A Review of the iPad After One Year

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Greg Orlowsky & Peter Orlowsky

Editor’s Note:

Greg is a highly valued member of the Instructional Technology team at Pacific University, widely known as the “Apple Guy,” who solves many of our tech issues and invariably gives good advice to the Berglund Center. Peter is his son, a highly wired high school student.

Usability by Peter:

My backpack used to weigh upwards of 35 pounds. It was so cluttered with notebooks, binders, and textbooks that it was literally weighing me down. What is funny is that I barely noticed this weighty disorganization. I had learned to adapt and work with it, at least until I got my iPad.

The world shook when the iPad was released; Steve Jobs ushered it into mainstream consciousness as "A revolutionary product." Through this clamor and buzz we were told that the iPad would be a monumental educational product. They were right.

While the thousands of apps available to consumers center mostly around wasting time and providing a distraction (Angry birds) I have found that if you try hard enough you can actually transform the iPad into a tool for almost all aspects of education. I firmly believe that it has made me into a better student. What most don’t realize, however, is that the iPad doesn’t come this way; it is simply a shell for the 300,000+ apps available to it.

When I first bought my iPad it came with virtually nothing installed (what a great pun). All I had to go off of was a calendar, a rudimentary note taker, a connection to the Internet, and the App store. What makes the iPad so unique and allows for such a strong human connection is that as you learn, it adapts.

I remember the first day I brought it to class; after pulling it out in first period English and getting all the “ooh’s” and “ahh’s” from my fellow students out of the way, the teacher began handing out essay prompts for us to begin drafting. That essay took me all of fifteen minutes to write, edit, and email directly to my teacher. I used Pages for iPad, which I downloaded using my school's Wi-Fi, and spent fifteen minutes on a project I would have otherwise done overnight. As
school days dragged on I began to develop a collection of apps that suited all my classes’ needs. Now about the only things in my backpack are my iPad and a solitary folder of worksheets.

**Essential Education Apps**

iWork for iPad: allows you to share documents, create Power Points, and build spreadsheets — a must have.

Graph Calculator HD: solve those pesky math problems with this full function graphing calculator.

Sound Note: record what your teacher says in the form of an audio recording, as well as a written document.

iStudiez Pro: the student planner of your dreams— never miss an assignment again.

**Support by Greg:**

I will now discuss supporting the iPad over the last year. All I can say is that it is a rock solid device. We have had no system crashes and only one app crash. The only errors we have experienced have been self-induced—like when I updated the OS without saving my documents. It is important to update documents daily with Dropbox or some other cloud storage. Using iTunes is a little cumbersome. By the way, it has been months since we have attached the iPad to a computer. It just doesn’t need to be connected that much.

We deployed a few iPads to the Early Learning Center in the College of Education at Pacific. I expected calls for Wi-Fi problems or lost files, but that has not occurred. I was in class the other day supporting a MacBook that was having issues with Wi-Fi; the kids at the next table were oblivious to my problems because their iPad was working flawlessly. It was Dr. Seuss day after all. The lack of support required for this device is a real money saver. It makes it easy to justify to your CIO when he does not have to budget for much support for the device.

One question still remains: can an iPad be a stand-alone device? The answer, in my opinion, is both yes and no. If you are tied heavily to the cloud, I believe it could be your only device. A real bonus is support for Bluetooth keyboards. Support for more accessories is in the pipeline. If, however, you are a video producer or need a lot of processor power, you may need a more powerful machine. By the way, iPad rocks for audio creation. It is the marriage of
hardware and software to advance learning and growth that makes the iPad the game changer that it is.

**Update: iPad 2**

A few days ago (March 11, 2011) iPad2 was released. I wanted to include my thoughts on this updated hardware. As is usually the case, Apple again has done its homework and gave us the features that were missing on the 1.0 release. Apple is famous for what is intentionally left out. Again, no support for Flash (I consider that a plus by the way). The camera is the prime upgrade this time. It is nothing to write home about, but it is there. The placement of the lens is a little awkward. My finger covered it several times. FaceTime really works well though. The large screen gives it enough real estate to make the experience more intimate.

Another major difference is the slimness and weight loss. It lost 33% of its height and now has curved edges. It is a delight to hold compared to the original, and losing the .2 lbs. makes it feel much lighter in the hand.

iPad 2 boasts a much better processor, now a dual core A5 chip. It also sports up to 9X better graphics performance. The gamers will love this addition and the opportunities for augmented reality apps will be huge for developers.

Lastly, the iOS 4.3 update adds full screen support for projecting the whole screen to a TV or projector. This will be beneficial for smart classrooms. An HDMI adapter is also available, great for viewing on a big screen TV. There is also better Home Network sharing with iOS 4.3. It is great not to have to load Movies on the iPad when you can stream from your computer.

In a few weeks the original iPad inventory will dry up, but you will not lose anything as the iPad 2 is a better machine. I do not feel slighted though as an owner of the original iPad. iOS 4.3 has a few goodies that keep the original iPad an evolving, improving platform.