# Can Tablets Improve Business Productivity?

by Jill Gilbert

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

Several companies that have tried to introduce tablets—including the Apple Newton in 1987—failed to capture the mass market. Palm, HP, and others led the handheld market from the late 1990s through the mid-2000s. I owned one of the first Palm OS color personal digital assistants (PDAs). When it outlived its business usefulness, the PDA had a second life as game console—at five times the cost of a Nintendo Gameboy.
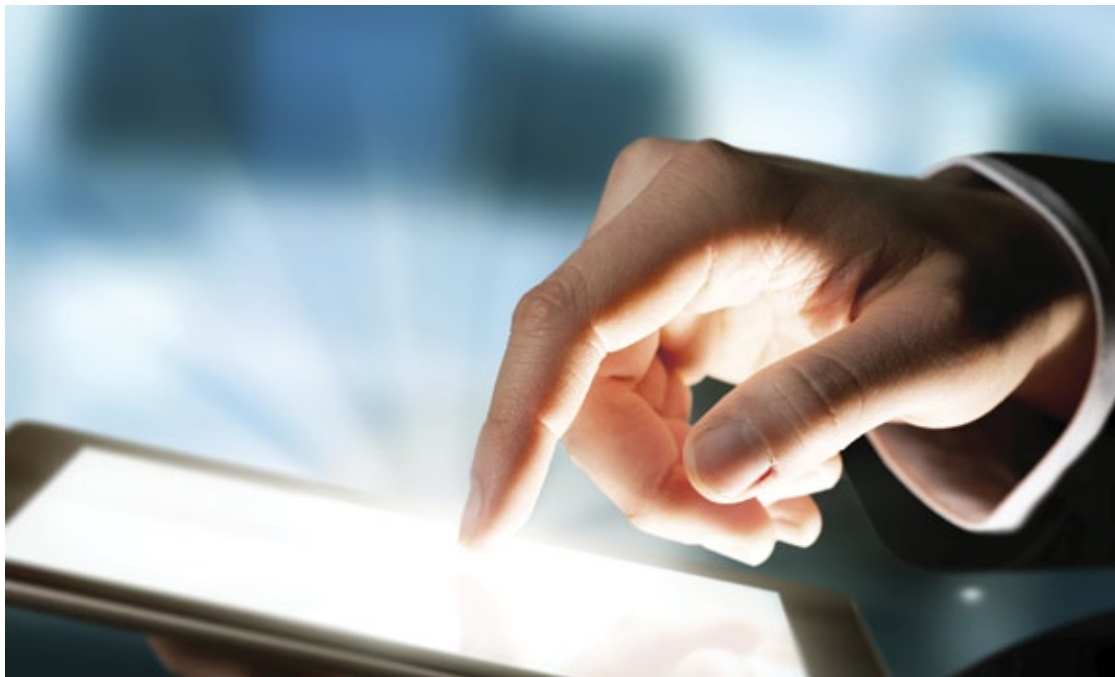
Jag_cz/iStock/Thinkstock

Fast forward to 2014. The handheld market crashed years ago with the launch of smartphones. Laptop computer sales are on a downward trend due to the popularity of smartphones and tablets. Tablets, initially marketed to consumers, now are commonplace business tools. It's fast becoming a BYOD (bring your own device) world. Can tablets improve business productivity?

Tablet Sales on the Rise

Apple basically created the tablet market in 2010 and maintained the biggest market share through early 2013. Android tablets outsold Apple iPads for the first time in late 2013. Apple increased sales, but lost market share by selling only high-end devices with its proprietary operating system. In contrast, multiple vendors were licensed to offer tablets with Android, Windows, Linux, and other operating systems in a range of configurations and price points to appeal to a broader market.

Worldwide sales of tablets to end users reached 195.4 million units in 2013, a 68% increase on 2012. According to IT consulting firm Gartner, "The tablet growth in 2013 was fueled by the low-end, smaller-screen tablet market, and first-time buyers; this led Android to become the number one tablet operating system, with 62% of the market."[2]

Security policies lag behind tablet use, however.

Lexicon Systems, LLC is an independent, woman-owned management consulting firm. Our focus is environment, health & safety (EHS), sustainability and risk management and the IT to support them. The firm offers full software life cycle management services—from strategy and business needs analysis to design, configuration, roll-out, risk and organizational change management.

As trusted advisors, Lexicon Systems helps clients grow to be more agile, better-informed decision-makers. We apply EHS, marketing, software product management, implementation and consulting expertise to produce results—shorter project cycles and significant cost savings.

