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/sleeker case and front- and rear-facing cameras that allow for live video chatting.

Overall, it’s evolution, not revolution, but the faster processor is good enough for me to pull the trigger on an upgrade.

Detractors of the iPad accuse it of not really serving a purpose or fitting a need. It’s too big to carry around like a phone, and it’s not quite as functional as a laptop if you need to do heavy duty computing.

But Apple has sold more than three million of these things, so there has to be something to it, right? I bought my first iPad on launch day, and I haven’t put it down since. The need that the iPad fills? I wasn’t one I was aware of beforehand. 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.

• 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.

• Overall, it’s evolution, not revolution, but the faster processor is good enough for me to pull the trigger on an upgrade.

There’s an app for that: The power of smartphones

We have all seen the commercial that beckons us to jump into a “smartphone centric” world in which the newest generation of mobile phone devices become an integral part of our information and entertainment supply chain. If you are a gadget junkie or have a teenager in your home, you may already know what a smartphone can do for you. But if you are still clinging mightily to a mobile device that is “just a cell phone,” read on.

Simply put, a smartphone is a handheld computer with a built-in mobile phone. As such, smartphones are capable of running advanced applications (or apps) similar to those on your desktop or laptop computer. It is these apps that make smartphones both powerful and appealing.

The market for smartphone apps is huge and growing exponentially.

One industry research firm estimates that the number of mobile application downloads in 2011 will reach 13 billion. This year, Apple alone will make $30 billion from applications in its App Store.

But you might be asking yourself, “What types of apps do I need?”

If you still have doubts as to how apps are changing the way we live, work, and communicate, consider the many ways I have used my phone in recent days:

• Wake up to an alarm I set on my phone’s clock the night before. Use the Weather Channel app to check the local temperature and get the forecast for Springfield, Mo., where I’m headed later in the week. Instantaneously check my e-mail account and calendar at work (without booting up my desktop, waiting for the browser, and logging in).

• Use the Facebook app to catch up on what’s going on with friends and family. Listen to Pandora (an Internet radio app) on the drive to work.

• Later that evening, download a movie (or book) that I can watch (or read) on my upcoming trip. Use a fitness app to track my daily calorie consumption and exercise (an app that can look up hundreds of thousands of foods or utilize the barcode scanner app to read in nutritional information directly from a food package).

• Turn on the night light and watch a movie before drifting off to sleep.

• During my trip, use the built-in GPS navigation app to hear turn-by-turn directions that guide me to my destination. Use the voice recognition app to dictate an e-mail to my boss.

• If travelling by air, use the browser to check my flight status. Check in at the gate with an electronic boarding pass sent directly to my phone. If headed to a foreign country, use the translator app to teach myself words and phrases I need to know upon arrival.

• While waiting at the airport, catch up on news and sports, then amuse myself with friends and family. Listen to Pandora (an app that uses the camera flash to light the way), apps that monitor home security cameras and/or turn lights and security systems on and off, educational apps for children, online dictionaries, online phone books, Google Sky (an app that uses the phone’s GPS to identify the stars, planets and constellations above you) and even a simple “bubble level” app that turns your phone into a leveling device.

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