

Review: New Kindle good contender for Amazon users

October 2 2013, by Anick Jesdanun



This undated photo provided by Amazon shows Amazon's new kindle fire HDX tablet. Amazon is the latest company to unveil new tablets, including a new 7 inch Kindle Fire HDX. (AP Photo/Amazon)

Amazon's new Kindle Fire HDX tablet resembles Google's Nexus 7 in many ways—from its light weight to its sharp display. Both tablets run a

version of Google's Android operating system, and they even have the same starting price of \$229.

The similarities end when you turn them on.

Amazon.com Inc. modifies Android so much that it no longer resembles Android. The company calls it Fire OS 3.0, or Mojito. Amazon's services are front and center on the Fire, and Google's are nowhere to be found. It's the other way around on the Nexus 7 and other Android devices. For a day or two, I even forgot the Kindle Fire can do much more.

Regular customers of Amazon will appreciate that integration. A row of tabs at the top of the screen offers quick access to various Amazon services, including e-books, music, videos and audiobooks, the latter from the Audible business that Amazon bought in 2008. Another tab gets you Amazon's shopping site, where you can buy television sets, vacuum cleaners and tennis rackets. The Kindle is already tied to your Amazon account, so it's easy—perhaps too easy—to just click and buy.

You also get Amazon's excellent recommendation technology. Browsing the e-book section, "The Great Gatsby" came up, likely because I had just added a movie version to my video watch list. Kindle versions of "Buffy The Vampire Slayer" comic books came up, likely because I own the entire television series on DVD. Under music, digital copies of physical CDs I had purchased were waiting for me, along with recommendations for other songs and albums from artists in my shopping history.

If you spring for Amazon's \$79-a-year Prime membership, you also get quick access to thousands of free movies and television episodes and the ability to borrow one e-book a month from a select list. For the first time, you can download the free Prime video to watch on a plane or

anywhere else lacking an Internet connection. On older Kindle Fires and other devices, you're limited to streaming, which requires a constant Internet connection.

Amazon plans to start shipping the smaller version of the Kindle Fire HDX on Oct. 18. Like the Nexus 7, it has a 7-inch (17.8-centimeter) screen, measured diagonally. A larger, 8.9-inch (22.6-centimeter) version is expected Nov. 7 and starts at \$379. Amazon is also updating last year's 7-inch (17.8-centimeter) HD model, lowering the price to \$139 but cutting a few features including the camera.

All three models expand on an X-Ray feature that Amazon introduced last year. While watching a movie or TV show on older Fires, you can get a list of actors appearing in that scene. Click on one for more information, mostly culled from Amazon's IMDb celebrity-database service. With the new devices, you also get summaries on major characters and opportunities to buy songs played during the show. You also get trivia and goofs, such as a lottery ticket having the wrong code in one scene of "Breaking Bad." You can jump directly to that scene with a click. When playing music, you also see lyrics for selected tunes, perfect for sing-alongs.

My favorite new feature is Mayday on the HDX. It's free, live technical support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A tech adviser appears in a small window on your Kindle, but the adviser can only hear you and see what's on your screen. Advisers can guide you by highlighting certain settings and buttons with a virtual orange marker. Advisers can also take control of your device and do the task for you, though you're better off learning to do it yourself.



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I tried three times to stump the tech advisers. For the most part, I found them patient and knowledgeable. It appeared to me they were really thinking through the problem, rather than following a script, as I typically find with my cable company. That said, one late-night staffer was willing to give up easily and dismiss my issue as a device malfunction, until I nudged him to walk me through the steps to discover one I had inadvertently skipped.

I'll wait until the support center is fully staffed and trained before making a final judgment, but I'm pleased with what I've seen so far. I

particularly like the security protocols; the adviser made sure to pause the screen sharing whenever I typed a password.

As devices get complex, we could use more of this type of offering. I'm hoping Amazon's approach to customer service gets adopted by Apple, Samsung and other rivals.

As for the hardware, the 7-inch (17.8-centimeter) HDX has a screen resolution of 323 pixels per inch, which is the same as the Nexus 7 and better than Apple's iPad Mini and Samsung's Galaxy Note 8.0.

For streaming video, I didn't see much difference in video quality, largely because of limitations in what's being sent over Wi-Fi. The differences are more pronounced with video downloads and e-books. Text on the HDX and the Nexus 7 is sharp, whereas letters bleed on the iPad and the Note.

The Apple and Samsung [tablets](#) do have slightly larger screens, about an inch (2.5 centimeters) longer diagonally. But both are also heavier and more expensive. The Nexus 7 is the lightest at 10.2 ounces (289 grams), while the HDX weighs 10.7 ounces (303 grams).

The HDX's front-facing camera is 1 megapixel, which is comparable with the Nexus 7 but much poorer than phones and tablets with rear cameras. The HDX does have one of the fastest processors for a tablet, but unless you're playing games or doing other data-intensive tasks, it won't make much difference.

One area where the HDX falls short is in app selection. The iPad Mini reigns with access to the thousands of apps adapted for tablets. But even compared with other Android tablets, the HDX doesn't have as wide a selection, as Kindles work only with Amazon's app store, not Google's broader Play store.

But I was surprised to see one Amazon video rival, Hulu Plus, available. And Netflix is supposed to get an update that works with the HDX by the time it ships. You won't find everything at Amazon's app store, but you'll find plenty to keep you busy. And if an app isn't available, you might still be able to access the service through Amazon's Silk Web browser.

