

Tablet Buyers Guide

Tablet comparison chart

	Weight	Thickness	Screen Size	Resolution	Operating System	CPU	Capacity	RAM	Battery life	Camera
ACER ICONIA (April)*	730g	13.3mm	26cm	1280 x 800	Android Honeycomb	1.0 GHz	16GB, 32GB, expandable	1 Gb	10 hours	Dual (5MP & 2MP)
iPad 2 3G (March)*	610g	8.8mm	25cm	1024 x 768	iOS4	1.0GHz	16GB, 32GB, 64GB	512mb	10 hours	Dual (VGA & unspecified)
HP Touchpad (June)*	740g	13.7mm	25cm	1024 x 768	webOS 3.0	1.2GHz	16GB, 32GB	1Gb	8 hours	Single (1.3MP)
LG Optimus Pad (April)*	650g	13.0mm	23cm	1280 x 768	Android Honeycomb	1.0GHz	32GB, expandable	1Gb	9 hours	Dual (5MP & 2MP), 3D capable
Motorola Xoom (February)*	730g	12.9mm	26cm	1280 x 800	Android Honeycomb	1.0 GHz	32GB, expandable	1Gb	10 hours	Dual (5MP & 2MP)
Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1v (April)*	600g	11.0mm	26 cm	1280 x 800	Android Honeycomb	1.0GHz	16GB, 32GB	1 Gb	10 hours	Dual (8MP & 2MP)
ViewPad 10 (March)*	875g	16.5mm	26cm	1024 x 600	Android 1.6, Windows	1.6GHz	16GB, expandable	512mb	10 hours	Single (1.3MP)
Blackberry Playbook (April)*	425g	10mm	18cm	1024 x 600	Blackberry tablet OS	1.0 GHz	16GB, 32GB, 64GB	1 Gb	10 hours	Dual (5MP & 3MP)
Dell Streak 7 (April)*	450g	10mm	18cm	800 x 480	Android 2.2	1.0 GHz	16GB, expandable	1 Gb	10 hours	Dual (5MP & 1.3MP)

* Month of international release

Factors to consider when buying a tablet:

1. AVAILABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

It may seem obvious, but many manufacturers are releasing devices in bigger overseas markets first. Several of the devices shown in our comparison have yet to have their Australian release date confirmed. Definitely available for sale in Australia right now are the iPad2, ViewPad 10, and the Motorola Xoom, along with earlier versions of the Galaxy Tab.

2. SIZE AND WEIGHT

There is a wide variety of sizes, from those that can comfortably be held in the palm of your hand, to bigger devices. The ideal size and weight depends on where you expect to use the device and for what purpose. How do you intend to carry the device?

3. SCREEN

There are two considerations when judging a screen, actual size (viewing area) and resolution (clarity). If you are mainly going to use the device for browsing, most sizes will be

adequate, however if you want to watch movies or play games you may prefer a bigger, better quality screen.

4. OPERATING SYSTEM

The main competitor to Apple's iOS system is Android. The latest version of Android designed especially for tablets is called Honeycomb, and it has received much critical acclaim. Beware of older devices carrying older versions of Android, which were built for smart phones not tablets, and tend to have a poorer user experience as a result. There are a number of devices with proprietary systems – such as Blackberry – which may be technically excellent but may lack the critical mass that will attract the volume of content development we will see for Apple and Android platforms. For those people old enough to remember the VHS v BETA debate, a sense of deja vu is permissible. But it is worth remembering that whilst BETA was widely regarded as technically superior to VHS, it went the way of the dodo because of content, or lack of. The lesson? Critical mass in content is crucial.

5. SOFTWARE/APPS

This is related to the operating system decision, and for many this could be the most important consideration. The Apple App store has over 300,000 apps, and recently celebrated its 10 billionth download. The Android App store is a long way behind right now, but may catch up fast. As for Blackberry, the jury is out, especially given the limited access Australia has thus far been given to Blackberry's App World.

A hot topic right now is the ability to play Flash content, which is becoming a common format not just for videos but for basic website content. There are several tablets which don't support Flash which can be annoying as it makes some content inaccessible. At the moment iPad2 is one of those, however at the time of publication, Adobe had just announced that it would be working together with Apple to enable Flash to be supported by the iOS operating system, a fantastic development for iPad owners.

Critical mass is a crucial factor here. The more people use the Android operating system, the more developers will get involved in developing for that system. Other systems have more risk associated with them.

6. CONNECTIVITY AND NETWORKING

Some users may be happy to use their tablet purely with wifi, but for true power and portability you will need 3G. Every tablet we surveyed was Bluetooth enabled, and the 3G models were GPS capable.

7. USER EXPERIENCE

The best technical specifications in the world will count for nothing if they come with a poor user experience. This has seen several iPad competitors marked down by critics.

8. STORAGE SPACE

Your intended usage will determine how much storage space you will need, and for some users this could count against the iPad2 and other tablets which have fixed, rather than expandable capacity. If you don't intend to store much content on your tablet then this won't be a big issue, but if you are looking to store rich content (video, images, games etc) then you may need more than the maximum 64GB on offer from Apple. Several tablets have an SD or micro SD card capability, which means your media can be moved from device to device.

9. CAMERA

It seems most mobile devices come with a camera these days (multiple cameras in many cases). If you are looking to use a tablet for video conferencing, then a dual camera

set-up is crucial. Lens quality and resolution can be important, and in that area the iPad2 is probably not as strong as some of its competitors.

10. BATTERY LIFE

A battery life of 9 – 10 hours is standard these days for most devices, as are lithium batteries. Battery life is unlikely to be a big decision driver.

11. CPU & RAM

As with desktops and laptops, faster processors and more RAM aid the user experience, by giving you browsing speed and better capacity to handle media. 1 GHz is reasonably standard amongst the devices we looked at, as is 1Gb of RAM (although the iPad2 is only 512mb). Don't fall into the trap of comparing this with your desktop or laptop. 512mb would obviously be woefully inadequate for a normal computer but seems to be more than sufficient for tablets, which are generally used quite differently.

12. ACCESSORIES

When it comes to accessories, such as stands, covers, chargers etc, you will find a much bigger range for the most popular devices. Apple has a head start in this regard, and is helped by having a standard size across the whole range of iPads. Bear this in mind if thinking about buying a less popular brand in a less popular size.

13. PRICE

There is a wide range of price points, from just over \$400 to over \$1,000. As with all things technology related, prices generally trend down, as was evidenced when the iPad2 was released with a lower RRP than its heavier, slower predecessor the iPad 1. Beware the many 'no name' brand devices that are likely to flood the market over the coming years. You get what you pay for, both in terms of quality and warranty support.

SUMMARY:

This comparison is not intended to give any verdict on which tablet to buy. As with financial advice, the needs and objectives and situation of the individual all need to be taken into account, which can lead to a different outcome for each person. With a purchase of this nature, it is worthwhile doing your homework. Check out online reviews, and if you have friends or colleagues who own tablets, talk to them about their own experiences. And if you can't reach a decision, wait a few months until the next new model is released and try again!

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