



Is the iPad Pro What eLearning Needs?

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Excerpt

On September 9, 2015, Apple announced the long-awaited iPad Pro. [1] To some, the announcement was a huge letdown. More of the same. To others, this laptop-sized tablet could be a stroke of genius. Regardless of your bias towards Apple's continual product evolution, does this new tablet make the perfect eLearning device?

iPad Pro For mLearning: Is The iPad Pro What eLearning Industry Needs?

The rapid rise of eLearning as an alternative to traditional live workshops is everywhere. Now you can learn at your own pace in the convenience of your office or their home. It doesn't come for free as eLearning requires a couple of basic technology elements:

- Reliable Internet connection that can sustain a data stream usually in the form of videos for viewing.
- A computing device with a browser (or an app) capable of displaying a visual data stream and interacting with course content.

The iPad Pro As an mLearning Device

A desktop computer or laptop has been a perfect machine for eLearning.

The mobile eLearning user doesn't need a desk. This mLearning user wants to take personalized learning classes on the go. Smart phones may indeed support the needs of mLearning. However,

restrictive data plans and small displays will continue to inhibit user acceptance. Tablets are an even better platform as long as the CPU and graphics are powerful enough to drive a larger display.

Enter the lightweight iPad Pro with laptop speed, fast graphics, and access to tons of apps. In a recent article, Jason Perlow regarded the iPad Pro a ho-hum product announcement that was inferior to Microsoft's Surface 3. [2]

Perlow dismisses the iPad Pro as a cloud-dependent computing device. I think eLearning vendors disagree. For example, [Lynda.com](#)'s introduction of an iOS app signals the appropriateness of the iPad for learning. The iPad Pro will only enhance a user's experience.

The Casualties of Innovation

First, a history lesson ...

The minicomputer destroyed mainframe computers. The desktop computer replaced the minicomputer. The cloud has killed USB flash drives. The speedy Web has reduced the demand for CD and DVDs. The smart phone has all but changed how we communicate—who has analog phones anymore?

I would suggest that Apple's announcement of the iPad Pro is a cannon shot aimed directly at the computer industry. Not only will Apple become less dependent on Intel in favor of their own CPU, the laptop may eventually become a dinosaur. Apple's laptop business is certainly not growing.

Can a Tablet Be Used for eLearning Development?

What makes a computing device a usable device for content creation are two things:

- Powerful apps
- Quality display
- Input device options
- Structured file system

Powerful apps: Apple claims that in 2015 there are at least 1.5 million of them. [3] At the announcement, more apps are going to be built specifically to take advantage of the iPad Pro. A new wave of "killer" apps are iPad-ready ([Nutshell](#), [Wunderlist](#), [Day One](#), [The Omni Group](#), and [Autodesk's SketchBook](#)). You don't have to look much further than to see what [Microsoft](#) and [Adobe](#) are doing with their low-end apps. These apps usually have a specific function and not as feature-rich as their desktop equivalents.

In general, tablet apps are good, but usually provide only limited functionality. CPU horsepower is required to convert data files and video files. The iPad Pro doesn't quite have it.

Quality display: With no end to high-quality displays in sight, the iPad Pro now exceeds the number of pixels found on their MacBook Pro Retina displays. Wow. Tablets have one fundamental characteristic that complicates eLearning content creation: the display's aspect ratio. As a desktop and laptop now use a widescreen format (16:9 or 16:10 aspect ratio), while the tablet retains a more traditional (4:3 aspect ratio) layout.

Input device options: As the finger rudely approximates a mouse, Apple's new Pencil looks to be as powerful as many drawing tablets offering precision, tilt, and pressure. The Apple Pencil may not replace the versatile [Wacom](#) pen tablet, but I bet their executives are reviewing their future with Apple's introduction into the stylus world.

Structured file system: Although iOS uses a sophisticated file system, the ability to access and create folders and files is still extremely cumbersome. If nothing else, the lack of an easy way to explore the entire file system will give you fits. Let's not forget about transferring files to others. There's no USB or network facility for direct file transfer. And, the use of the cloud works, but it takes several steps to stage files for upload or download with [Dropbox](#).

Am I Gonna Buy One?



I don't think the iPad Pro is going to force me to Craigslist my laptop any time soon. But yet, I will Craigslist my iPad Air 2. The price is right, the performance is incredible, the size is large, and it is light. The clincher is the availability of the pencil and keyboard. A perfect mLearning and eLearning device.

Even though the iPad Pro lets you edit documents and take pictures and record movies, it isn't a courseware development system. Not even close. That's what an iMac is for.

I'm preparing myself for an even greater eLearning user experience when I line up to buy an iPad Pro this November! I'm going to be joined by artists, illustrators, and business people. Thank you, Apple, for continuing to make computing fun.

References

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Bio

Ken Whitaker, of Leading Software Maniacs, has more than 25 years of software development leadership and training experience. He has written books on leadership and is an innovator in instructional design and agile project leadership workshops. Ken is the creator of PM Chalkboard, a software company VP, and the editor for *Better Software* magazine. He is creating a unique gamification product that redefines learning.