Web 2.0

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What I use my iPad for

It should come as no surprise that I like gadgets. Some people spend their money on fast cars and exotic holidays. Or more realistically, on food and books. I buy gadgets. I bought the first iPad when it came out, and I upgraded to the iPad 3 when that became available. Now, given that I already have a laptop and an eReader (Kindle http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=1000493771) it would be fairly logical if you looked at me and said 'In the name of all that's wonderful, WHY?' In this column, I'll try and explain why I like the iPad, and what it gives me that other resources don't.

If you own an iPad 1 or 2, the iPad 3 is slightly smaller, thinner and the resolution is much higher. I could go into detail over the specifications, but Apple do that so much better than I could (http://www.apple.com/ipad/compare/). Basically, it's lighter, easier to carry around, and the screen looks much better. It's always been a functional device, but even more so now – I quite often carry it around the house with me, and it's my device of choice to take to conferences and training sessions, even though I've got a nice small laptop.

I use it for a wide variety of different things. Because of the way it is made (I could insert a bunch of technical stuff here that I don't understand, and you probably wouldn't either!) when I turn it on, it's instantly connected to the Net. This means that in a couple of seconds I can be reading my emails, and responding to them. As it's nice and light it's easy to perch on my lap if I want to watch something on the iPlayer (other television channel software is available), YouTube or a TED talk (http://www.ted.com/talks) for example. As the screen has such a high resolution it really does feel as though you have a 50" HD television sitting there right in front of you. Consequently, it's really easy to read from, and the Kindle app means that I can download the books that I've got on my eReader to it, and because they synchronise so quickly I don't have to try and remember where I have got to.

Of course, we're now moving into the real reason why I use an iPad – the variety of applications that are available for it. We'll take it as read that there are lots of silly (and not so silly) games that can be played on it, and move straight to the productive stuff. Probably my most used app of all is Zite, (http://www.zite.com/) which is a news-based tool. I have linked my Twitter and Facebook accounts to it, and it checks to see what my contacts have been talking about and linking to. It can then check out the actual news story or weblog and display it for me on the screen, in the form of a magazine. I can then tell it if I enjoyed

what it had found for me, and ask it to pull up more stories in the future on the subject under discussion. Over the course of time, I have been able to 'teach' it about the things that interest me, so every day I get an extremely useful round-up of information. This has in large part taken over from my Google Reader, which I confess that I've not looked at for several weeks. I also use a number of other news related tools though – Pulse News (http://www.pulse.me/) and Flipboard (http://flipboard.com/) are the two others that get referred to every single day. I also check the TED talks app every few days to see if there are any new and interesting presentations. TED talks are generally between five and twenty minutes long, so they're a quick filler if I have some time to spare, and it's a glorious mishmash of serious and silly, but always excellently delivered. Showyou (http://showyou.com/) is another excellent tool, as it finds and collects videos that friends and colleagues have liked or tweeted, so it's a very fast and effective way to keep up with the media side of the news.

As I mentioned, I use my iPad when I'm running a training session, and there's an excellent resource called SlideShark (http://www.slideshark.com/) which is another free tool. Create your PowerPoint presentation, upload it onto their site, and then download it back into the iPad. It's really easy to hide slides, add a timer, use a highlight option (holding your finger down on the iPad, creating a nice red dot on the projection screen) and you can flip easily from slide to slide. If you're a trainer or pre-senter, this is a fantastic little app to use. Another of my favourites is iThoughtsHD (http://www.ithoughts.co.uk/iThoughtsHD/Welcome.html) which is a mind-mapping tool. It's wonderfully easy to use and a very different way of putting a presentation together.

There are a lot of tools that are available across devices of course, and this means that I'm never without the data that I need. Google Chrome (which links and syncs to all my bookmarks on Firefox and IE using Xmarks (http://www.xmarks.com/) provides me with my browser, Dropbox (https://www.dropbox.com/) keeps copies of all of my documents, Evernote (http://evernote.com/) is neatly linked into my other devices, the Kindle app keeps copies of the books that I'm reading, and social tools such as Facebook, Google+, Pearltrees (http://www.pearltrees.com/) and Lanyrd (http://lanyrd.com/) are also easy to hand. The iCloud is an excellent resource – any photographs that I take on my iPhone appear on the iPad without any work on my part, and there are plenty of tools that I can use to retouch and play around with my photographs.

The iPad is therefore an excellent all-round tool – and did I forget to mention that it takes excellent photographs and videos? There are of course problems with it – the lack of Flash being one major one for example, but unless you're addicted to your Facebook games I can't say that this is a great loss. If you're considering buying a new gadget in the near future, an iPad is worth considering.