

Review: Nook Tablet is Kindle Fire's worthy foe

November 21 2011, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer



This product image provided by Barnes & Noble Inc., shows the new Nook Tablet. The Barnes & Noble's Nook Tablet is a worthy competitor to Amazon.com's Kindle Fire. It avoids some of the Fire's shortcomings, but has flaws of its own. (AP Photo/Barnes & Noble Inc.)

Listen, and I'll tell you the story of the bookstore chain that stormed into the hottest category in consumer electronics and conquered.

It's a nice underdog story, right? A bit like the tale of plucky rebels who attacked Lord Vader's Death Star.

But that was fiction. Barnes & Noble Inc.'s new Nook Tablet (\$249) is a solid product, worthy of duking it out with Amazon.com Inc.'s [Kindle Fire](#). Considering that the Nook comes from a desert planet where the only entertainment was shooting womp rats (Sorry, I mean "from a bookstore chain."), it's really impressive.

[How the Nook Tablet compares to the Kindle Fire](#)

But the Nook doesn't quite muster enough force to blow up a Death Star. Barnes & Noble's earlier Nooks were dedicated book-reading devices, and the Tablet is at most a half-way step into the world of general-purpose tablet computing.

Like the new Kindle Fire, the Tablet has a 7-inch, touch-sensitive color screen, about half the size of the iPad's. It's the same screen as on the Nook Color, the e-reader Barnes & Noble launched a year ago. I thought it was the best e-reader yet when it launched.

The Tablet improves on the Nook Color mainly by beefing up the processor and the memory and extending the battery life to 11.5 hours of reading, or 9 hours of video.

The Tablet also has improved software, but the Color will be getting the same software through a downloadable update.

The Tablet is debuting with Netflix and Hulu applications. Coupled with the nice, sharp screen, that makes for a good device for that TV and movie fix -as long as you're connected to Wi-Fi. The apps actually highlight one of the shortcomings of the Tablet: there's no way (short of hacking the software) to use it for offline viewing of movies you buy or rent.

Barnes & Noble promises to provide some sort of movie store next year.

Amazon, meanwhile, launched the Kindle Fire with access not just to Netflix and Hulu, but to its own store with downloadable video, plus free streaming content for Amazon Prime subscribers.

Barnes & Noble is also well behind when it comes to the selection of third-party applications: it has about 1,000 available today. That compares to just under 10,000 at Amazon, and 500,000 on the iPad.

However, the Nook has these features over the Fire:

- Faster processor and more memory for software operations, which means faster Web browsing and magazine page-flipping.
- Longer battery life.
- Twice as much storage space: 16 gigabytes compared to eight. Don't get too excited about this, though. What Barnes & Noble has left out of its marketing material is that only 1 gigabyte is available for content that isn't bought from Barnes & Noble. Since books don't take up much space and Barnes & Noble doesn't sell movies, much of the 16 gigabytes is likely to be wasted.
- A slot for memory cards. This is the cure for the lack of memory for non-Barnes & Noble content. You can add another 16 gigabytes of memory by buying a \$20 card.
- The ability to load books from third-party stores like Google Books. On the Kindle, you can only read books from Amazon.
- Netflix streams are sharper. Barnes & Noble initially claimed they were in high definition, but that X-wing doesn't fly: the Tablet's screen isn't high-definition.

- Children's books with built-in narration (some Kindle apps have this).
- A microphone. This doesn't have a lot of uses, but it does allow you to record your own narration.

Apart from the ones mentioned above, the Kindle Fire has these features over the Nook:

- A lower price: \$199.
- The Comixology app, the most popular one for comic books. On the Nook, you're pretty much limited to buying electronic comics from Barnes & Noble.

For the most part, the [Nook Tablet](#) justifies the higher price tag compared to the Kindle. Of course, anyone with money to spend should also be looking at the iPad 2, which starts at \$499 and does all of what these smaller tablets do - plus a whole lot more. That's one Death Star that won't be exploding in a hurry.

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