



Tablet, Notebook, and Desktop: All in One

YOU MAY HAVE A TABLET COMPUTER BECAUSE IT'S EASY TO CARRY AROUND, A NOTEBOOK BECAUSE IT IS MORE VERSATILE BUT LESS PORTABLE, AND A DESKTOP BECAUSE IT'S POWERFUL AND HAS A LOT OF STORAGE. WHAT IF ONE DEVICE COULD SATISFY ALL THE NEEDS?

At a New York City news conference in May, Microsoft introduced what looks a lot like an iPad killer. The device can be both a tablet and a notebook, and it may be able to serve as a desktop. The Surface Pro 3 has a larger screen and its aspect ratio (4x3 instead of 16x9) is more like a piece of paper than a wide screen TV. That's important for several reasons and square inches of screen real estate is only one of them.

"So many people carry both a laptop and a tablet but really want just one device that serves all purposes," Microsoft Surface Corporate Vice President, Panos Panay said.

Although he never used the term "iPad killer", the comparison was there: Panay noted that the Surface 3 is 30% thinner than an 11-inch MacBook Air. The 12-inch display and a new continuously variable kickstand provide the screen real estate and multiple viewing angles people need for work and play, he said.



Panos Panay, Microsoft's Corporate Vice President, showing how thin the Surface Pro 3 (with a 12-inch screen) is, notes that it's 1/3 thinner than Apple's 11-inch MacBook Air.

There's also a new Surface Pen designed to have the look and feel of a real pen, not a stylus, that can be used draw and take notes on the tablet.

Panos said that familiarity is important for technology to be useful. To me, one of the cooler new features turns the tablet into a notepad that works with One Note. But is it familiar? Consider 3 situations:

- How you work with pen and paper first. To take notes on paper, you pick up a pen, click it to expose the writing tip, and start writing.
- Now a stylus on a tablet: You turn on the tablet and wait for it to become ready, then you launch OneNote, locate the stylus (which feels nothing at all like a pen), and start writing. Ugh!
- On the Surface 3, it's different. Pick up the pen, click it to expose the writing tip, and start writing. Clicking the pen activates the Surface Pro 3 and NotePad will be running.

So that makes this \$1000 electronic device as good as \$1 legal pad and a \$3 pen. But the Surface 3 does more: It can also surf the Web, send and receive e-mail, and run any application that works on your desktop computer.

It gets better: The notes you wrote on the tablet will synchronize with any other computer that shares your OneNote account.

Panay said that the design team's overall objective for the Surface 3 was a single device that could be used as a tablet, a notebook, or a desktop. Overall, it would seem that they've done a good job.

Lots of additional features further raise the bar and lower the thickness and weight of the device. The Surface Pro 3 is available with Intel i3, i5, or i7 processors starting at \$800 (Core i3 processor, 64GB SSD, and 4GB of RAM). At the high end, there's the \$1950 version with a Core i7 processor, 512GB SSD, and 8GB of RAM). The "type cover" that adds a portable keyboard sells for \$130, the docking station adds \$200, and an Ethernet adapter sells for \$40.

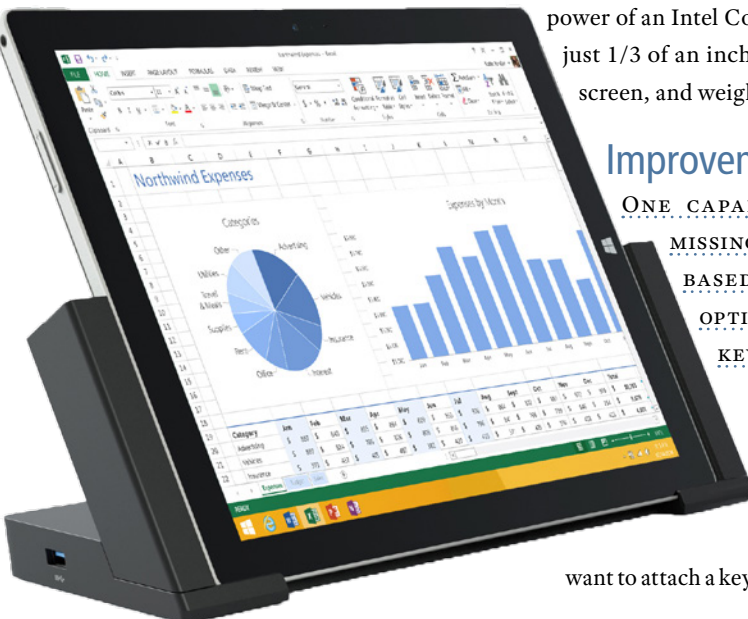
Any Application?

A LIGHT-WEIGHT TABLET MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO PERFORM ACCEPTABLY WITH A PROGRAM SUCH AS ONENOTE, A WEB BROWSER, OR AN E-MAIL PROGRAM. MAYBE EVEN A WORD PROCESSOR OR A SPREADSHEET APPLICATION. BUT WOULD A PROGRAM SUCH AS PHOTOSHOP STALL THE MACHINE? SO YOU MIGHT THINK.

