

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

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in the infralogic of the digital age, where the separation between user and product is vanishing, along with the outdated conscious operations of prediction and control.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

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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