

Apple intercepts Microsoft's Surface tablet NFL play

September 22 2014, by Andrea Chang And Tony Perry, Los Angeles Times



Microsoft Corp. thought it had scored a touchdown when it struck a multiyear deal with the NFL that would allow teams to use the company's Surface tablets during games.

Too bad television announcers keep referring to the devices as iPads.

The tablet computers, covered in bright blue protective cases, have become a familiar sight on the sidelines this season as coaches and players turn to them to study opponents' moves, review previous possessions and strategize. They're replacing the pages of black-and-white photographs that had long been printed out using fax machines and printers and delivered in binders to teams dozens of times during a game.

The confusion over the Surface tablets began during Week One of the season, when Fox commentator John Lynch told viewers that New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees was "not watching movies on his iPad" during a game. Lynch made things more awkward when he then said players had "iPad-like tools."

A similar slip-up occurred on "Monday Night Football" last week when ESPN's Trent Dilfer wondered how long it took Cardinals assistant head coach Tom Moore "to learn how to use the iPad."

And at Sunday's game between the San Diego Chargers and the Seattle Seahawks, a television announcer balked when told the teams were using Surface devices.

"What? I thought it was an iPad," he said.

Microsoft, which reportedly paid \$400 million to be the "official sideline technology sponsor of the NFL," is understandably miffed at the free publicity being bestowed upon Apple Inc., one of its biggest rivals.

"Despite the majority of our friends in the booth correctly identifying the Surface on NFL sidelines, we're working with the league to coach up a select few," a Microsoft spokesman said.

The blunders highlight the difficulty that many tech companies - even enormous ones such as Microsoft - face in a country dominated by iPhones and iPads.

"It's an Everest-like challenge for Microsoft, as well as other tech players that play in the tablet world, to distinguish themselves as their own brand," said Daniel Ives, managing director at FBR Capital Markets.

"Apple has essentially established the tablet market as iPad, and part of what Microsoft is trying to do here is change perceptions. It has a lot of challenges in its path just given the cult-like movement behind Apple."

Apple is the No. 1 tablet maker in the world, followed by Samsung and Lenovo. Microsoft doesn't crack the top 5, according to research firm IDC.

Apple's dominance in the tablet market has actually waned recently. But that decline has been almost entirely due to tablets running Google's Android operating system, and not because of the Surface.

Apple's iOS operating system held 52.8 percent of the worldwide [tablet market](#) in 2012, trailed by Android with 45.8 percent, according to a report by research firm Gartner.

That changed significantly last year, with Android surging ahead and dominating the market with 61.9 percent and Apple falling to 36 percent. Microsoft increased its foothold, but still commands only a 2.1 percent market share.

"In 2013, Microsoft's tablet volumes improved but share remained small," the Gartner report said. "Its ecosystem still failed to capture major consumers' interest on tablets."

Analysts say Microsoft has been aggressively trying to change its image

as a stodgy, business-driven company. Led by new Chief Executive Satya Nadella, the tech giant has been focused on opening more Microsoft-branded retail stores, revamping products to make them more consumer-friendly and pushing for big partnerships such as the one with the NFL.

"Our goal with this NFL partnership was to leverage our technology to make the game more efficient, productive and competitive. Streamlining the photo viewing process is our first step toward that goal," Microsoft said in a blog post last month.

As part of the deal, Microsoft provided the NFL with hundreds of Surface Pro 2 tablets, which the league distributes to teams before each game. To ensure a level playing field, each team is given 13 tablets to use on the sideline and 12 to use in the coaches' booth; the teams can only view still photos, not videos, on the tablets, which aren't connected to the Internet.

The tablets are collected at the end of the game and stored by the NFL for safekeeping and to prevent tampering.

By and large, football players and coaches have welcomed the Surface, although many admitted there's been a learning curve. Over the summer, teams were trained by Microsoft representatives on how to use the tablets and were allowed to use the devices during practice to become familiar with them.

"It's been interesting," Arizona Cardinals quarterback Drew Stanton said. "Tom Moore, the second-oldest coach on our staff, is just getting used to operating it. So it gives him fits. Sometimes I have to show him how to do stuff. ... He's sitting there trying to zoom in and tapping his finger repeatedly on the screen."

By signing the deal with the NFL last year, Microsoft expected prominent brand exposure. The thinking was, if Microsoft is good enough for the NFL, it must be good enough for viewers too.

"Like everything else, it's a good marketing tool for the NFL and for Microsoft, because (fans) get to see the guys over there looking at everything," Stanton said.

The partnership is rolling out in stages. Last year, teams began by hanging Microsoft ads around their stadiums as well as on the hoods of instant replay booths and communication carts near the field. Things ramped up this season with in-game team usage of Surface tablets on the sidelines, the first time that tablets have been allowed by the league during games.

Near Microsoft's Redmond, Wash., headquarters, the Seahawks wore logos for Bing - Microsoft's search engine - on their practice jerseys during training camp. And before the team's season opener, Microsoft employees gave Surface demos to game attendees at the stadium.

Brian Schneider, special teams coach for the Seahawks, said he has been impressed with the Surface experience. Previously he had to rely on black-and-white faxed pictures that made it hard to pick out uniform numbers, he said. Now the pictures are in color, there is zoom capability and he can write on the screen.

"This is the best technology we've had," Schneider said.

He said he's not surprised that broadcasters and others are struggling to understand that the devices are Surfaces, not iPads. But "that will change," Schneider said. "It's just a matter of time."

Distributed by MCT Information Services

Citation: Apple intercepts Microsoft's Surface tablet NFL play (2014, September 22) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-apple-intercepts-microsoft-surface-tablet.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.