad.

So should you just walk like a zombie into your local Apple store and buy an iPad, or are the others in the field worth a look?

I've only had hands-on time with the iPad and the Samsung [Galaxy Tab](#). So pay attention to release dates for the others, as they might not be available in time for this year's holiday wish lists. Lenovo Group Ltd., China's biggest personal-computer maker, recently announced that it will introduce a tablet called LePad next year.

Here's an overview of the soon-to-be crowded landscape:

APPLE IPAD: If you're contemplating a tablet as a gift (to give or receive), you're probably already familiar with the iPad.

Apple's 9.7-inch touch-screen tablet that runs iOS is now available at Wal-Mart, Target and Best Buy. By the time you're ready to buy, iOS 4.2 should be available, which adds [multitasking](#) and folders as well as Airplay to send your music and shows wirelessly from the iPad to an [Apple TV](#).

The iPad's biggest draw has to be the convenience of more than 300,000 applications available in Apple's App Store inside iTunes.

Just in time for the holidays, Apple will engrave your iPad with a personal message for free.

The iPad is available in six configurations from \$499 for a 16 gigabyte Wi-Fi version to \$829 for a 64 gigabyte model with Wi-Fi and 3G.

The iPad 3G service is only available through AT&T and can be activated by the month as needed.

SAMSUNG GALAXY TAB: One of the newer players in the tablet field is Samsung, with its 7-inch Galaxy Tab.

The Galaxy runs Google's Android 2.2 operating system.

I got to sit down and play with the Galaxy for about 20 minutes the day I was writing this story, and I came away impressed.

I've been a proponent of the 7-inch tablet, and I'm now convinced that I'm much more interested in tablets of that size.

The Galaxy comes in a Wi-Fi-only model for \$599 or with 3G Internet

service from T-Mobile, Sprint, Verizon and AT&T.

Sprint and T-Mobile are selling the Galaxy Tab for \$399 when the buyer signs up for a two-year data plan.

The only downside to the smaller screen is in checking my Gmail account. I had hoped the Galaxy would automatically scale HTML e-mails to fit the screen. But when opening these messages, I had to scroll around to see the entire message.

The Android operating system also seems to have many layers and many settings. Apple's iOS is much simpler, with fewer choices to make.

That may or may not be a good thing, depending on how much of a "techie" you consider yourself or the gift recipient.

All in all, the Galaxy is a fine tablet that does everything I could ask it to do. Plus it has front and rear cameras to shoot photos and video or for video chatting.

The Galaxy Tab can show Adobe Flash content as well as HTML5.

DELL STREAK: Firmly straddling the line between tablet and smart phone is the 5-inch Dell Streak.

First of all, the Streak is the only device in this comparison that's a full-blown 3G phone.

The Streak also runs the Android operating system and includes a GPS chip and compass to provide turn-by-turn navigation.

The Streak also treads into e-reader territory with full integration into the Amazon Kindle bookstore.

The Streak features a front-facing VGA camera and a 5-megapixel rear-facing camera.

The price is \$549.99, but a two-year contract from AT&T drops the price to \$299.99.

HP SLATE 500: HP has entered the market with a Windows 7-powered tablet with an 8.9-inch touch screen.

The Slate is also aimed at business users and is available from HP for \$799.

Admittedly, the Slate is full-featured. It runs a 1.86 GHz Intel Atom processor, 2 gigabytes of RAM, a 64 gigabyte solid state drive, and Broadcom's Crystal HD accelerator for playing 1080p video.

There's also an active digitizer (pen) that enables handwriting and drawing input.

This is a serious tablet for people who need the full Windows desktop experience.

Like most other tablets, it also has front- and rear-facing cameras.

BLACKBERRY PLAYBOOK: BlackBerry's foray into tablet computing is aimed squarely at the corporate user with the new PlayBook.

With a 7-inch [touch screen](#), the PlayBook is expected to go on sale early in 2011 for "under \$500," the only pricing information available to date.

The PlayBook will initially ship as a Wi-Fi-only model. Models with cellular radios should follow.

The heart of the PlayBook is QNX, an operating system that features multitasking.

The PlayBook has a dual core processor and 1 gigabyte of RAM. It also supports Flash and HTML5 as well as Java.

It'll be available in 16, 32 and 64 gigabyte configurations. It also has a micro SD card slot for additional storage.

BlackBerry handheld users can connect the PlayBook to their phones via Bluetooth to access all the data such as push e-mail, calendars, tasks and documents.

The PlayBook has front and rear cameras and can shoot and play back HD video via micro HDMI.

Storage is on a micro USB card.

BEST SELLER: Overall, the iPad still will be the best seller this holiday season.

But if you read the specs of the other tablets, you can easily see where the iPad falls short.

Adding a couple cameras and perhaps a user-addressable storage area would go a long way toward making the [iPad](#) irresistible. But then again, [Apple](#) is selling all it can make now.

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