

OUT BEHIND THE BARN DANS LE FEU DE L'ACTION

Apple's new iPad – Tool or toy?

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To satisfy my recurring, relapsing techno-lust, I visited the Apple store to see the new iPad computer. It is impressive, but I didn't buy one because I already own at least one device that does what I would expect of the iPad. But it might be perfect for you, so let's talk about its major features.

The iPad is 7.5" wide, 9.5" high and 0.5" thick. The top is mostly a bright touch-sensitive display screen and looks like a large version of Apple's iPod Touch or iPhone devices. Its chief advantages are portability and ease of use, and its usefulness is somewhere between a smartphone and a small laptop computer.

AVAILABLE MODELS

There are 2 models, each of which comes with 16, 32 or 64 GB of memory. The first connects to the Internet using only wireless (Wi-Fi) technology. The second can connect to both wireless and the newer 3G cellular networks offered by Telus, Rogers and Bell. To use a cellular network, you must also purchase a subscriber identity module ("SIM") card and a data service plan. The service providers may allow you to share the data plan from your smartphone for a monthly charge.

HARDWARE

The iPad uses the touch-sensitive screen to display a full-sized keyboard, suitable for touch typing. It can also be combined with any Bluetooth keyboard. A cable is provided to connect to a USB 2.0 port on a desktop computer for synchronizing data and charging

the battery. Among other accessories, Apple sells an external keyboard and a protective case that can act as a viewing stand. Surprisingly, no earphones are provided and there are no USB ports for connecting external devices.

OPERATING SYSTEM

The operating system is easy to use. Apple provides the free iTunes program for synchronizing files between the iPad and a desktop computer. iTunes also connects to an online store where users can purchase applications, music and videos.

INTERNET BROWSER

The Safari browser application works whenever a wireless or cellular Internet connection is available. One limitation is that Safari cannot display the Flash Video format used on many websites.

MAIL, CONTACTS AND CALENDAR

Applications are included for managing email messages, contacts and an events calendar. These applications will synchronize with Microsoft Outlook or the corresponding applications on an Apple Mac.

MUSIC AND VIDEO

The iPod application plays music on the iPad's internal speakers. The Video application plays movies, TV shows and other videos. Both music and video files are available from the iTunes Store. These features make it attractive as a source of personalized entertainment during long trips.

IBOOKS

The iBooks application provides competition for the Kindle and other book-reading devices and offers unique bookmarking and search features. Books can be downloaded only from iBooks, which is separate from the iTunes Store and can be accessed only from the device. However, books purchased from other sources can be transferred to the iPad through iTunes.

PHOTOS

The Photos application allows the iPad to be used as a digital picture frame for storing and organizing photos. An adaptor is available to connect directly to a digital camera or SD card.

CELLULAR PHONE

Although the iPad can connect to the Internet using cellphone networks, it has no built-in telephone capability. With the addition of a Bluetooth earpiece, it could be used to make calls through Internet-based telephone applications such as Skype.

SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS

A wide variety of application programs are available, including many of those written for the iPhone. These include Apple's own Pages (word processor), Numbers (spreadsheet) and Keynote (presentations) which are similar to the Word, Excel and PowerPoint applications in Microsoft Office.

MEDICAL APPLICATIONS

Many mobile medical software vendors have adapted

their programs to run on the iPhone. They will be easier to read on the larger iPad display, making it a useful quick-reference tool. Unfortunately, it is hard to find physician-oriented medical applications among the many consumer-oriented applications in the iTunes Store.

THE BOTTOM LINE

For now, I'll stick with a basic cellphone, an iPod Touch for music and a PC desktop for serious computing. I might change my mind if I find more useful iPad applications. If you would like more information about the iPad, visit the websites mentioned below.

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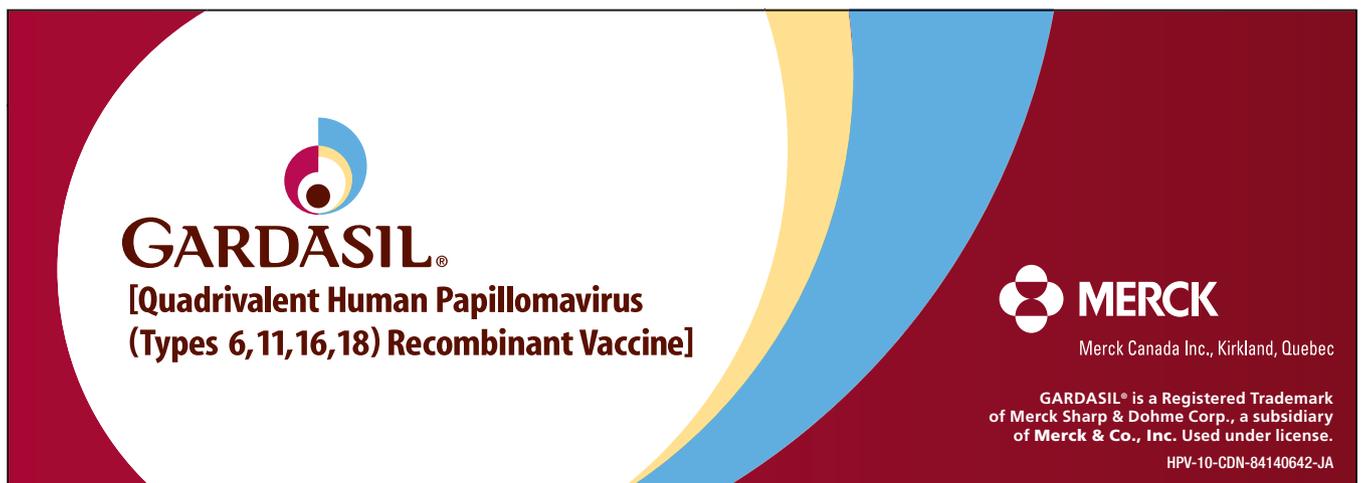
USEFUL WEBSITES

Apple

- The main Apple website provides detailed information about the iPad and its features: www.apple.com/ca
- The complete user manual can be found at support.apple.com/manuals/#

iPad in Canada

- This website offers useful up-to-date information about the iPad, including a comparison of the data plans available from the Telus, Rogers and Bell networks: www.ipadincanada.ca



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