I've been skeptical with the Kindle Fires in the past because they don't do everything other Android tablets can do. But after trying out the HDX, I find it a worthy contender. Ultimately, it comes down to whether you regularly buy from Amazon and want to make its content work easily on your device.

About the kindle fire:

Amazon has three tablet computers out this fall: the Kindle Fire HDX in two sizes and an entry-level, 7-inch Kindle Fire HD. They all come with similar features, though the HDX has better hardware and comes with Mayday technical support.

The 7-inch (17.8-centimeter) HDX starts at \$229 and is expected to ship Oct. 18, while the 8.9-inch (22.6-centimeter) HDX starts at \$379 and should come out Nov. 7. The base models have 16 gigabytes of storage. You can pay more to get additional storage or to get rid of ads that come on the tablets' lock screens. Versions with 4G LTE cellular access will cost \$100 more.

The HD, available Wednesday, starts at \$139 with 8 gigabytes of storage. It replaces last year's HD model.

How new 7-inch Kindle compares with smaller rivals

Amazon is the latest company to unveil new tablets, including a new 7-inch (17.8-centimeter) Kindle Fire HDX and an updated HD model. That screen size has gotten popular because devices are cheaper and easier to carry around. Here's how Amazon's new tablets compare with Apple's iPad Mini and Google's Nexus 7.

Amazon.com Inc.'s Kindle Fire HDX (shipping Oct. 18, 2013):

— Price: \$229 with 16 gigabytes of storage, \$269 with 32 GB and \$309 with 64 GB. Add \$100 for versions with 4G LTE cellular capability.

— Screen size: 7 inches (17.8 centimeters) diagonally

— Screen resolution: 1920 x 1200 (323 pixels per inch)

— Size: height: 7.3 inches (18.5 centimeters); width: 5.0 inches (12.7 centimeters); thickness: 0.35 inch (0.9 centimeter)

— Weight: 10.7 ounces (303 grams) for base model, 11.0 ounces (311 grams) for cellular version

— Cameras: Front-facing camera

— Battery life: 11 hours of mixed use, 17 hours when reading.

— Operating system: Modified version of Google's Android

Pros: Cheap and portable. Convenient access to Amazon store. Integration with Amazon Prime subscription benefits such as book-borrowing, videos. High-resolution screen. "Mayday" live video support 24/7.

Cons: Third-party applications limited to what's available through

Amazon store, not broader Google Play store. No rear camera.

Amazon.com Inc.'s Kindle Fire HD, 2013 model (shipping Oct. 2, 2013):

- Price: \$139 with 8 gigabytes of storage, \$169 with 16 GB
- Screen size: 7 inches (17.8 centimeters) diagonally
- Screen resolution: 1280 by 800 pixels (216 pixels per inch)
- Size: height: 7.5 inches (19 centimeters); width: 5.0 inches (12.7 centimeters); thickness: 0.42 inch (1.1 centimeter)
- Weight: 12.2 ounces (345 grams)
- Cameras: None
- Battery life: 10 hours
- Operating system: Modified version of Google's Android

Pros: Really cheap and portable. Convenient access to Amazon store. Integration with Amazon Prime subscription benefits such as book-borrowing, videos.

Cons: Third-party applications limited to what's available through Amazon store, not broader Google Play store. No camera or option for cellular access. Fewer features than 2012 model, including less storage and the exclusion of front-facing camera and microphone in new model. No "Mayday" support.

Apple Inc.'s iPad Mini (released Nov. 2, 2012):

— Price: \$329 with 16 gigabytes of storage, \$429 with 32 GB and \$529 with 64 GB. Add \$130 for versions with 4G LTE cellular capability.

— Screen size: 7.9 inches (20.1 centimeters) diagonally

— Screen resolution: 1024 by 768 pixels (163 pixels per inch)

— Size: height 7.87 inches (20 centimeters); width: 5.3 inches (13.46 centimeters); thickness: 0.28 inch (0.7 centimeters)

— Weight: 10.9 ounces (308 grams) for base model, 11 ounces (312 grams) for cellular version

— Cameras: 5-megapixel camera on back and a low-resolution camera on front, for videoconferencing

— Battery life: 10 hours

— Operating system: Apple's iOS

Pros: Portable. Unmatched access to third-party applications, high-quality Apple software and the iTunes store. Screen larger than on rival devices.

Cons: Screen resolution is among the lowest. Pricey.

Google Inc.'s Nexus 7 (released July 30, 2013):

— Price: \$229 with 16 gigabytes of storage, \$269 with 32 GB. Add \$80 for 32 GB model with 4G LTE cellular capability.

— Screen size: 7 inches (17.8 centimeters) diagonally

- Screen resolution: 1920 x 1200 (323 pixels per inch)
- Size: height: 7.87 inches (20 centimeters); width 4.49 inches (11.4 centimeters); thickness: 0.34 inch (0.86 centimeters).
- Weight: 10.2 ounces (290 grams) for base model, 10.5 ounces (299 grams) for cellular version
- Cameras: 5 megapixel rear camera, 1.2 megapixel front-facing camera
- Battery life: 9 hours
- Operating system: Google's Android

Pros: Cheap and portable. Access to a variety of games, utilities and other software for Android devices, though not as extensive as apps available for iPad. High-resolution screen.

Cons: No major standout features compared with similar Android tablets.

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