



Android or iPads?

Guidelines for the selection of tablets for use in UK schools

The use of tablets in schools is becoming increasingly popular. This guide is intended to explain some of the differences between iPads and Android tablets, exploring how the different platforms have different advantages and disadvantages for use in schools.

Familiarity, Usability and Openness

While many people might assume that students would be more familiar with iPads, according to Kantar UK (a market research company) the Android system has had at least 15% more market share than the Apple iOS system since January 2012.

The user interface of both systems is easy to use. For teachers who have little experience with either system, there is a multitude of user guides for both iPads (e.g.

http://portables.about.com/od/newsandviews/ss/iPad-tutorials.htm) and Android tablets (e.g. <u>http://www.wikihow.com/Use-an-Android-Tablet</u>).

In terms of size we recommend 7" tablets – we have observed these were a large enough size for children to easily use individually and that bigger tablets were difficult to handle and use by younger students. If the children are older and will be predominantly using the tablets in pairs you may want to consider a slightly larger tablet size.

The main difference between iPads and Android tablets is their level of openness. iPads are built exclusively by Apple, will only allow apps installed approved by Apple and are harder to load personal content onto. Android tablets are developed by a range of manufacturers and are more open in terms of having apps and content loaded onto them. The main outcome of this difference is that by purchasing iPads you are restricted to the Apple infrastructure which has implications in terms of cost, content and integration with other technologies.



Apps

Apps are perhaps the most important part of the tablet experience; apps are the programs and games your students will use to undertake educationally meaningful activities.

The iPad and Android app stores are of a similar size. However, there are a number of big differences between the available apps when considering them from an educational perspective.

The first difference is that iPad app developers tend to charge for their apps whereas Android apps are often free. The main implication of this is that while you have to pay for them, iPads tend to have a broader range of high quality apps. We've observed that the best educational apps tend to be on the iPad system... which could swing the balance when considering what platform to select.

The two images below show the "Education" categories from the iPad and Android app stores. The iPad app store separates the apps in age appropriateness which makes it easier to find apps that are suitable for the student you are teaching.



One final point on apps is that the majority of free Android apps are advert-supported. It is important to bear in mind that within some apps there were adverts that could be considered inappropriate for children (e.g. for online dating), particularly within a school context. This further





Cost and Device Quality

iPads are expensive. At the time or writing, the most basic iPad Air 2 costs £399, the most basic iPad mini 3 costs £319. In comparison, the Google Nexus 9 (roughly equivalent to the iPad Air) costs £319 and the Google Nexus 7 (roughly equivalent to the iPad mini) costs £170. This is a significant cost difference when scaled up for an entire school. Additionally, replacement costs, insurance and accessories are all cheaper for Android devices than they are for iPads. Making a selection of tablets can have long-term implications as teachers, IT technicians and the support network will all become comfortable with a particular system. Changing your mind in a few years time could be extremely expensive in terms of both time and money.

Top-end Android tablets (such as the Google Nexus or Samsung Galaxy Tab range) have a similar build quality to iPads. If this is deemed to be too extravagant, there are a variety of more basic Android tablets that have lower technical specifications but could still offer value to schools, particularly where IT budgets are being squeezed or in order to undertake a smaller pilot of tablet devices. In terms of a cheaper Android device, we would recommend the Tesco Hudl2 (currently £129).

In addition to the tablet costs there are broader costs to be considered with regards to deploying tablets in schools. The first is their replacements – operating on a similar time-scale to PCs, it is to be expected that the tablets would need replacing every 3-5 years. Furthermore, classroom-wide use of these tablets would likely necessitate the use of a Mobile Device Management (MDM) system to control the installation of apps. Having an MDM system is important as it determines the content and applications students can use – without one this increases the likelihood of them being able to access inappropriate content. Such systems can cost a substantial amount of





money regardless of whether they are used for Android tablets or iPads.

Integration with other classroom systems

In order to be most effective, tablets need to integrate with the other technologies you use in the classroom. One of the commonly used technologies tablets can integrate with is large wall-mounted displays (e.g. SMARTboards), allowing content to be displayed individually to students or shared with a class. Previously only iPads had this functionality through AppleTV. However, with the advent of Google's Chromecast (amongst others) Android tablets can now broadcast their screens to large displays. However, both of these technologies (AppleTV and Chromecast) were designed for the consumer market and as such lack educational features such as highlighting tools.

The other concern is integrating the tablets with the other technologies the school currently uses. Windows PCs and Apple Macs have different abilities to integrate with iPads and Android tablets. In order to optimize the benefits, the iPad needs to be used with an Apple Mac. Android tablets typically integrate better with Windows PCs. Both types of tablets **will** work with both types of computers but with some added difficulties. For example, transferring files from an Apple Mac onto an Android tablet requires the installation of some additional software which is not as easy to use as the equivalent Windows program.

Given the portability of tablets, they are best used with wireless Internet, with some apps (but not all) requiring wifi to use all functionalities. Not all schools, particularly those based in older buildings, have sufficiently good wifi across the buildings to use tablets and there can often be wifi blackspots. This should definitely be checked before ordering hundreds of tablets!

Purpose of the technology

One thing we have yet to discuss is why do you want to buy tablets? This may be a strange question to address last but there are a number





If the tablets are going to be mainly used for reading, e-readers offer a much better option. With the basic Kindle only costing £69 (without special offers) and the Kindle Fire 7inch costing £119, there is a substantial cost saving. More to the point, these e-readers are better designed to support reading, featuring a longer battery life, glare-resistant screens and connection to a variety of bookstores.

Tablets can be challenging for children to type on due to the letter keys being on a small flat surface and also the fact that the keyboard and screen share the same surface making positioning difficult. This means that for typing-based activities, tablets are less than ideal. There are a variety of better options for word processing activities including laptops, PCs and, if portability is a necessity, netbooks.

Tablets can offer a lot of potential added value to schools but are not suitable for use in all contexts and the choice of tablets and their integration into school needs to be carefully planned and monitored in order to ensure this value is successfully achieved. An example of best practice in this respect is to allow teachers to explore and discover uses for themselves early on, which could be audio recording examples of speaking in literacy lessons or providing an alternative medium for practicing previously taught concepts in mathematics. For any school looking to deploy tablets across their classrooms we would recommend encouraging teachers to regularly share and learn how their colleagues are using the tablets in informal gatherings.

About this Guide

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