

Acer's Iconia tablet rivals iPad in price, but not much else

June 29 2011, By Troy Wolverton



Acer's Iconia Tab A500

If you're shopping for a tablet - but don't want an iPad - your options are growing daily. Among the latest is Acer's Android-powered Iconia Tab A500.

The Iconia Tab is a nice-looking, well-built, sensibly priced device. But

it's no iPad. And it's not even the best Android tablet on the market.

Like Samsung's [Galaxy Tab](#) 10.1 and Motorola's [Xoom](#), the Iconia Tab runs the Honeycomb flavor of Google's Android operating system. [Google](#) designed Honeycomb specifically for tablets and, like the other Honeycomb devices, the Iconia Tab is more pleasurable to use than tablets running versions of Android designed for smaller-screened smartphones.

The Iconia Tab has other similarities with the Xoom and the Galaxy Tab 10.1. Like those devices, it includes a dual-core 1-gigahertz processor; forward- and rear-facing cameras; and a large, 10.1-inch widescreen [high-definition](#) display. Like the Galaxy Tab, the Iconia Tab is a Wi-Fi-only device; you can't get one yet with a [3G](#) or 4G antenna.

The Iconia Tab differs from the other Honeycomb tablets in its design, its price and its software. Unlike the Xoom and the Galaxy Tab, which are both encased in plastic, the Iconia Tab's case is made of brushed aluminum. It looks sleek and feels solid.

Perhaps more important, the Iconia Tab is one of the first large-screen tablets to attempt to compete with the iPad on price. Acer's tablet comes in two versions, one with 16 gigabytes of built-in storage and one with 32 gigabytes. Those models are \$50 and \$100 less expensive, respectively, than the comparable Wi-Fi-only iPads with the same amount of storage.

[Acer](#) also hopes to distinguish the Iconia Tab with its software. The device comes with an app called Clear.fi, which allows users to access their pictures, music and movies stored on the tablet or on their network and to share such content with other devices in their homes. It also includes an app called SocialJogger, which allows users to view their [Facebook](#) and Twitter feeds and post messages to those sites. And it

includes an alternate interface that attempts to organize users' apps by grouping things like e-book apps, games and social networking programs into separate pages.

I didn't find any of the Acer programs terribly compelling. Clear.fi is fine for organizing your content, but it's less useful than Google's Gallery or Music apps. Gallery, for instance, will pull in pictures you've stored on Picasa, and Music will allow you to listen to songs you've stored on Google's servers, neither of which you can do with Clear.fi.

I was even less impressed with SocialJogger. One frustration of using it is that anytime you click on a Web link or a picture, it opens up the Iconia Tab's separate Web browser rather than pulling up the page or picture within SocialJogger itself. That leads to a lot of unnecessary flipping back and forth between the two applications.

Meanwhile, I found the alternate interface an unnecessary and confusing extra layer to get to things like e-books. The Iconia Tab has an icon labeled "eReading" that looks a lot like another icon labeled "Books." If you click the latter, you'll immediately get to see the e-books in your library. If you click the former, you'll pull up the page on the alternative interface that links to your e-book apps, including the "Books" one.

The Iconia Tab has other shortcomings besides poorly designed apps. Although I liked the tactile feel of its case, the device is heavy and bulky compared with other tablets. At 1.7 pounds, it's about seven ounces heavier than the featherweight Galaxy Tab. And it's 13.3 millimeters thick, which is about 4.5 millimeters more than the slender iPad 2. Those differences in weight and thickness may not seem like much, but they matter if you hold the device for a protracted period.

Acer's tablet also shares a problem with its other Honeycomb siblings: It's noticeably sluggish and not very stable. If you rotate the device, for

example, it can take up to two seconds for what's on the screen to change perspective to match the new orientation. Its Gmail program also locked up on me while I was checking my account and it once crashed completely.

The Iconia Tab also suffers from a problem common to all Android tablets: a dearth of tablet-customized applications. Although Android tablets are supposed to be able to run nearly all Android apps, I experienced mixed results. Some apps, such as the "Angry Birds" game, had obviously been redesigned for the tablet and looked great. Others, such as Pandora, were clearly designed for smaller, lower resolution screens and looked either pixelated or stretched out on the Iconia Tab. Still others, such as "World War," wouldn't run at all - even though they claimed to be compatible with the device.

Despite these shortcomings, the Iconia Tab is a nice device and I love its price. But if you're in the market for an Android tablet, the Galaxy Tab is a better gadget, despite being costlier. And if you really want a great tablet, get an [iPad](#).

ACER ICONIA TAB A500:

-Likes: Aluminum case, relatively low price, [Android Honeycomb operating system](#)

-Dislikes: Poorly designed preinstalled apps; sluggish response; few available tablet-customized apps

-Specs: [Dual-core](#) 1GHz processor; 2 megapixel front and 5 megapixel rear-facing cameras; 10.1-inch widescreen display, [Wi-Fi](#) connection to the Internet

-How much: \$450 for model with 16 gigabytes of storage; \$500 for 32 gigabytes

-Web: us.acer.com

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