

# Review: New Surface tablets great for productivity

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In this Sept. 23, 2013, file photo, Microsoft's Surface Pro 2 is introduced, in New York. Whether or not you like Microsoft's updated Surface tablets will depend on your needs. The tablets can be great for working on the go, especially if you spring for a \$130 keyboard cover. On the flip side, the new versions still lack the elegance and fun that iPads are known for and many Android-based tablets now offer. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

Whether or not you like Microsoft's updated Surface tablets will depend on your needs.

On one hand, the tablets can be great for working on the go, especially if you spring for a \$130 keyboard cover. On the flip side, the new versions still lack the elegance and fun that iPads are known for and many Android-based tablets now offer. People used to the hundreds of thousands of apps on those devices will be disappointed.

Both new tablets go on sale Tuesday. The Surface 2 starts at \$449 and runs a lightweight version of Windows 8.1 called RT, meaning it works only with apps designed specifically for it. The Surface Pro 2 starts at \$899 and runs a full version of Windows 8.1, so it also works with programs designed for traditional desktops and laptops, including Photoshop and Quicken personal-finance software. Microsoft also will continue to sell last year's Surface RT model for \$349.

## **Function over fashion**

Microsoft takes a lot of pride in the new devices' redesigned kickstand. Previous models felt wobbly, while the new ones have a steady leg to stand on. The inclusion of a second kickstand position makes typing on your lap as comfortable as typing at your desk.

Like other RT tablets, the Surface 2 comes with a free version of Microsoft's Office, giving you access to Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. The Surface Pro 2 has a more powerful processor and is designed for heavy work or gaming use, but you need to pay for Office separately or have a \$100-a-year subscription. But at least you can get it. Microsoft doesn't make Office for the iPad or Android tablets.

Another feature that distinguishes the new Surfaces and other Windows tablets is their ability to run multiple programs side by side. Want to pull up a Microsoft Word document alongside a work email so you can reference it? No problem. Samsung devices do offer a similar feature, but it doesn't work with all apps. You're out of luck entirely with the

iPad.

With the Surface Pro 2, Microsoft isn't just aiming to replace your tablet. It wants you to dump your laptop, too. To help with this, it will start selling a docking station early next year. The \$200 accessory offers additional USB ports, which can connect to external monitors, printers and more. It's similar to docking stations available for many laptops and could help make the transition from the field to the office more seamless. Even without the [docking station](#), there's one USB port, something rare in a tablet.

The use of Microsoft's SkyDrive online storage service also helps. You can access your files from just about anywhere with an Internet connection. It also could come in handy if your tablet happens to be run over by a truck, as you can download everything back. Both new Surfaces come with 200 gigabytes on SkyDrive for two years, on top of the usual 7 gigabytes.

## **What about the apps?**

While the Surface 2 and Surface Pro 2 may excel in productivity, they don't have the style and fun of their competitors. The construction is rugged, which makes me less paranoid about letting my preschooler play with it. But they also seem bulkier and heavier than other tablets. Surprisingly, the Surface 2 weighs just a pound and half, the same as the year-old iPad, while the Surface Pro 2 is about a half pound heavier. See if Apple will announce lighter iPads Tuesday.

And while Microsoft Office might be great for someone who wants to write a dissertation or create a PowerPoint presentation on a train, the dueling touch screen and desktop functions of Windows 8.1 might seem maddening to people who just want to play "Angry Birds," watch a movie or surf the Internet in bed. In addition, Microsoft's app store

doesn't have as much to offer yet as its Apple and Android counterparts. Facebook, Netflix and ESPN are there, but not the multitude of games and other apps that Apple and Android users take for granted.

On the upside, the new Surface models let you play Xbox games. In addition, the Pro 2 was designed with not just business people, but also gamers, in mind. The Pro 2 features speed and battery improvements over the previous versions. That extended battery life should come in hand for movies, too. Microsoft won't say how long the Surface Pro 2's battery lasts, but says it's a 75 percent improvement over the previous version. The Surface 2's battery offers 10 hours of video playback, which is more than enough power to let you binge-watch the entire seven-episode first season of "Breaking Bad."

When it comes to watching TV, both Surfaces have high-definition displays, measuring 10.6 inches diagonally. That's larger than the iPad's 9.7 inches, but smaller than the typical laptop. The Surface screens also aren't as sharp as that on the iPad. Both Surfaces offer 208 pixels per inch compared with the iPad's 264.

## **So should i buy it?**

Do you long for an almost laptop-like typing experience and access to Microsoft Office? Or would you rather use a simple platform that opens the door to hundreds of thousands of apps all viewed on a crystal-clear screen?

While the Surface 2 is probably most fairly compared to an iPad or high-end Android tablet, the Surface Pro 2's processing power makes it more like a laptop.

The optional Type Cover 2—which comes in four colors—is essential if you want to get the most out of either new Surface. Anyone who has

tried to type on a [tablet's touch screen](#) can attest that you need a proper keyboard if you're writing more than a few sentences. Spend the \$130 for the Type Cover 2, as the \$120 Touch Cover 2 doesn't have keys that move, making typing awkward. That brings the tablets' prices to \$579 for the Surface 2 and \$1,029 for the Pro 2.

By contrast, an 11-inch MacBook Air starts at \$999 and weighs just 2.4 pounds. If you need Windows, there are plenty of ultrabooks available for a few hundred dollars more. Those are slim and light, just like the Surface.

I'm curious to see if the Surface 2 will be able to do the same work that my old, much heavier, laptop computer did when it comes to reporting from the field. Its paired-down nature probably won't let me run a lot of the same programs that I did on my laptop. I'm not sure if I'd be willing to pay more than \$1,000 for the Surface 2 Pro with the keyboard cover, even if it does let me run those programs. I think I'd have to shop around and take a good look at some MacBooks and ultrabooks, too.

Meanwhile, when it comes to watching Netflix and wasting time on silly games, I'm not ready to give up my iPad just yet.

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