

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



Photo: Dan Winters

Nicholas Negroponte

Founder, One Laptop per Child;

first investor in Wired

The Next \$100 Laptop

The unsung advantage of current ebooks is being able to use them in bed. Paper books have pages that can neither disappear nor reappear. Instead, we have to turn them, which is pretty stupid and not at all easy when you're lying on your side.

So why tablets? A short answer: one-handedness.

And it's not just for bed. Would you have ever imagined how many people walk around looking at one hand? Texting is replacing talking, and thumbs are replacing lips. Laptops, meanwhile, are not mobile. They are nomadic. You have to sit down to use one and do battle for a connection. Standing with a laptop is entirely unsatisfactory.

Tablets are therefore the new frontier. They are the new book, the new newspaper, the new magazine, the new TV screen, and potentially the new laptop. Something you carry — and, yes, something you can lose.

The real beneficiaries, however, are not you and me or the thousands who will soon queue up to buy the iPad. The undeniable beneficiaries of tablets will be those who have no alternative, those who have no books, no libraries, and in many cases no schools or electricity. I mean the nearly 2 billion kids in the developing world.

For them, a tablet needs to be windup. Yes, a crank, not solar but quiet human power that works at night, in cloud cover, and on windless days. Such a device also needs to be unbreakable, water-resistant, and dust-proof, and to connect to the Internet for free. At a minimum, it needs to hold 100 books and wirelessly access any of the titles stored on nearby tablets. So, if you ship 100 of these to a remote African village, each loaded with 100 different books, that's 10,000 books in the village — more than you and I had in primary school.

I'm talking about the tablet version of the XO from One Laptop per Child, proposed for 2012. By that date, we will have moved from laptop to tablet for a variety of reasons, the biggest being cost. The \$100 laptop never actually hit \$100 (the closest

we got was \$175), but we can get the price down, and the tablet is the way to do that. It requires no moving parts, not even a hinge. The housing can be made of a single piece of plastic. The XO today has 900 pieces, most on its circuit board. Ideally, the tablet's circuit board will be reduced to only one chip.

XO laptops are now in the hands of 1.4 million children in 35 countries and support 25 languages. The result: The kids teach their parents to read and write, truancy drops, and educators say they have never loved teaching so much.

Most of the students own their XOs and feel that it's the most important piece of hope in their life. And not surprisingly, most of the kids even sleep with them.

Gina Bianchini

CEO, Ning

A smartphone is mobile, but it isn't fun to browse on. On a laptop, the technology is built in, but few want to carry around a 6-pound computer for the privilege of using a browser. The tablet bridges this gap. People will not only engage in new social experiences but will do so on a device that's easy (and beautiful) to use, wherever they may feel so inspired.

George Lois

Advertising pioneer

The Real Thing

Way back when I was a young man, making deliveries at my father's florist shop in the Bronx, I once had the unexpected choice of spending the evening taking a gander at some 1940s porno or accepting the invitation to have actual sex with a gorgeous lady I regularly delivered flowers to in ritzy Riverdale. With a pounding heart, I chose the real thing. That's how I feel about experiencing a magazine's contents on a crammed computer screen versus holding a magnificent magazine in my hands — with its surprising visual and visceral possibilities at the turn of each page.

The newfangled tablets that let me read electronic magazines could be a useful

research device at times, but the tactile and graphic excitement that's available on the best graphically designed magazines are pitifully nonexistent on a bland, crowded computer screen. And certainly, the possibility of a great magazine cover that knocks your eye out on the newsstand — one with a big, edgy idea that makes a statement about America's politics and culture, that force-feeds an irresistible taste of a magazine's content — is totally out of the question. The magazine is dead. Long live the magazine.

Jack Dangermond

President and founder, ESRI

Planning a garden, park, building, or city shouldn't be done in an office. A location-aware tablet will let us use what's called geodesign to compose participatory, what-if scenarios onsite, using maps that several people can share — something we could always do with paper but that's been a challenge with digital maps in the field.

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Marshall McLuhan

Prophet of the electronic age

The Medium Is Life

What would Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) make of the coming tablet age? Contributing editor Gary Wolf channeled the oracular media theorist.

Steve Jobs is the preeminent figure of the late 20th century; he is our Ford, our Disney. Like them, Jobs is a great success in business. Others may have similar thoughts, similar predictions — in fact, if he were truly original he would not be so popular — but the fearlessness and simplicity of his attack on the old type of humanistic consciousness makes him a hero.

Jobs operates in the infralogue of the digital age, where the separation between user and product is vanishing, along with the outdated conscious operations of prediction and control.

Humanism temporarily survived the era of electronic media only through the act of turning on a device. The knob or switch is like the cover of a book: Open it; close it. But when a medium is coincident with life, the last refuge for humanism is gone.

