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There's an App for That: The Power of Smartphones

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What the iPad 2 can do for business

Until last week, I was the proud owner of an iPad. Don't get me wrong, I'm not abandoning the only device that Steve Jobs called "magical." I just sold my first generation to partially pay for the second generation that was recently launched, aptly named with a creative stroke of genius — The iPad 2.

To recap the recent announcement, Apple has upgraded their year-old iPad to a newer version that launched on March 11. Major feature additions include a faster processor, a thinner/rear-facing cameras that allow for live video chatting.

As such, smartphones are both powerful and appealing. As a small business owner, I wear many hats, and the iPad wears these hats, too. Here is just a sample of how I use mine.

• Bookkeeping — We use an invoicing system that is Web-based called Freshbooks. It's a great service, but the iPad makes it even better. With two or three finger touches, I can check my accounts-receivable report, resend an invoice to a client, create a new recurring invoice profile or any number of things.

• In five minutes, I can see the entire picture from anywhere I am.

• Email — Yes, I have a smartphone that can send and receive email, but the iPad is better. I really have come to despise typing more than a few words at a time on my phone. The iPad, however, has a much bigger keyboard so longer messages aren't so painful.

• Facebook — I use Facebook personally and for business, and I can manage all of it right from my iPad. Again, this feels forced on my phone, but on the bigger screen of the iPad everything is readable and manageable.

• Here's a tip, too. Use the "Friendly" app instead of the official Facebook app. Facebook's app is just a stretched version of their iPhone offering, so Friendly gets the job done better for a whopping $2 or so.

• Web browsing — Web sites just don't look good on a phone, or at least most of them don't. The iPad makes browsing full-sized websites a breeze in most cases. I have mixed feelings about the lack of the iPad's flash support, but that really hasn't hurt my experience so far.

• Note taking/organization — I attend a lot of meetings, whether they're job, networking, or charity related. My desk used to be scattered with scraps of paper with random notes on them.

• Now my desk is only half-scattered with paper! The iPad comes with a quick and easy note taking app that works like a charm. And if you're looking for an even better service, it integrates with the Web service Evernote.com for sharing notes across multiple devices/computers.

These are only a few of the areas of productivity where I have benefited from my iPad. Of course I'm addicted to Angry Birds (a popular game on phones and tablets; I'm in the top 2,000 in the world!) so maybe it's hurt my productivity just a little bit, too. Overall, though, as with many technology innovations, it would be tough to go back to a world without it. Yes, my iPad truly has been an upgrade for my day-to-day life over the past year.

Unfortunately, I underestimates the demand for the iPad 2 and wasn't able to get one on launch day this year. I have been test driving the only real competitor to the iPad for the past week and an impressed.

It's called the Motorola Xoom and has the Google Android operating system (an upgraded version from the software that powers Droids and other phones). I'm impressed so far, but I don't own it I'm seeing the unseating it from the tablet throne just yet.

The Xoom is more for needs, while the iPad is for people who want to "just work." For business or for pleasure, that's what the iPad does. It just works.

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