

Tech review: Another year, another iPad

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Some years, Apple introduces a new version of a product and the world rejoices. Other years, the updates are more under the hood, but they still sell a ton.

With the iPhone, it has taken to an every-other-year release schedule.

For example, the iPhone 4 was followed a year later by the 4S. The same goes with the iPhone 5 and 5S.

The S-year phones are improvements on the originals but not earth-

shaking updates.

Which brings us to the iPad Air 2, which I think might have been better named the iPad Air S.

The Air 2 is a nice [upgrade](#), but it seems much more under the hood.

They look pretty much the same. What are the differences?

The easiest addition to spot is the [fingerprint sensor](#) in the home button. The gold edge around the button is a dead giveaway.

It's a bit thinner, and it's faster. The display is the same size, but has an anti-reflective screen. Some of the storage configurations are more affordable.

That's all really great, but is it reason enough to drop your current model and upgrade?

We'll see.

SPECS

The iPad Air 2 runs faster; it's equipped with Apple's A8X processor and the M8 motion coprocessor. These are pretty nice upgrades over the original Air.

The Air 2 is 1.4mm thinner and 32 grams lighter. It has a better main camera, with an 8-megapixel sensor and burst mode and slo-mo for video.

Support for 802.11ac was also added.

The screen is the same size (9.7 inches) and resolution (2048 x 1536 pixels), but the screen components are laminated together, which is supposed to help the image look clearer. The screen looked fine, but I couldn't really see a difference.

Battery life remains 10 hours.

As I mentioned, Touch ID can now unlock the iPad using your fingerprint, but there is no near-field communication chip, so no Apple Pay from the iPad Air 2.

Storage configurations also changed a bit.

The WiFi-only 16gb version still costs \$499. The \$599 mid-level model gets bumped to 64gb, and the \$699 top-end iPad Air 2 has 128gb of storage.

Cellular versions of all three models are available for an additional \$129. The model I tested was provided by AT&T (although the cell radio was not activated).

TIME TO UPGRADE?

Let's go through some scenarios. These are just my thoughts; I don't want to tell anyone what they should or shouldn't buy.

If the iPad you have now is working for you, and you really don't want to spend the money, don't upgrade.

If I had an original iPad, like my mom does, I'd upgrade it.

Apple introduced the iPad in April 2010, so the first batch will be 5 years old early next year, and they don't run iOS 8. My mom has already

had some of her apps refuse to upgrade because they're not compatible with her older version of iOS.

I'd also recommend an upgrade from the iPad 2, but only because of iOS slowness. I've not tried iOS 8 on an iPad 2, but I've read reports of people who did the upgrade and regretted it.

If I had an iPad 3 or iPad 4, I'd be tempted to hold off one more year and see what Apple introduces next year. My mother-in-law has an iPad 3, and it's still going strong for her, but she is still on iOS 7. Either the iPad 3 or 4 would be fine running iOS 8.

If I had bought an iPad Air last fall, the Air 2 is not nearly enough of an upgrade to get me to buy now. Aside from the speed bump, I can't say the camera or Touch ID are enough of a reason.

If you're a new iPad user, the Air 2 is a great tablet and you'll love using it.

The problem with the iPad is that there's not much new in the newer models. It's a mature product, and we've become comfortable hanging on to our iPads a bit longer. As much as Apple will hate to hear it, I think the iPad upgrade cycle is stretching to three or four years for most users.

Pros: Small, light, fast.

Cons: Pretty close to last year's model.

Bottom line: Apple's best iPad yet, but is that enough?

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