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Why the new Apple iPad stinks

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We've probably all heard it by now. During a press event last Wednesday in San Francisco, Apple announced its version of the tablet computer: the iPad.

We've also probably all heard the hype. You know, the chatter about how this new product is going to save the world. How it's loaded with all the goodies you absolutely need: clean aluminum and glass styling, an innovative touch-screen interface, wireless internet, and on and on and on.

As an Apple user for the past few years, I've got to admit that I'm not immune to this chatter. Apple certainly knows how to create a product that is intuitive and just darned easy to use.

Apple fanboy in me aside, however, I just can't understand what the company was thinking with this newest creation. Yes, sure, the possibilities of the tablet computer for specific purposes are exciting. (Just for one example, can you imagine the time and energy a doctor could save by having a small, easy to use tablet computer to record and search for information?) But the iPad seems almost purposefully constructed so as to make it as useless as possible.

So, putting aside my Catholic worker sensibilities and my questions about the need for new technology, here are my four (thoroughly unresearched) reasons why the Apple iPad simply stinks, in no particular order:

1. Being locked to the iPhone OS.

As part of their search for the easiest to use interface possible, Apple designed the iPad to use an updated version of the operating system for the iPhone. Based around the use of different 'apps,' or

applications which you can download from the iTunes Store, this operating system takes away the learning curve of the full computer. If you want to use the calculator on the iPad, you just have to push the little icon for the calculator. There's no digging around for what you're looking for.

But there's also no freedom to use your computer as you want. It means everything that you want to do on the iPad has to go through Apple. All your applications have to be approved before they're available on the iTunes Store. Talk about a complete lack of freedom to use the \$500 (or \$700 or \$800) you just spent some of your savings on as you want.

2. Inability to actually read books.

To try and break into some of the market share of the Amazon Kindle e-reader, Apple has created a shiny new application for the iPad called 'iBook.' Based upon a tiered pricing structure, this new application lets you download and read books right on the screen. Theoretically you could find your favorite book online with the application, download it on the spot, and cozy up with the iPad on your couch.

Not quite. Unlike the Kindle, which uses a nifty system called E ink to emulate the look of ink on a page, the iPad will simply display the book onto a normal LCD screen, like the one you use on the monitor or screen of your desktop computer or laptop. I don't know about you, but when I get home from work just about the last thing I want to do is stare at a bright computer screen for another couple of hours.

3. Lack of camera and any peripheral options.

The iPad has no camera. Which means you can't take any pictures or use its internet connection to talk on Skype. It also has none of the normal connection ports you would find on your laptop or desktop computer. Which means you'll never be able to upload photos or documents from your flash memory stick to the iPad.

It's so isolated from your normal computer life, I think maybe they should have named it the 'iSland.' Which leads us to number 4:

4. The horrible, horrible, horrible name.

There's not much to be said here. I simply can't believe they couldn't come up with another name to use. Marketing tip for entrepreneurs: when naming your fancy new product, try to steer away from associations with things regularly thrown in the trash.

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