

# Review: New phones, tablets keep Samsung at Android helm

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In this Aug. 13, 2015 file photo, a product expert demonstrates the Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge Plus during a presentation at Lincoln Center in New York. The new Galaxy devices come weeks before comparable updates from Apple are expected. In a sense, if Samsung can't beat the competition in sales, it can beat it to store shelves. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

Samsung's new smartphones and tablets might not offer enough to entice current iPhone and iPad users to switch, but they keep Samsung at the

head of the class among Android gadget makers.

The new Galaxy devices come weeks before comparable updates from Apple are expected. In a sense, if Samsung can't beat the competition in sales, it can at least beat it to store shelves.

Samsung has been facing competition not just from Apple but also from Android manufacturers such as Motorola and Xiaomi, which offer good-enough features while keeping prices low. Consumers will have to decide whether the premium features in the latest Samsung devices will be worth the premium price tags.

The Galaxy S6 Edge Plus and Note 5 phones arrived last week, while the Galaxy Tab S2 tablets come out next Thursday.

Here's a closer look at the devices:

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## JUMBO SMARTPHONES

Samsung pioneered jumbo phones with the original Note in 2011, but lost its edge after Apple came out with its own, the iPhone 6 Plus. Samsung's new 5.7-inch phones seek to restore some of that edge.

Of the two, the Edge Plus is likely to appeal to more people. The screen's left and right edges are curved like a waterfall and blend into the [phone](#)'s aluminum casing. You get a better grip and a more immersive viewing experience, even from an angle.

As with the smaller S6 Edge phone from this spring, you can access frequent contacts and have the edge light up in a different color, depending on who's calling. With your phone face down, you know

whether the caller's important enough to interrupt a meeting. The Edge Plus model adds quick access to frequently used apps. The side screen also displays headlines and clock functions.

The Note 5 model comes with a regular, flat screen and is notable mostly for its stylus. It will appeal primarily to professionals who do a lot of note-taking and messaging. You can write instead of type an e-mail or reminder. Software converts the handwriting—even my chicken scratch—into computerized text. You can jot down a note even with the screen off, so you don't lose your train of thought in turning on the phone and opening an app first. You can also annotate documents and Web pages to share with others.

Both phones have great screens with vivid colors, though colors sometimes look unnatural. Faces appear too orange at times, for instance. The cameras are excellent, but have color challenges, too. Grass at a baseball game appeared yellowish rather than green. On the other hand, many people want photos to look stunning rather than accurate, judging by the popularity of Instagram filters that do just that.

The phones have great battery life—13 to 15 hours of Hulu video, while the included wall charger gets you a quarter charge in 15 minutes and more than 85 percent in an hour.

The new phones borrow a number of features from the iPhone. They use metal and glass just like the latest iPhones, while earlier Samsung phones used plastic. And like the latest iPhones, Samsung phones will be capable of making card payments by tapping a store's payment terminal. Samsung Pay will debut next month.

So why don't I believe these new phones will entice iPhone users to switch? Being just as good isn't enough. They need to be much better, given that switching means buying new apps and learning new ways to do

things. The pen and the edge screen help, but they won't appeal to everyone.

Samsung has a better chance at luring back some Android users—at least those willing to pay \$696 to \$740 for the Note 5 and about \$75 more for the Edge. Decent Android phones are available for a few hundred dollars less—without the pen or edge screen features.

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## NEW TABLETS

Compared with the original Tab S, the Tab S2 update sheds bulk and weight, akin to what Apple has done with the full-size iPad Air and Air 2. But Samsung also scaled back on some features to make that happen.

The \$500 full-size model is now 9.7 inches rather than 10.5 inches, while the \$400 mini version is 8 inches instead of 8.4 inches. Samsung also dropped the camera flash, something rare in tablets to begin with. Battery capacity is reduced, though you don't need as much power to light up a smaller screen. In any case, the 12 to 14 hours promised for video should be enough for most flights or evenings at home.

As with the Samsung phones and the original Tab S, the new tablets use AMOLED screen technology for vivid colors. This type of screen is rare for tablets because it's expensive to produce at such sizes. Colors are amazing when watching streaming video, as long as you overlook the occasional unnatural tone.

One excellent change: The dimensions are now 4:3. Android tablets, including the original Tab S, have typically used a wider, 16:10 aspect ratio, which is great for video but bad for just about everything else. The 4:3 ratio, which the iPad has long had, is better for photos, magazines

and Web browsing.

Samsung is ahead with multitasking features that let you view multiple apps side by side, though similar features are coming to the iPad soon with the iOS 9 software update.

Again, I don't see Apple users switching. But just as an iPad can be a good companion for iPhone users, a Samsung tablet is great for Samsung phone owners. A feature called SideSync lets you receive calls, texts and notifications on the tablet. You can make calls and send messages, too. If you have a recent, higher-end Samsung TV, you can have the tablet display whatever's on the TV, so you can go check the grill or use the toilet without missing a scene.

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