

My tablet test

By **MJ Shoer**

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I had been debating whether or not to get a tablet for many months. For several years, I have used a tablet PC, a laptop that doubles as a tablet, in that you can swing the screen around and use it as a touch screen and write on the screen in natural handwriting.

Because I am so accustomed to this, I had been having a real internal struggle with whether a true tablet would be little more than a gadget for me. If you read my blog at mjsblog.jenaly.com, you know I have recently been heavily testing a tablet and I am pleasantly pleased with the results.

When I first got my tablet, it was little more than a gadget for me. Because I use my tablet PC as my only computer, it travels with me wherever I go. I have a docking station for it at my office and also at my desk at home. It is my only computer and configured as a true desktop replacement.

For me, this is most efficient as my operating environment is identical, no matter where I am.

Because of the tablet features, I also take this to client meetings and use the included stylus to take my meeting notes. It is a little heavy and bulky, but it serves its purpose well, so this was my main hesitation in trying a tablet as I was not sure what I would do with it.

At first, I mainly used the tablet as a convenient way to check e-mail at home or browse the Web, when I didn't feel like I needed to be working on my computer. This saved boot time, energy and bulk and, in and of itself, was not a bad thing.

I downloaded the Kindle app and began reading my books on the tablet too, which was definitely nice at night, when I didn't want to turn on lights and disturb my wife if she fell asleep before me. Beyond that, I was still struggling to find the business utility of a tablet.

However, I did find it. When considering a tablet, you want to ask yourself exactly what you want to do with it. For some, a tablet may be a great option, especially for travel. For others, it may not be.

For me, I need to have a good tool for e-mail, getting online and interacting with our clients and staff.

The tablet e-mail applications are not the same as Microsoft Outlook, where I spend the majority of my time, but they are close enough to be very functional for managing electronic communication, including my calendar.

The Web browser is very capable and offers an excellent online experience.

Where things can get tricky is with your business applications. We use a couple of very robust database applications and while one of them does offer a tablet version of the software, it is not as functional as the native application, so using these purely on a tablet would not be sufficient for me.

To address this, the Cloud becomes a great enabler. We have a terminal server in our private cloud, which allows us to publish these database applications so I can connect to them remotely from my tablet and use them as if I was using my traditional PC. The touch interface of a tablet may be a bit limiting in these instances, but if you couple your tablet with a keyboard, you can have a nearly identical experience to working on a laptop.

Another consideration in choosing a tablet is which type to go with. The Apple iPad is the clear market leader and for most consumers, a great choice. Android tablets have come on strong over the last year and offer a nice choice as well. If you already have a smartphone, I recommend you choose a tablet of the same operating system. In other words, if you have an iPhone, go with the iPad. If you have an Android, go with an Android tablet. This will keep your operating environment the same and will make you more efficient. As it relates to apps, it will also save you money as you won't have to buy apps twice, once for your smartphone and once for your tablet.

For me, I elected to go with the Lenovo ThinkPad Android tablet. There were several reasons. I already had an Android smartphone and was happy with it. We have a mixed environment in our company, with both Apple and PC, iPhone and Android, so I really took the time to decide which would serve me best. One of the features for me

is the ability to take handwritten notes on my tablet. In this area, Android is better than the iPad, in my testing and opinion.

The Lenovo tablet came with a built in stylus and note-taking software, so when I meet with clients, I carry my tablet in a nice, slim leather jacket and take notes on it like it was a pad of paper. When I return to my office, I attach these notes to our client database for future reference.

When traveling or in long meetings, I also have Lenovo's keyboard folio case, which is a leather case that includes a nice ThinkPad keyboard. If you've ever used a ThinkPad laptop, you know these are among the best and most comfortable keyboards made. This keyboard also has a very unique optical mouse built into the case that lets the tablet be used just like laptop. When working on complex files or working remotely with business applications, this has been a critical accessory. The touch interface is functional, but being able to interact just like I have become accustomed to on a traditional computer makes the tablet viable for me.

In fact, I have written this column on this tablet while on a Delta flight to a meeting for the rest of the week. I am online via the GoGo Internet service and am filing this column to my editor right from the tablet.

That's a successful test in my opinion.

I hope this has helped you understand some of the considerations to take into account when choosing a tablet.

More importantly, I hope this will help you determine if a tablet is right for you and how you may be able to use one.

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