

Microsoft takes aim at laptops with new Surface tablet (Update)

May 20 2014, by Sophie Estienne



Journalist try out the new Microsoft Surface Pro 3 tablet computer after a launch press conference on May 20, 2014 in New York

Microsoft on Tuesday unveiled a new Surface Pro tablet designed as a powerful all-purpose computer fit to replace a laptop.

Surface Pro 3 was touted as slimmer, bigger and more powerful than its predecessor and crafted for a world in which people want to work as

well as play on tablets.

"We want products and technologies that enable people to dream and get stuff done," Microsoft chief Satya Nadella said at a press event in New York.

Pro 3 has a high-resolution screen that is 12 inches (30.5 centimeters) measured diagonally, weighs approximately 28 ounces (800 grams) and is slightly more than a third an inch (0.9 centimeters) deep.

The tablet has the Surface trademark keyboard cover, but modified to let users tilt it as they wish and more securely anchor the device while being used, say, in a person's lap.

It also comes with a "pen" that can be used to remotely activate Pro 3 with clicks or to write on it as though it were a notepad.

"We are super proud of Surface Pro 3," Microsoft corporate vice president Panos Panay said while introducing the tablet at the event.

"I am sure that this is the tablet that can replace the laptop."

Available mid-year

Surface Pro 3 will be available for pre-order beginning Wednesday with a starting price of \$799.

A version of Microsoft's latest champion in the tablet war, powered by an Intel Core i5 chip, will hit the market in North American on June 20.



Satya Nadella, Microsoft CEO, speaks at the launch of the new Microsoft Surface Pro 3 tablet computer May 20, 2014 in New York

Additional models, including a top-end Pro 3 with an Intel Core i7 chip, will be available in the US and 26 other countries including France, China, Australia and Germany by the end of August, according to Microsoft.

Microsoft is being innovative and counterintuitive with the Pro 3, touting a large-screen tablet while rivals boast smaller, pocket-sized devices, according to Gartner analyst Mike Silver.

Much care and thought went into technical features of the Pro 3, and a challenge for Microsoft is to get that message to mainstream consumers who aren't geeks.

"There is a lot of elegance in the device, but they have to prove they can communicate that," Silver said at the unveiling event.

"If everything works as good as it looks, you are getting pretty close to a device that can replace a notebook computer for a high percentage of people."

Leave laptops behind

Pro 3 has the potential to strike chords with people who want to leave their laptops behind and just carry a tablet when they are on the move, according to the analyst.

Panay cited research indicating that more than 95 percent of laptop owners also have tablet computers. But Microsoft has barely made a dent in a tablet market dominated by Apple's iPad and others using Google Android. Gartner surveyed showed the Microsoft operating system had just two percent of the global market in 2013.



Panos Panay, corporate vice president with Microsoft's Surface division, holds the new Microsoft Surface Pro 3 tablet during a press conference on May 20, 2014 in New York

Nadella stressed that Microsoft, which built its software empire working with partners who make computing hardware, wants to pioneer a merging of laptops and tablets and not to compete with device manufacturers.

"We clearly are not interested in building refrigerators or toasters; we are not building hardware for hardware's sake," Nadella said.

"The motivation is to create new categories; we want to build productivity experiences."

Microsoft in March released Office software tailored for iPads, and it soared to the top of the charts at Apple's online App Store.

While Office applications for iPad are free, subscriptions to Microsoft's online Office 365 service are needed to be able to create or edit documents, spreadsheets or presentations.

More than a billion people use Office, according to the Redmond, Washington-based technology titan.

The Pro 3 signals that Microsoft has decided to play into its strengths in business software and avoid going head-to-head with bargain-priced tablets powered by Google's free Android software, according to analyst Jack Gold of J. Gold Associates.

"Further, Microsoft finally seems to understand it can not go head to head with Apple's iPad," Gold added in a research note, saying the Pro 3 is a "superior business device" for work.

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Citation: Microsoft takes aim at laptops with new Surface tablet (Update) (2014, May 20)
retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2014-05-microsoft-aim-laptops-surface-tablet.html>

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