

Holding out hope for a surprise with next iPad

February 23 2012, By Troy Wolverton

With Apple expected to unveil the next version of the iPad early next month, I worry that I'll feel like a kid on Christmas who weeks before found the unwrapped presents hidden in the closet.

I'm concerned there won't be any surprises, that I already know all there is to know about it.

Here's hoping that [Apple](#) proves me wrong.

While company officials have declined to comment about the new iPad on the record, specifications for the device have been widely reported in the press.

The iPad 3, as it's been unofficially dubbed, is expected to have a screen with twice the resolution of the first two models. It's expected to have a faster processor, likely one with 4 cores, and 4G [network capability](#). It also will almost certainly have an improved [graphics processor](#) to make all the images on that high-resolution screen look pretty and move smoothly.

Oh, and it might have a new camera, if recent pictures that surfaced supposedly depicting the back case of the iPad 3 are any indication.

I'm not dismissing these upgrades. The high-resolution display that Apple put into the [iPhone 4](#) and its successor looks stunning compared to the ones used in older models. I'm sure the one in the next iPad will be

similarly impressive. Processor upgrades are generally a welcome addition, because they enable new features and new kinds of applications. And the front- and rear-facing cameras on the iPad 2 are awful; I'd love to see those upgraded.

I'm not going to argue that Apple needs to make radical changes to the iPad. The device has been a runaway success, dominating the [tablet market](#) since the first version launched.

The tablets that tried to go head-to-head with the iPad - such as Research in Motion's [PlayBook](#), Hewlett-Packard's [TouchPad](#) and Motorola's [Xoom](#) - all failed to knock it from its perch. While Amazon's Kindle Fire is gaining fans and Windows 8 tablets represent another potential challenge, there's little indication that either represent a real threat to Apple's dominance.

So my plea for novelty is mainly selfish; I'd like to see something I didn't expect.

The upgrades in the next iPad either have been long expected or represent logical, incremental changes. Either way, they're nothing to get worked up about.

So what would get me excited? Here are a few possibilities:

-An iPad mini. The iPad and the iPhone are great devices, but neither of them is ideal for reading books or taking notes. The iPad's a bit too heavy and the iPhone's a bit small. I'd like to see Apple make a device that's right in the middle, that's about the same size as the Kindle Fire or one of the e-book readers.

I know that Apple's late CEO Steve Jobs said that size just doesn't work for a tablet, but the success of the Kindle Fire and the millions of e-book

readers Amazon and other companies have sold argues against that.

-A lower price. The iPad seemed to be a bargain when Apple released it at \$500. But with devices like the [Kindle Fire](#) and Barnes & Noble's Nook Tablet priced at \$250 or less, the iPad is looking ever more pricey. And let's face it: Many folks can't afford to pony up \$500 for an iPad.

Here's where a smaller iPad could help. A smaller size and a smaller, lower-resolution screen would cost a lot less to make than the current version, allowing Apple to offer a low-price model.

-Handwriting recognition. I know, I know: Jobs believed that companies that shipped a tablet with a stylus "blew it" in terms of design. I'm not arguing that the iPad should be transformed into a Windows-style pen-based tablet instead of one that responds to fingertip input. But I'd love to be able to take notes on an iPad or iPhone while out on assignment or even in the grocery store.

Unfortunately, the on-screen keyboard is too slow and an external keyboard too unwieldy. Some apps let you write with your fingertip or an optional stylus, and some recognize handwriting, but only within that particular application. I'd like to see the feature available within some of the devices' native applications, such as notes and reminders.

This feature would be something of a back-to-the-future play for Apple. The Newton, Apple's first tablet-like device, included handwriting recognition that was widely mocked for the poor job it did. But the technology has come a long way since then.

-Siri. When I first tested it, I loved the speech recognition service Apple built into the iPhone 4S. It's since lost some of its charm; due to network problems or other reasons, I could only get it to work about half the time I used it after I initially tested it.

Still, when it works, Siri is very cool. It can make searching for information on the [iPhone](#) much easier than having to find and launch a particular application. So, I'd love to see the [iPad](#) be able to use it too.

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