

# Expect big changes from the iPad

Chances are, you and I won't be buying anything called an iPad any time soon. But that doesn't mean this new thing with the silly name won't eventually change the way we live.

In case you haven't heard, the iPad is something of a new computer from Apple, meant to bridge the gap between the iPhone, popular for a few years now, and Apple's line of laptop computers. When turned off, it just looks like a 9.5-inch-by-7.5-inch sliver of black glass on one side, and shiny metal on the other side. It's only half an inch thick and weighs a pound and a half. (At least that's what the company and tech reviewers tell me. The only samples were in California for journalists to play with Wednesday, and I didn't fly out of frigid Chicago to participate.)

I say "something of a computer" because it's not a computer. It can't do everything computers can do, but Apple's target market isn't the person who needs a computer. Rather, it's someone who needs something that can do most things a computer can do, a bit more simply. The sacrifice is your ability to customize your experience.

That's just the thing, though. There's a big untapped market of people needing something exactly like this. So in that way, Apple's succeeded. They've also succeeded in supplanting the e-reader Amazon Kindle, which now there's no longer a reason to purchase.

But the iPad will go further than push up Apple's stock price. Whether alone or through driving competition (although probably alone), it will finally remove computing from something you do at a



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certain place to something you truly do everywhere, for every reason.

To a certain extent, the iPhone started that trend. Way back in 2007, it snuck this extra computing power in on the side, under our noses, and created a market for something we didn't know we could use — computing power and Internet access on-the-go.

In case you don't own an

iPhone or iPod Touch (which is the computing experience of the iPhone without the phone function), here's the lowdown. They can instantly make us more productive at office work or farm work, better cooks, more frequent communicators with family, better musicians. Applications for these little devices can listen to a song and tell us its name, lyrics, and where to purchase it. They can take pictures of bar codes on products and tell us where to buy them more cheaply. (I'm sure by now there's a version that takes into account location, as well.) On them we can play memory games to literally exercise our brain, keeping our nogginns healthy into our old age.

## What impact on journalism?

The first way Apple changed life on this planet actually wasn't through applications. It was by allowing the people who produce content — musicians, app programmers — to extract money from the consumer in a way other than via advertising. Think a subscription to your local newspaper.

Years ago, the iPod — another contraption with a silly name — arrived. Back then, everyone kept their music on disks of plastic and metal and had to lug around a 30-pound zippered case if they wanted to hear one from their collection on the go.

More importantly, back then, it was predicted that downloading would absolutely destroy the music industry because in just a few years' time (it was said) no one would be willing to pay for music.

What's interesting is that today, the music industry hasn't lost that much money. By some accounts, they haven't lost any.

(Illegal downloading has gone up, but listenership to music has skyrocketed. Seems that people — especially young people — download illegally as a way to hear new music. In general they continue to support their favorite artists monetarily.)

The world of publishing is hoping for the same line of rescue. People have been shown to be willing to pay small sums of cash for a single item for their mobile devices. That portability, apparently, brings back value to the same content people deemed devoid of value on the Internet.

But, maybe for the best, journalists aren't betting that the iPad will save their jobs singlehandedly. I follow a lot of them on Twitter, and one of them said, "When the iPad saves journalism maybe I can afford to buy one."

A few applications even read bar codes or search by product name and tell us what impact that product has on the environment and society, including company workers. It will recommend alternatives if they exist.

The point is, there's an endless market for crunching data that directly pertains to our real lives, and only since July 10, 2008, when the Apple App Store was unveiled, did the floodgates open.

The personal computer was only a baby step, in that it replaced all the stuff that could obviously be digitized. Now the mindset is, "what can't data-crunching help us with?"

Heck, you can now run an entire business and all its finances, inventory, advertising — everything — through an iPhone. Not that it's the ideal situation, but it can be done. And easier than you think. (I can't say the same for the iPad, which ships in March and runs from \$499 to \$829. It doesn't have a camera for barcode scanning or a built-in phone.)

Because of these deficiencies, critics say the iPad's hype concluded in a bit of a letdown, but Apple knew what it was doing. It wanted to hit a low price point — \$499 was what the original iPhone cost — and it knew it was creating another space in our lives.

We just don't know it yet.

### EDITOR'S NOTE

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