LEXICON SYSTEMS, LLC

moving > business > ahead™

Organizations with many tablet users—whether company-supplied or BYOD—face a data security risk and should establish policies and guidelines for tablet usage. Many have yet to establish such policies.[1]

Measuring Productivity from Tablet Use

To measure how tablets impact productivity, organizations must first understand why and how tablets are used. This allows them to identify key performance indicators and collect data "before" and "after" tablet use.

Organizations can use a five-step systems approach for new tablet deployment initiatives, as well as to bring BYOD users into compliance with company policies and guidelines: Strategy, system discovery, system design, implementation, and realize benefits.

1. **Strategy.** Define *why* the organization should use tablets. For example, to increase productivity

of a mobile/distributed work force; allow collaboration among company, suppliers, and vendors; gain competitive advantage; and other objectives.

2. **System discovery.** Define and prioritize the user needs—*what* functions the tablet should allow the user to perform, such as

   - conduct research and consume data;
   - enter data into enterprise Cloud
   - applications;
   - author documents, spreadsheets,
   - and presentations;
   - access, view, and edit electronic files;
   - present information to others;
   - use e-mail and communication tools; and
   - collect field data.

3. **System design.** Define the technical solution—*how* to best meet the objectives and top priority needs, with a combination of tablets, apps, and standard processes.

4. **Implementation.** Define the user population and timing—*who, where,* and *when.* Plan and schedule the roll-out and be sure to provide training, documentation, and user support. Identify key performance indicators to measure productivity. For example, reduce customer request response time by 50%; reduce time spent on e-mails by one-third; reduce audit records review time by 80%; and so forth. Begin to collect key performance indicator metrics after roll-out.

5. **Realize benefits.** Audit the solution. Perform and audit 6–12 months after implementation, and look for trends in key performance indicators. Based upon audit findings, adjust the program, as needed, by starting at Step 1.

Tablets as Laptop Replacements

Can and/or will tablets replace laptops in business? The answer is, yes and no.

Advantage: Tablet

The top benefits of a tablet versus a laptop are portability, fast startup and shutdown, and the availability of apps. Apple iOS and Android tablet users can choose from one million-plus apps, while Windows tablet users can choose from approximately 200,000—including a variety of business and productivity applications. In addition, some organizations deploy commercial or proprietary Cloud or Software as a Service (SaaS) apps to their workforce.

Another benefit is Internet connectivity that allows data storage in the Cloud rather than in the tablet, plus access to Web-enabled apps and collaboration tools. The lack of a connection is a disadvantage for those who rely upon the Internet for day-to-day work.

Tablets can replace laptops for people whose primary needs include e-mail, Web browsing, light authoring/editing, and document review and collaboration.

Advantage: Laptop

The greatest benefits of a laptop versus a tablet are the ability to perform complex calculations; work with large databases; develop detailed, formatted documents and graphics; and work offline with large data storage capacity.

Tablets are not good replacements for "power user" knowledge workers; they may use a tablet for travel and light work and likely will continue to use a laptop for heavy work.

Tablets Work for Some, Not for Others

Tablets can improve business productivity and can replace laptops for some workers. The secret is to know the best uses and limitations of each tool, to use the best tool for the task at hand, and to innovate if that tool is not available at the moment.

65% of businesses allow BYOD desktop or mobile devices to access organizational data, including e-mail, applications, and sensitive data. 53% are unprepared to deal with hacked or stolen BYOD devices.[1]

Case Study: Laptop Replacement Trial

I used my iPad as a laptop replacement during a three-day business meeting. Its note-taking software lacked some of the features of the laptop version; the e-mail app had fewer e-mail management features; and the iPad had limited utility when not connected to the Internet.

Conclusion: The iPad is light and portable and works well for short-term needs, especially when traveling. While I can leave my laptop at the office in favor of the iPad and stay connected, at times, I still desire the power of a laptop.

The abundance of tablet apps can be both exciting and scary for first-time tablet users. If your organization does not have a tablet policy and guidelines, then define your needs before diving in head-first. Several technology blogs offer advice on the best apps for business use.[3] **em**

References

1. Eddy, N. BYOD Businesses Still Lack Effective Security Policies; *eWeek*, February 21, 2014; available online at www.eweek.com/small-business/byod-businesses-still-lack-effective-security-policies.html.
2. Kline, D. Android and iOS Dominate Tablets, but Could Windows 8 Catch Up?; *The Motley Fool*, March 11, 2014; available online at www.fool.com/investing/general/2014/03/11/android-and-ios-dominate-tablets-but-could-windows.aspx.
3. For further reading on tablets, see "Tablets: Where's the Productivity?"; ZDNet; available online at www.zdnet.com/topic-tablets-wheres-the-productivity/?tag=nl.e101&s_cid=e101&ttag=e101&ftag=TRE684d531 (accessed April 1, 2014).