The iPad is the beginning of this end. The thin, single pane of glass that comprises the interface is just a window onto the world, an edgeless frame. Essentially, there is no interface, any more than a person's fingertips are an interface. The long story of humanism — by which I mean the emergence of individual consciousness as a byproduct of our language and literature — comes to an end when we return, futuristically, to doing everything by hand.

We no longer hear the voices of the past, because we have our fingers in our ears.

Fake Steve Jobs

Not the CEO of Apple

Go Save Yourself

So once again we've changed the world with a mind-blowing, revolutionary product that does things that everybody considered impossible. An ebook reader that also plays movies and music? And browses the Web? No way. Can't be done. Well, we did it. And you can fly three times around the globe and watch movies the whole time on a single battery charge. It's amazing. Phenomenal. Exciting. Magical. Amazing. Beautiful. Stunning. Gorgeous. And yet for some people in the media, this is not enough. These people are disappointed because they expected the iPad to also save newspapers from a certain death.

Yes, David Carr of *The New York Times*, I'm talking to you, you pie-eyed crackhead. All I can say is, bitch, please! I'm a genius, but I'm not a miracle worker. Nor am I Mother Teresa. I wasn't put on earth to save *The New York Times*. I was put on earth to restore a sense of childlike wonder to people's empty, pathetic lives, and I must say that so far I'm doing a pretty outstanding job.

Anyway, do you really think saving newspapers is just a matter of putting your old crap on a new device? Because from what I can see, *The New York Times* sucks just as bad on a Kindle as it does on paper. That, in fact, is the real problem with *The New York Times*: It sucks, and everyone knows it, except, apparently, the dumb fucks who write for *The New York Times*, which is, oddly enough, the heart of the problem.

Quod erat demonstrandum, as Socrates once said.

The iPad isn't about saving newspapers. It's about inventing new ways of telling stories, using a whole new language — one that we can't even imagine right now.

Like I said when I met the publisher of *The New York Times* when he begged me to let his new media guy get onstage at our iPad event: Sully, I like you guys, but the truth is you guys really need to die so that we can clear the way for the new guys — although at the same time I do want to commend you for the great job you did when you landed that plane on the Hudson. He's like, What? And I'm like, Wasn't that you? And he's like, No, that's a guy named [Sullenberger](#), and I'm like, Well, what's your name? and he says, Sulzberger, and I'm like, OK, whatever, but you're still screwed.

Hacks, I'm sorry, but I'm not going to save you. Frankly, I don't read magazines or newspapers, and if every last one of you were all erased from the planet tomorrow I would not notice and I would not care. Having said that, I wish you all the best in whatever future careers you choose. Gardening, I've heard, is very peaceful and involves slinging manure, so you should be good at it. Namaste. Much love. Peace.

Chris Anderson

Editor in chief, Wired

Ditch Your Laptop

Tablets are the future of media — if they become ubiquitous. And that will happen only if they replace laptops. I think most of us are willing to carry two devices (one is a phone) but not three. So why would they dump a keyboard for a touchscreen? Look to three data points for the answer: the iPhone, the Kindle, and the cloud.

The iPhone shows that loads of people want rich-media networked devices with them everywhere. Like a tablet, the iPhone is a one-app-at-a-time full-screen experience, where the interface is determined as much by the apps and the device itself as it is by the OS. By dint of its bigger screen, a tablet is immersive enough to spend hours with — and yet it's still intimate. A laptop is a work device, an arm's-length, lean-forward experience. A tablet, in contrast, is a personal device, something you cradle and lean back with.

The Kindle shows that people are willing to pay for specialized devices if they can give them the flexibility to have the content they want when they want it. For magazines, with their long-form text and engaging, visually rich design, a tablet could be perfect. Of course, it will still have a Web browser, but it'll also have a critical mass of content — games, books, magazines, and video — that isn't Web-based. All the impact (and more) of print, with the convenience of digital delivery. If it worked for the single-purpose Kindle, it will work even better for the multipurpose tablet. Imagine highly produced, curated content that arrives as an event to look forward to, like a film opening or a book launch. This is where the new business models kick in: Tablets can show media in a context worth paying for. The first issue of a magazine might even be free, like the first few levels of a game are, but that's just a sampler. Rather than tell people about great content, that tablet lets them experience it — and easily upgrade to get more.

Finally, the cloud shows that as more and more of our data and software lives in servers somewhere, the computers we carry with us can be less and less powerful — thinner, lighter, longer battery life. Let Google buy the big iron; you can buy sexy aluminum and glass that's a delight to hold. Sure, rich-media apps like games and magazine readers will run locally, but they'll be no resource-hogging Photoshop. Modern smartphones have shown us what efficient mobile operating systems and specialized apps can do with hardware that wouldn't fill a single drive bay on a desktop PC.

Think of all the trips where you've asked yourself, "Is this when I leave the laptop behind and just use my phone?" The tablet answers that question. Bigger than a phone, funner than a laptop, more cuddly than a Kindle. I think they're going to sell like hotcakes.

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