
THE ISAD AND THE DWINDLE FIRE

by Jeremy Fonte

Smartphones are essentially out-of-date 6-12 months after you purchase them - and now, with the advent of tablet computing, there is a second device category that has an extremely short shelf life. iOS and Android-based tablets are remarkably successful devices that have a wonderfully appealing (and well-marketed) presence in modern culture. But does the hardware really expire in a year?

Of course not. These devices are closely integrated with digital product marketplaces - apps, movies, games, music - and it is the content that defines the flexibility and utility of a given device. Windows PCs ruled the computing world for a long time, and every couple of months the hardware received a solid upgrade, leaving buyers in a perpetual state of lagging behind the latest and greatest. Now, PCs are almost a commodity - you can buy a laptop for \$300 to \$400 if you're just doing light office work and web browsing. Exhibiting a hardware race that harkens to the olden days of desktop PCs, Apple's iPad and Amazon's Kindle Fire now rule the tablet universe. Why? Because they have the best content, by far, of any mobile computing device - plus capable and impressive hardware specs.

I have Amazon Prime - a great service that gives me unlimited videos to stream, a free book a month from the Kindle Owner's Lending Library, and free 2-day shipping. I also have an Amazon Cloud Player account. These services have made me greatly prefer using my Kindle Fire HD over my iPad 2. The iPad has plenty of power and is a nice device, but the built-in content on the Kindle Fire is vastly superior. What use is a "retina display" when my Kindle Fire HD does everything I need in a tablet, better than it's competitors, for less than half the price?

Now is the time to learn from the mistakes of the PC-era. A thirst for the latest specs will simply lead to constant frustration. The only real threat to old tablet hardware is the end of support from new apps and OS upgrades - Apple gives a device a few years of OS upgrades and then stops applying them to the older hardware.

If you don't want to be iSad, take a look at which device has the best content for your interests and go from there. The iPad can do just about anything, but if you mainly want to consume media (books, videos, music), consider the Kindle Fire line - there's even an 8.9" model now, which is less than an inch smaller than the iPad - and about half the price of the "iPad with Retina Display".