

COLUMNS

Tablet wars have begun: The new must-have tech toy

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By **Marko Muellner**

As Mobile World Congress 2011 in Barcelona, Spain ended last week, one thing was apparent: just 10 months after the launch of the Apple iPad, the tablet market has solidly arrived.

Tablets stole a full 48 percent of the show buzz at the world's leading mobile show a show traditionally anchored in all things handsets.

In the wake of Consumer Electronics Show and Mobile World Congress, there is no question 3DTV, IPTV, smartphones and laptops are old news. Tablets are the new must-have tech toy.

Mobile World Congress 2011 Buzz: Smartphones versus tablets

There have been thousands of articles already this year about tablets based on Android, iOS, Windows OS and even Palm OS.

There are also stories about megapixels, weight, screen size, screen types, multiple cameras, 3G, 4G, Wi-Fi, 3D.

Apple iPad set the standard and now the big CE companies are playing with features and functions to own the next must-have tablet. It is classic CE early adopter geekdom.

Mobile World Congress 2011: Tablets buzz winners

The question is: Does the mass-market care about these things?

iPad advertisements are solely focused on how you use this new hybrid device. In fact, Apple's brilliance is in making the tablet seem simple and magical. And it is. My three-year-old figured out how to use it within a few seconds.

I understand the fragmentation that tablets encapsulate between OS developers, hardware manufacturers, telecom companies, application developers, content producers and publishers the consumer is becoming inundated with options.

But do consumers see anything more than size, style and price?

For those of us that have been lucky enough to live with a tablet, we know we love it but cannot necessarily articulate why.

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The tablet is not a smartphone and it is not a laptop. It spans most functions of both, but lags behind in mass-market enterprise software, and it does not really do anything that these other devices do not. It is about convenience. More like a microwave than a rocket ship.

Today, tablets are primarily being positioned as media and entertainment devices an evolution of the Walkman, iPod, DS and PSP. It excels at video consumption, news and content aggregation, music, photos and games. But is this where the real opportunity lies?

Tablet cure for enterprise

Morgan Stanley recently interviewed fifty CIOs about deployment of tablets, and the results suggest that tablets for enterprise are on the rise: 51 percent expect to purchase tablets for their employees within a year, and 67 percent said they plan to support employee-owned tablets.

With developers rapidly innovating across all operating systems, the enterprise future of notebooks nears and this is where features and function are really going to matter.

The recently announced Research In Motion PlayBook and Hewlett-Packard Slate are being solidly positioned to appeal to the enterprise.

My tablet has made my laptop feel like a desktop. It has replaced my notebook and pen. I take it to every meeting, every lunch and every presentation. I take it on every business trip. And it has increased my productivity in and out of the office.

The thing is, my tablet is not running any of our corporate software except what I access through a browser, and most of it has not been optimized for a mobile experience. But I use it anyways.

The world of enterprise software cannot innovate soon enough or broadly enough to solidly make tablets the de facto business computing device.

The hardware innovation is happening now. It is time for software to catch up. The tablet wars have begun and you are crazy if you think it is all about Hulu Plus, Angry Birds and Netflix.

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