

13 of the Brightest Tech Minds Sound Off on the Rise of the Tablet

James Fallows

National correspondent, The Atlantic

The Digital Copilot

Will the tablet computer catch on? In one specialized realm, it already and decisively has: aerospace. Right now, the flying world is far ahead of the general public in embracing tablet devices. And while the motivations for widespread early adoption are specific to flying, they have enough parallels to normal terrestrial activity to suggest that tablets may find a place here on Earth.

The collective term for these devices is [electronic flight bags](#). EFBs come in many forms, including some built into cockpits. But several popular versions resemble what Apple and others have announced: bigger than a PDA, smaller than a laptop, a flat working surface dominated by a display that accepts multiple kinds of touch inputs. EFBs are expensive — costing many hundreds to many thousands of dollars — but also very popular, for several reasons.

First, they address a genuine point of pain. Remember those squarish, footlocker-sized cases you used to see pilots wheeling through airports? They were jammed with the documents required for almost any flight — approach plates for landing in bad weather, charts, runway diagrams, checklists, and operating handbooks. All that paper caused general chaos in the cockpit. To have it all in one trim package brings relief.

EFBs also let pilots simultaneously work with different kinds of data. The information a crew needs to see during flight consists of text (checklists, notices), static diagrams (airspace, airport layouts), and dynamic graphics (wind patterns at different altitudes). The EFBs present all this in one place — often as combined maps with text overlays, a view pilots can't get in any other way. And they're just as egalitarian about input. Pilots don't always have time to type, and depending on flight circumstances like turbulence or light, they might prefer touchscreens or knobs. Good EFBs accept different kinds of entries.

More important, in the cockpit constant updates save lives. Paper charts and briefings are out of date the second they're printed. Weather systems would have moved, airspace restrictions might have changed, and very often a plane's route would be adjusted. EFBs update constantly, usually via satellite networks.

All these traits could easily find applications in the nonflying world. Engineers and architects might like to see a variety of data combined in one place as they stand outside a building site. People in a teleconferenced meeting might sketch a design on a touchscreen tablet and have it appear on their colleagues' devices around the world. Journalists at a congressional hearing might have live-feed windows showing what is being said in other rooms. And all of this information would be more useful on a device that's bigger than an iPhone but that doesn't require the awkward holding of an opened laptop.

There is one additional, crucial aspect of the EFB's popularity: People mainly use it while sitting in a chair. This points to the primary challenge for tablets: limiting them to situations when people can conveniently — and safely — stare at a screen. The main social menace of mobile devices today is that people look at their screens when they should be looking at the road or sidewalk. That's not a problem on airplanes. While pilots need to pay “strategic” attention to the flight — “Where is that thunderstorm headed?” — there's less second-by-second risk if they're checking their computer screen.

So we learn from jet pilots that tablets may indeed catch on — and they may well make all of our lives better. As long as we keep them out of the driver's seat, I'm ready for the tablet age.

Bob Stein

Codirector,

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Follow the Gamers

Twenty-five years ago, when I founded the Criterion Collection and Voyager, my imagination extended only as far as multimedia — enabling authors to express ideas with a palette that included audio, video, text, and graphics. While CD-ROMs hinted at these possibilities, the advent of the Internet, particularly the Web, showed that locating works in a dynamic digital network promised even more fundamental

changes. The most important thing my colleagues and I learned from experiments with “networked books” is that as discourse moves from the page to the networked screen, the social aspects of reading and writing move to the fore. A book is becoming a “place” where people congregate and converse.

The arrival of Apple, Android, and Nokia tablets ups the ante. Simply moving printed texts to tablets (as with the Kindle) will be of limited value. To succeed, publishers will have to embrace multimedia and community-building. My guess is that the [gaming industry](#) will show us the way. Unlike publishing, the culture of videogames is much less stifled by legacy products and thinking. Multimedia is already its language, and gamemakers have vast experience building thriving communities. As conventional publishers prayerfully port their print to tablets, my bet is that the gamemakers will invent the new forms of expression that will dominate the media landscape.

Martha Stewart

Magazine publisher and TV host

Into the Wild

I’ve been making magazines now for 20 years; I’ve been making books for 27 or 28. These are illustrated books and magazines that need a digital home somewhere. My printed cookbooks — the ones that have no illustrations — are [available for the Kindle](#) on Amazon.com. But the illustrated books need a full-blown effort like the iPad to really bring out the beauty of the images.

We all have so much to read these days, and having the ability to pick and choose and save and file and send digitally is really exciting. I have a bag full of torn-out magazine pages that I distribute to various people for creative ideas. I’ll be able to do that much more effectively if I have access to a digital version of those magazines rather than having to destroy them.

We are at a crossroads here. The printing press is still in great use and is still a very viable tool. But the Internet is also an exciting place to learn, to read, to see. Either way, it’s about customers. Where are those eyeballs? We have to find them.

That’s one of the big credos at our company. Where our customer needs us and wants us, that’s where we want to be — with our products, with our magazines,

with our books, with our television content.

Ultimately, the tablet will not take the place, I hope, of the printed page in terms of the magazine format. I will continue to read print magazines, because I love them. That's me. But I will also read digital magazines. I will choose which ones. There are some magazines that I would look at just to see in more depth. *National Geographic*, God, I would love to see that. I already have the digitized version of *National Geographic*, but it's not the same thing. It's just like the magazine. The tablet could be like going into Africa.

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