

Apple's iPad: What does it offer for e-Learning?

By [Bill Brandon](#)

January 27, 2010

After months of speculation, and several weeks of feverish hype, we have now seen the Apple iPad. People asked: "Is it a laptop without a keyboard? Is it a personal media experience? Is it something completely different?" Steve Jobs himself called the iPad "the most important thing I've ever done." So what is it?

The answer, in my opinion, is "None of the above." The iPad, at this point in its evolution, is essentially a super-sized first generation iPod Touch, with the addition of a microphone, a connection for video out, and a bookstore. But that doesn't mean it's no good for e-Learning, and it also has other uses for education and training.

First look at the Apple iPad

The iPad has a 9.7-inch LED-backlit multi-touch color display, a choice of models with 16, 32, or 64 GB of Flash Memory (no slot for any sort of memory card) and "up to" ten hours of battery life in use (up to one month on standby). It is a half-inch thick and weighs 1.5 pounds.

The 16 GB basic model, available in "late March," is priced at \$499. It supports WiFi and Bluetooth. The basic 16 GB model with 3G (through AT&T only) will be available "in April" for \$629. All of the 3G models are unlocked. The 3G iPads use the new GSM micro-SIMs.

The iPad is designed for consuming a variety of media including video, news, books, and music. The user interface is very similar to the iPhone's, with the addition of an OS X-style dock for frequently used applications. The operating system is based on the iPhone OS, with some modifications that take advantage of the larger screen. There are options that include 3G wireless capability, GPS, and a plug-in keyboard. There is no camera. Built-in applications include the Safari Web browser, YouTube, iBooks, an appointment calendar, and an address book. Users will be able to purchase new iPad versions of Keynote, Pages, and Numbers individually on the App Store for \$9.99 each.

The full details, photos of the iPad, and technical specs are available online at <http://www.apple.com/ipad/features/>.

AT&T will offer two data plans for the iPad. For \$14.99 per month, users get 250 MB. Unlimited data is \$30 per month, the same as for the iPhone. There are no contracts for these data plans – users can stop at any time - and the 3G is activated on the iPad itself. Both plans include free access to AT&T WiFi hotspots. European data plans will be available by June, according to Steve Jobs' presentation.

What about learning on the iPad?

Although there were no life-changing features in the iPad, it is still a platform intended to support online content including books, magazines, games, music, and video, plus Web access. This means that, because of the bigger display, it is potentially a better platform for mobile learning than the iPhone or the iPod Touch, although the iPad (like the iPod and iPhone) does not support Flash.

Apple has released a new iPhone Developers Kit that supports the iPad. Most iPhone apps will run unmodified on the iPad, and e-Learning creators can use the Developers Kit to whip up well-designed, interactive content,

including educational games and simulations, that take advantage of the larger screen real estate, the multi-touch display, and the accelerometer in all models. The 3G models will also be capable of supporting location-based learning. Given a connection to the Internet via WiFi or 3G, social networking from the iPad should be a breeze. This is all good for asynchronous e-Learning.

Synchronous e-Learning on the iPad as shown today presents some problems. To begin with, there is no camera, so the virtual classroom is likely to be an audio-only experience. The iPad appeared, in the demonstration, to have serious limits to its windowing capacity. Because the iPad does incorporate a microphone and speakers, learners should be able to conference via Skype or Google Voice. Sooner or later, an enterprising developer will come up with a whiteboard app. Interestingly, Apple has a patent for a multimedia conference system that appears to be applicable to the iPad. If this is the case, in the near future expect to see Apple offer a Bluetooth Web cam to support the conference system.

The iPad can also support classroom instruction and performance support. It can display HD video. It has video out via the dock connector, so an instructor can display Keynote presentations from the iPad alone. Apple has negotiated deals with major publishers, and the iPad supports the open ePub format. Apparently Apple has persuaded publishers to offer their books for \$13 to \$15, although that surely will not include textbooks. Because of the capabilities of the iPad, text can include illustrations, code enhancement, and embedded video and audio files.

Summary

While Apple's announcement today wasn't a life-changing event, it has added a potential new platform for mobile learning, for social networking, and for content creation in Weblogs and wikis. It also provides content creators with another channel for interactive applications. It is not a "Kindle killer," but the open ePub format avoids being locked into a proprietary box. ePub also means that those who develop documents for upload to the iPad will not have to pay for conversion of those documents to a proprietary format (as is the case if you want to send a document to your Kindle).

Significant deficiencies for e-Learning on the iPad include the absence of a camera and the continued lack of support for Flash. The monthly charge for 3G service adds up to \$360 per year onto the cost of ownership for the device. Many who already own an iPhone, iPod Touch, or netbook will decide that the iPad is redundant – that their current device(s) already does everything the iPad does. Other issues for e-Learning designers and managers may include that it is too big to fit in a pocket, it is too small to be a practical laptop replacement, and it lacks a telephone. The iPad will also have to pass muster with corporate IT departments, who will have the same kinds of security and support questions that they had about the iPhone.

It is also possible that iPad 2.0 will address all of these issues and overcome them. We'll keep you plugged in with developments, and with user experience once the iPad launches.

Expect to hear much more about the iPad at [mLearnCon](#) in San Diego, June 15-17, 2010!

