

The year of the document

Written by Darryn Lowe
Friday, 01 January 2010 00:00 -

In my last post I surmised what the probable specs of an Apple tablet would be while also showing why Apple has a great shot at making it all work. But a tablet is only going to be as good as the software that runs on it and will only work if people see a use for it so this post is going to look at what the Apple tablet will do if it exists at all.

There are two rumours about the name of the tablet device... iSlate or Magic Slate. The latter actually is a better name in my not so humble opinion. But the name points to something bigger than just what it's trying to name. The word "slate" conjures up the idea of a blackboard (screw you PC thugs) which of course gives the idea of writing. It's this, mixed with the rumours about Apple's [iWork.com](#) that provides the key as to what Apple is trying to achieve with the tablet.

Apple's iWork application is a Mac suite in the same vain as Microsoft's Office but it also has an online collaboration aspect since early 2009. The big problem with iWork.com was that it has been beta for the last year and also lacks many features but in its current form works well with the desktop application. iWork.com however may become more than just a collaboration tool for other iWork users. Currently you can share documents with Windows users by way of Word/Excel or PDF documents but no one can edit them online. There appears to be a move towards online editing in some form that resembles Google Docs but with a much more advanced interface a la MobileMe Mail. Throw in a mobile version of iWork for iPhone/iPod Touch/mythical tablet and you have document editing on the fly and access to documents on the fly and you've got a documentation system that can give you the information wherever you are whenever you need it.

Documentation on portable devices has often been poorly done with some exceptions. [Documents To Go](#)

has long been a favourite of mine since the days when I had a Palm and I currently use it on my iPhone as well because it is such a nice tool to be able to edit documents on the fly and then synch back. The big problem I have with Documents To Go is that it doesn't support the iWork format which is what I use all the time for my document editing, especially spreadsheets which I often use. It also requires a separate application to transfer those documents onto my iPhone and back again. If Apple produced a mobile version of iWork that stored everything on iWork.com then you'd eliminate the need for synching all the time because it would just work on documents stored online (a backup would be stored on the local machines though for security).

The other facet of documentation will more than likely come from Apple getting into Books. Amazon has the Kindle and Sony has the eBook Reader and there is another device called the Nook but these are single purpose devices that aren't really that nice to use. On the iPhone there are great apps like Classics which has a beautiful interface that feels like you're actually reading a book but there is also Stanza, BookShelf, Eucalyptus all of which have nice interfaces. I like Classics because it doesn't feel like a computer program and that's the problem with reading on a screen. It doesn't move like paper it moves like a long list of text and if you've ever read a long list it gets tiresome and boring and you switch off. Classics however has an animation when you turn the page and the text doesn't scroll so it really feels like you're reading a book. Now, if Apple developed something similar and had books as purchase options from the

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iTunes store then Apple would have conquered the entire media sector. This isn't a bad thing because it would force competitors to buck up their ideas instead of being stagnant in their approaches to things, especially media. Now while a device like a tablet will never replace physical books and papers and magazines it does give people more than over priced options (I mean how many books really are worth \$30?) and therefore people would buy more. It happened with music and movies so there's nothing to suggest it won't happen with books.

But it won't stop there. It seems to make sense that Apple will release mobile versions of the iLife suite as well. Imagine a keyboard on the screen that lets you make music in GarageBand wherever you are. Imagine being able to blog in iWeb wherever you are (handy for my site). Imagine editing your videos or keeping all your photos organised wherever you are all from a mobile device rather than carrying around a bulky laptop or being forced to do that sort of work when you get back to your desktop.

The potential for a tablet device really is huge but it needs to be done well. Apple has experience in turning sloppy technology into game changers as can be seen with the iPod, iPhone, and iPod Touch. But Apple is a software company above all else, it just happens to make the hardware that goes with it. As such Apple's software is screaming out for a mobile outing which I think Apple will deliver on. When it delivers it will show Microsoft, Palm and Google how cloud based computing should be done. This comes not because I'm a Mac fanboi or anything like that but because of pure hard evidence. Apple has time and time again changed the way we interact with the media we have today and I can't wait to see what this year has in store for us.