

Microsoft bets on Surface Pro 3 as laptop replacement

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In unveiling a larger, lighter, more "lapable" version of its Surface tablet on Tuesday, Microsoft defied the expectations of many who had thought it would be announcing a smaller tablet.

And the device, called Surface Pro 3 and introduced at a media event in New York, may be an example of Microsoft getting ahead of the curve for the first time since the [tablet market](#) took off.

"You could make the comment that when Surface Pro and Surface RT launched was exactly when the market had shifted toward smaller sizes," Tom Mainelli, an analyst with research firm IDC, said of Microsoft's first branded tablets, which made their debut in late 2012.

"If Microsoft came out with an 8-inch tablet today, I'd make the argument that they came out with a smaller tablet just as the market is shifting toward larger sizes," Mainelli said, referring to the growing popularity of larger-screen smartphones.

Whatever the case, Microsoft has a lot to prove with this latest generation of Surface.

It still needs to grow its tiny share of the tablet market and show that its vision of 2-in-1 tablets designed to be both laptop and tablet is what people and businesses want.

Currently, Windows tablets hold about 4.5 percent of the worldwide tablet and 2-in-1 market, and Surface holds a 1.3 percent share, according to IDC.

The Surface Pro 3 may not dramatically move the needle for Microsoft's tablet market share-but it should help, Mainelli said.

"I was very impressed by the device," he said. "It has the potential to really jump start the 2-in-1 category."

The launch of a larger device rather than a Surface Mini-at least for now-may also reflect new CEO Satya Nadella's strategy of focusing on what Microsoft can uniquely do. That would be producing hardware that emphasizes productivity and that connects to the company's growing array of cloud services.

Nadella started Tuesday's event with a brief appearance on stage, saying Microsoft is not interested in building hardware purely for hardware's sake.

Rather, the company's focus on hardware starts with an "obsession of empowering every individual to do more and be more. That is what we at Microsoft are all about," he said.

Panos Panay, a Microsoft vice president in charge of Surface computing, declined to say whether the company is working on a Surface mini, saying just that it's working on a wide variety of products.

It was Panay who gave most of the morning's presentation, introducing the specifics of Surface Pro 3, which Microsoft executives repeatedly emphasized was a laptop replacement.

Panay said he and his team worked on making the device larger and lighter than its predecessor; improved its "lapability"-the ability to work on the device while it's on one's lap-through improvements in the kickstand hinge and keyboard latch; improved the cover's trackpad; and created a stylus pen to write on the screen. The Surface Pro 3 has a 12-inch screen with a 3:2 aspect ratio and a thickness of 9.1 millimeters, and weighs 800 grams (1.76 pounds)

The Surface Pro 2, in comparison, has a 10.6-inch screen with a 16:9 aspect ratio and a thickness of 13.5 millimeters, and weighs 900 grams (1.98 pounds).

Panay also emphasized that the Surface Pro 3 is lighter than the 13-inch MacBook Air, which weighs almost 3 pounds.

In addition, the new hinge allows the Surface Pro 3 kickstand to move from 22 degrees to 150 degrees.

The new Surface Pro Type Cover (sold separately) has a larger trackpad with reduced friction and smoother scrolling, as well as a magnetic latch that allows the user to shorten the distance between the bottom of the tablet and the top of the keyboard, providing a stronger, more stable connection between keyboard and device.

The included stylus, called the Surface Pen, opens Microsoft's OneNote program with a click of the pen, and stores what's been written to OneDrive with one click as well.

A new docking station will also be available.

The Surface Pro 3 will run on Intel Core i3, i5 and i7 processors.

"I am sure that this is the [tablet](#) that can replace the laptop," Panay said.

The devices, which start at \$799 for the i3 version, can be preordered starting Wednesday. The i5 version will be in retail stores in the U.S. and Canada on June 20. The other configurations will be available in August.

While not limiting the Surface Pro 3 to businesses, Microsoft clearly is targeting them.

Microsoft said Tuesday that BMW Group, Coca-Cola and LVMH-Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton have already committed to buying and employing the device in their companies.

Mainelli, the IDC analyst, thinks Surface Pro 3 will help Microsoft gain traction for its tablets among corporations.

In IDC's focus groups, he said, there's growing interest in 2-in-1 devices and the Surface in particular.

"This product certainly is even more desirable than Surface Pro 2," Mainelli said. "IT buyers that have traditionally supported Windows, I think, will look at this product as a viable option."

Michael Silver, an analyst with research firm Gartner, regards the Surface Pro 3 as "a really competitive entry," especially for corporate users.

"It's high end," he said. "It's not clear that [Surface] can capture the hip factor from Apple yet."

Silver said it will take hands-on time to see if the Surface Pro 3 can be a true laptop replacement.

"Any time you look at a machine that tries to do more than one thing, there are trade-offs," he said.

But the Surface Pro 3, Silver said, "probably comes closest so far in terms of minimizing trade-offs. ... You're seeing some innovation from Microsoft, maybe going a different way from the rest of the industry."

Surface Pro 3, Operating system: Windows 8.1 Pro

Size: 7.93 x 11.5 x 0.36 in.

Weight: 1.76 lbs.

Display: 12 in. diagonal

Color: Silver

Processor: Fourth generation Intel Core i3, i5 or i7

Battery: Up to nine hours of Web browsing

Price: Starts at \$799

Accessories: Surface Pro Type Cover (keyboard) \$129.99

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