Panay asked Michael Goff of Adobe to show how

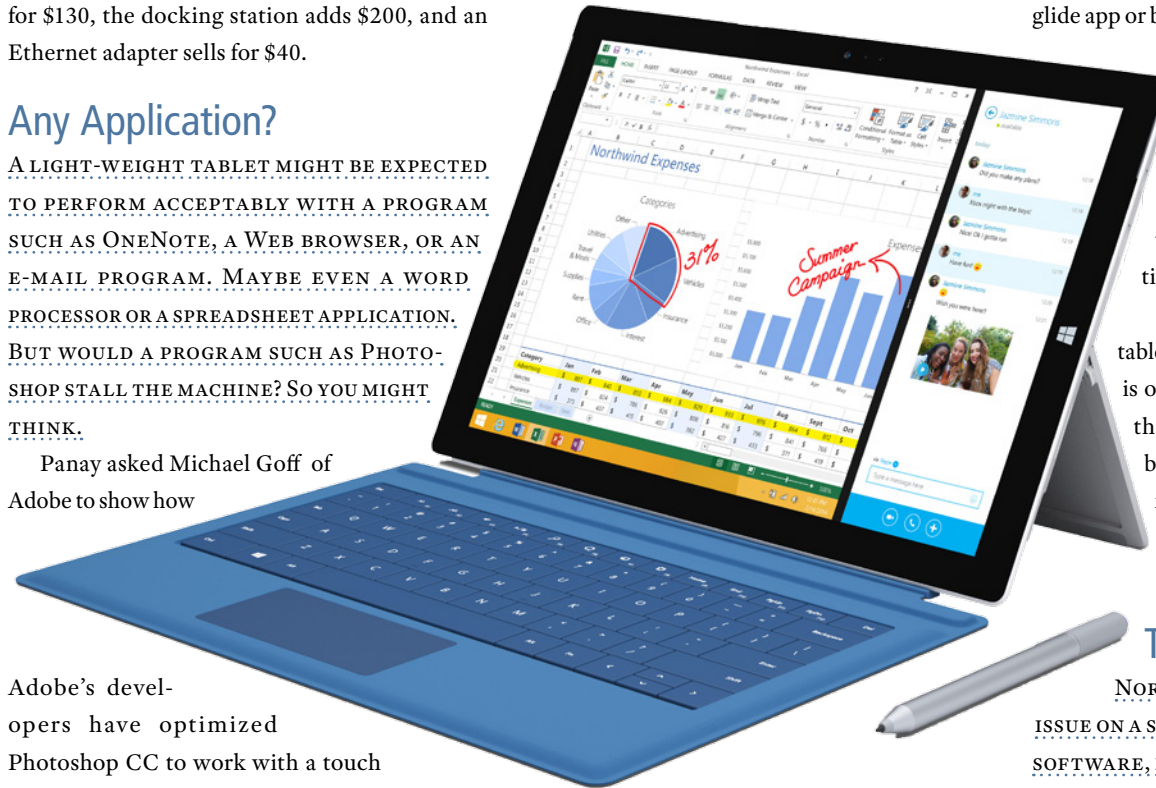
Adobe's developers have optimized Photoshop CC to work with a touch screen.

Goff launched Photoshop and from my vantage point, it appeared to be the full version of Photoshop CC, with the primary differences being larger buttons to make them easier to use on a touch



device. The expected gestures such as pinch-to-zoom are all present and Goff says that Adobe will be ready to support forthcoming HiDPI screens.

A docking station for the Surface Pro 3 allows the tablet to work like a desktop computer, complete with a full-size keyboard and mouse. But you can still reach up and touch the screen. Because I have a touch screen tablet, this is some-



thing I frequently do when I'm using a notebook computer and I'm always frustrated when the screen doesn't react to my touch.

Panay characterizes the Surface 3 as "the tablet that can replace your laptop" because it has the power of an Intel Core processor while being just 1/3 of an inch thick, having a 12-inch screen, and weighing less than 2 pounds.

Improvements?

ONE CAPABILITY THAT'S STILL MISSING FROM ALL WINDOWS-BASED TABLETS IS A GLIDE OPTION FOR THE ON-SCREEN KEYBOARD.

The superb SwiftKey app is available for Android devices, but not for Windows tablets. There are times when you don't want to attach a keyboard and when you don't

want to use a pen, but you just want to be able to type using the on-screen keyboard. An app called "TouchPal" is available for Windows tablets, but it doesn't work well enough to be usable. Where SwiftKey on an Android tablet routinely guesses the correct word, TouchPal rarely manages to come even close. This is a shortcoming that Microsoft needs to address, either by inventing its own glide app or by paying the developers of SwiftKey to port their astoundingly good app to Windows.

Sales for the Surface have been unimpressive at best even though reviews have generally been positive. I expect to see even more positive reviews now.


I'm not in the market for a Windows tablet computer because my Iconia tablet is only about 2 years old and I'm not in the market for a Windows notebook because the Lenovo is even newer, but if I was in the market for either right now, I would give serious consideration to the Surface 3.

The Future

NORMALLY I DON'T SPEND AN ENTIRE ISSUE ON A SINGLE ITEM, EITHER HARDWARE OR SOFTWARE, BUT THIS DEVICE PROVIDES WHAT I THINK IS THE CLEAREST VISION WE'VE HAD SO FAR REGARDING THE FUTURE OF COMPUTERS.

Powerful devices are now being packaged in cases that are small enough that what was once a notebook computer can now be a tablet.

When combined with docking stations, external storage (cloud-based, local network attached storage, or USB3 hard drives attached to the hub), portable keyboards, and other accessories, this tablet is one that could be a desktop replacement. Maybe we're close to having a single device that can fulfil many functions. Ω



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