

Review: Google's new tablet outshines Samsung's

September 4 2013, by Troy Wolverton



With the new Nexus 7, Google has taken a tablet that was already very good and made it great.

The original Nexus 7, which the search giant debuted last year, was a well-built, powerful and compact. It had fairly high-resolution screen that ran a streamlined version of Android and carried a bargain price of

just \$200.

The only real reservation I had about it was its lack of available content - the selection of movies, games and television shows in the device's native digital store was poor compared to what was available for Apple's iPad and Amazon's Kindle Fire.

With the new Nexus 7, which Google unveiled this summer, the company has largely addressed that shortcoming while making the device better in numerous ways.

The new Nexus 7 is lighter and thinner than the previous model, but still feels solidly built. Although it's still thicker than Apple's paper-thin iPad Mini, the difference is minimal, and the Nexus 7 weighs less than Apple's device.

It also sports a powerful new processor. I put the Nexus 7 through a battery of tests that are designed to measure the capabilities of [smartphone](#) and tablets' application and [graphics processors](#). Google's tablet blew the tests away, in most cases far exceeding scores posted by rival devices. While these tests sometimes don't mean much in the real world, with the Nexus 7, you actually can appreciate its speed. It's just snappier and more responsive than other tablets, quickly launching apps and speedily switching between them.

But the highlight feature of the updated device is its new screen, which has more than twice as many pixels as that of its predecessor. That gives the new Nexus 7's display a [pixel density](#) that's about equal to that of the "retina display" in Apple's iPhone 5 and greater than that in Apple's full-sized iPad.

What that means for you and me is that text is ultra-sharp and readable, even at small font sizes. It also allows the device to display movies and

[television shows](#) in full 1080p high definition, something its predecessor couldn't do.

The screen is beautiful. My only quibbles about it are that I wish it were a bit larger and a bit wider. I prefer the 8-inch screen size, because devices with those screens offer much the same portability as the Nexus 7, but are able to display larger text and icons that can be easier to read or interact with. I also like devices that have more squarish screens, because they can be held and used more easily in both vertical and horizontal orientations.

But there are other things to like about the new Nexus 7, because Google has made plenty of other upgrades. It now has a rear camera, for example. It's only 5 megapixels, but that's pretty much the standard for tablets. It has stereo speakers, unlike its predecessor. And the base model of the Nexus 7 now has 16 gigabytes of memory, up from 8 gigabytes previously. Google will soon offer two different 32 gigabyte models, one of which will be able to connect to cellular data network.

According to Google, the Nexus 7's battery should endure 9 hours of "active use." I didn't test that precisely, but the device did last for more than a day of intermittent use without needing to be recharged.

Since the first Nexus 7 debuted last year, Google has greatly improved the offerings in its Play store. All of the top 20 movies and most of the top TV shows in Apple's iTunes store are now available through Play. The games selection is more hit or miss, but it's better than before.

Some consumers may be unhappy that the storage space in the Nexus 7 isn't expandable; unlike many other Android tablets, it doesn't feature a memory card slot. But that didn't concern me that much, since much of the content you might want to enjoy on the device will likely be stored in the cloud.

The base price of the new Nexus 7 is \$30 more expensive than last year's base model. But the \$230 price is actually the same amount Google charged for the 16 gigabyte version of last year's model, so the company can argue that it hasn't raised its price.

Regardless, it's well worth the price. The Nexus 7 is a great gadget.

I couldn't say the same of another new tablet, the 8-inch version of Samsung's Galaxy Tab 3.

While I like the size of the Galaxy Tab's screen, the device is inferior in many other ways to the Nexus 7. Its screen is of much lower resolution than that of Google's device and looks far less sharp when compared side to side. Its processor placed in the middle of the pack compared to other Android tablets and smartphones in my tests. And unlike the Nexus 7, the Galaxy Tab 3 has Samsung's customized interface running on top of Android that I find less easy to use and just too busy.

To be sure, the Galaxy Tab 3 is not a bad device. It's well-built. It's lightweight. And it offers some cool features. For example, it won't shut off its screen if you are looking at it.

But for \$300, I wish it were more compelling than that. Because the Nexus 7, with its great screen and zippy processor, is a much better deal.

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GOOGLE NEXUS 7 TABLET

-Troy's rating: 9.0 (out of 10)

-Likes: Inexpensive; lighter and thinner than last year's model while adding a rear camera and stereo speakers; has a high-resolution display,

zippy new processor; available offerings much better than before

-Dislikes: Base model more expensive than last year's; game selection still spotty; would have preferred a larger, wider screen.

-Specs: 1.5 GHz quad-core processor; 7-inch 1920 x 1200 display; 1.2 megapixel front and 5 megapixel rear cameras;

-Price: \$230 for 16 GB Wi-Fi-only model; \$270 for 32 GB Wi-Fi-only model; \$350 for 32 GB Wi-Fi and LTE model

-Web: google.com/nexus/ target="_blank">www.google.com/nexus/

SAMSUNG GALAXY TAB 3 8.0:

-Troy's rating: 7.0 (out of 10)

-Likes: Thin, light with ideal-sized screen; custom software offers cool features like the ability to recognize when someone is looking at the device.

-Dislikes: Relatively low-resolution screen; processor offers middling performance; customized Android interface is annoying to use.

-Specs: 1.5 GHz dual-core processor; 8-inch, 1280 x 800 display; 1.3 megapixel front and 5 megapixel rear cameras.

-Price: \$300

-Web: www.samsung.com

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