

Tips, Tricks and Advice from your local “IT Guru”

This month I want to talk to you about tablets. Over the past year the price of these devices has dropped and they have got much more powerful. Not only that, but for some people they are a good alternative to a full size PC, so I thought I would recap on your options.

First, you need to decide on size. There are really only two form factors: 7-8 inches and 10-11 inches. The smaller sizes will fit in a pocket (at a push) so are generally well suited for travelling with. The bigger versions offer a much better viewing experience, but really need a case or a bag if you are taking them out of the house. However, you can't just look at size in isolation - the intended use is just as important. If you are thinking of doing lots of typing then the larger size makes things easier, because they naturally have a bigger keyboard. They are also better for showing videos and pictures. The smaller devices are great for reading on; most are the same size as a book, and are much lighter than their bigger brothers. They are also better for gaming as they can be held for much longer periods of time without developing huge muscles in your wrists.

The last time I wrote about tablets I covered the difference between Wi-Fi only devices and those with cellular connections. Nowadays, there is so much free Wi-Fi around that I really don't think this is a problem any more. Unless you absolutely need connectivity everywhere you go, a Wi-Fi model is going to be fine. The only caveat is the little known fact that the Apple Wi-Fi only iPads have no GPS built in. They can get a rough idea where you are from your Wi-Fi connection, but if you are thinking of doing any serious navigation then you will need a cellular model.

So, what system should you buy? Regular readers will know what's coming... but I still think Apple's iPads are the best all round buy. The latest games and applications are more likely to become available on the Apple system first, and the range of accessories and software is absolutely massive in comparison to the Android and Windows selection. The common misconception with Apple products is that they're overly expensive. But, in truth, the entry-level iPad Mini is now only £199, and it's bigger brother starts at only £319.

If funds are short, then tablets based on Google's Android operating system are much cheaper. Anything well below £100 is best avoided – some are simply too slow, and others are just terrible in general. Time and time again, I have seen people buy these cheap devices and then give up after a month or so and just buy an iPad instead. Also, the really low-end devices do not have access to the Google Play Store, so finding new apps is fraught with problems and danger. As a general guide, expect to pay around £150 for a 7-inch screen and over £200 for a 10-inch version. Also, make sure to go for well-known names like Samsung, Lenovo, Toshiba or Sony. At the lower end of the price range, TESCO is still selling the Hudl for around £100 and this is probably the best low-cost Android device. It runs an almost standard version of Android and has access to Google's Play store, so finding new apps is easy and safe. Amazon also has a range of Fire tablets in many different sizes and prices, and these would be my second choice when looking for a low-cost tablet. They may not have the same high-end feel as the Apple tablets, but they are half the cost!

However, my recommendation for an alternative to an iPad has to be a Windows 8.1 tablet. Microsoft is really pushing them this year, and there are some amazing deals available. This also seems to be one area where a low price doesn't seem to make much of a difference in terms of quality or experience. At the moment you can buy 7-inch tablets for around £70 with a years subscription to Office 365, (so you get Word, Excel, Powerpoint, and usually priced a £60 itself) and the build quality is more than good enough. Prices range from the incredibly cheap £59 Linx, to the eye-wateringly expensive Surface Pro 3 at £1200, and all of them offer a full version of Windows with the prospect of upgrading to Windows 10 later this year. They can all run most of the Windows software available, as well as the new modern Apps available in the Windows store, and the range of apps is growing all the time! Given the choice between a cheap Android tablet or a cheap Windows tablet, I would pick Windows every time. They really are that good.

If you have any questions or anything you would like me to cover in this column, email me at look@4-11consultants.co.uk

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