



by Jill Gilbert

Jill Barson Gilbert, QEP, is president of Lexicon Systems, LLC. E-mail: jbgilbert@lexicon-systems.com.

Latest Generation Smartphones and Tablets Are Serious Business

Not too long ago, businesses decided that BlackBerry was *the* communication device. Windows smartphones were limited to twenty-somethings and a few techies, with corporate IT departments not eager to support them, and the iPhone was considered a plaything, hardly on the corporate IT radar. Move over, BlackBerry! Google Android phones have taken a big bite of market share, and iPhones are a serious contender for business accounts, now that Verizon offers them. But hold the phone! A slew of new tablet computers will redefine the mobile market. Businesses now have options.

Flashy or Functional?

I grew weary of my Windows Mobile 6 phone and I jumped at the chance to buy a shiny, new iPhone 4 just days after Verizon made it available. The iPhone is all it's cracked up to be, and more. Its design and operating system are so intuitive, it's scary!

So the story goes, Apple designed the phone and operating system without the cellular providers' (initially AT&T, and later Verizon) input—a departure from the norm where the service provider dictates the phone design, features, functionality, and software.

Plaything or Productivity Tool?

In just three short weeks, my iPhone has proved to be a valuable business productivity tool. It manages voice, e-mail, and attachments better than any device I have had in the past. I found that by setting up my office e-mail using IMAP (Internet Message Access Protocol) rather than POP3 (Post Office Protocol), I could "subscribe" to e-mail folders that I need to be mobile, and sync mail in three places—Outlook on my notebook computer, Web mail account, and iPhone. So far, this appears to be a great alternative to Microsoft Exchange for small businesses that use the Outlook mail client.

Microsoft Exchange Server allows full e-mail sync and replication in several places. You can always save your e-mails to a personal folder and read or archive them. But with POP3, each time you access e-mail through Outlook, it removes the files from

the server. If you check your e-mail Inbox on your smartphone, then you don't see those messages when you return to the office and open the Inbox on your notebook, and vice-versa.

The iPhone excels in Web browsing and can load full Web pages, not just the slimmed-down mobile versions. Contrary to the TV commercials, I can surf the Web and use the phone at the same time, if desired, as long I have a wireless Internet connection for the Web browser.

The standard "apps" are more than enough to get anyone going, including a GPS and accelerometer that work with the compass and Google Maps apps. Last week, we decided to go out for lunch to a place we had not visited in a while. But on a Friday, at hub time, the wait was 25-30 minutes, and I needed to get back to work in a hurry. So in the car, pointed back toward the office (someone else was driving), I used Google Maps to quickly search for a restaurant and found a great new restaurant. It's on our list for a return visit.

Gadget or Tiny Computer?

The latest generation of smartphones and small- to mid-sized tablets offer so much computing power, they make notebook computers obsolete for many things. Manufacturers from A to Z have entered three market niches: smartphones, small tablets, and larger tablets. The three most common operating systems are Apple's iOS, Google Android OS, and BlackBerry Tablet OS.

Tablets offer wireless Internet connectivity, most offer Bluetooth, rear-facing and front-facing cameras (for video conferencing), and have crisp displays for high-definition video. Some have slots for additional flash memory, while others have fixed memory.

The small tablet market niche includes the Motorola Atrix, a small tablet that docks to a netbook computer. When undocked, the tablet provides the computing power of the larger device at your fingertips. In 2010, Dell introduced a 5-inch tablet device that many users found to be too small for applications like reading books and watching movies, and recently introduced the 7-inch Streak tablet. Samsung recently introduced the Galaxy tablet; Sharp competes in this niche, as well.

The large tablet market niche includes the Motorola Xoom, introduced in early 2011, which sports the Google Android 3 operating system, optimized for tablets. Apple introduced the iPad 2 in March, quickly followed by the BlackBerry Playbook, HP Slate, and Viewsonic tablets.

If a new tablet works as well as the iPhone, with its larger, extremely portable, screen, then it might be just the tool for everyday tasks. The greatest limitation with earlier offerings was data entry; working with complex spreadsheets or editing detailed reports requires a capable keyboard.

Apple has revolutionized data entry; input depends on a slight electrical charge from your fingertip, rather than a hard tap with a stylus or fingernail, or a firm press of the finger. It takes only a few minutes to learn the lingo of navigation, with the “flick,” “pinch,” “pinch out” (I prefer to call it “spread,” as in spread your fingers), “tap,” and “double tap” motions. The iOS virtual keyboards anticipate what you want to type, and make the “hot” zone larger around the keyboard letters that it expects you to type next. The computer learns the words that you use frequently, and suggests them. If you’re really a bad “light-touch” typist and have too many misspellings appear as suggestions, then you can always reset the dictionary to the factory default.

Blurry Lines

Some of my clients and colleagues carry two or three cell phones because their organizations restrict

personal use, they need to be in constant contact with texting teenagers, or they want a more full-featured device. Some corporations allow employees to use their own smartphones in lieu of the plain, company-issued cell phones. This places a burden on IT to support a handful of operating systems, but moves the cost burden for the device to the employee. Sort of an “I’ll scratch your back (support your device), if you scratch mine (pay for it)” relationship.

The new tablet computers and the latest generation of smartphones continue to blur the lines between flashy and functional, plaything and productivity tool, gadgets and tiny computers. They are serious business contenders. If I need a powerful phone/personal digital assistant/computer to conduct day-to-day business, then let it be fun! By the time you read this, I will have four months of experience with my new phone. Check in with me to see if I still sing its praises... I predict that I will. Let me hear from you! **em**