

Review: OnLive Desktop brings the PC to tablets

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An undated photo provided by OnLive shows the OnLive Desktop on an iPad 2. The OnLive Desktop app gives you access to Microsoft programs including Word, Excel and PowerPoint, as well as Adobe Reader and a few other programs. You don't have to already own these programs, but you can't add other programs to the desktop _ it is not saved after each use. Instead, you can upload any file you work on to access it later. (AP Photo/OnLive)

So you love your iPad, but you wish you could work on Microsoft Office software, watch Flash video and generally have more of a PC-like experience? OnLive Desktop is one way you can.

OnLive is best known for a streaming video-game service that works much the way [Netflix Inc.](#) delivers movies over the Internet. Instead of buying games to run on your computer or game console at home, you pay OnLive a [subscription fee](#).

The games run off OnLive's remote servers and respond almost instantly to your controls at home. What you'd normally see if you were running the game at home is instead streamed to you over the Internet, just like a movie.

OnLive Desktop does something similar, but with a

suite of Windows-based Microsoft Office programs. Essentially, remote servers do all the work, and OnLive's app shows a [virtual desktop](#) on your iPad or Android tablet. Because there's no storage on the tablet, everything works fast.

I tried out OnLive Desktop on an iPad 2. The OnLive Desktop app gives you access to Microsoft software such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint, as well as [Adobe Reader](#) and a few other programs. You don't need to already own these programs.

You can't add other software to the virtual desktop, however. The system is wiped clean each time you use it, though OnLive offers you a way to save document files to access later.

Booting up takes you to a familiar Windows screen. The touch-screen keyboard is similar, but there are a few changes from the native iPad keyboard, including the ability to use the "control" and "alt" keys as [shortcuts](#) to copy and paste. OnLive syncs easily to a Bluetooth keyboard, which would be handy for typing out lengthy documents.

When you save documents to the app, it syncs the docs with the remote servers. It's not instant, but it takes less than a minute. With the [free version](#) of the app you get 2 gigabytes of storage - plenty if you're not working with a lot of photos and video.

For \$4.99 a month, you can upgrade to OnLive Desktop Plus, which adds Web browsing with Internet Explorer. Besides letting you access Web sites, the browser gives you more ways to store documents, as you'll have access to email and storage services such as Dropbox. You can also watch Flash video and animation, something you can't do consistently on Android devices or at all on the iPad's Web browsers.

Because I probably wouldn't use my iPad often for work documents, browsing the Web was where OnLive Desktop's advantages kicked in for me.

On the [iPad](#) and Android tablets, some sites such as Hulu.com don't work. You have to download an app instead, and, in Hulu's case, pay for content on Hulu Plus. Browsing in Internet Explorer on OnLive Desktop lets you access the regular, free Hulu site and watch content easily.

I was happily able to watch an episode of "30 Rock" - something you can do on a regular computer, but not on a tablet or smartphone without Hulu Plus. The \$4.99 monthly fee for OnLive Desktop Plus is cheaper than the \$7.99 for Hulu Plus.

My experience with OnLive wasn't perfect. I encountered network connection problems a few times, although that was easily resolved by closing and reopening the OnLive app. Among other limitations: You can't see how much battery is remaining when you're using the app, and you can only run it in landscape orientation - shaped like a movie screen, not a portrait painting.

I haven't tried the two other companies that offer similar services - CloudOn and Nivio - so I can't compare them.

If I had to use Office documents on a portable device heavily for work, I'd probably stick with a laptop or OnLive's pro version, which is in the works. That version will start at \$9.99, offer 50 GB of storage and come with the ability to customize the OnLive Desktop with other PC applications. The company didn't say when it would be available.

For tablet users who want quick, full-featured access to Microsoft Office programs or a way to search the Web in a speedy, more traditional format, OnLive [Desktop](#) is worth checking out.

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