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iPad: The future of personal computing

Approximately 14.8 million iPads were sold in 2010, with 7.3 million being sold in the last quarter of 2010. One year ago, industry experts predicted far smaller numbers, ranging from 3 million to 9 million. In 2010, iPad sales were so high that its revenues actually surpassed Apple's portable computer revenues last year.

Earlier this month, the iPad 2 was released. It sold out in the United States during the first weekend, with analysts estimating that between 500,000 to 600,000 units were sold. In total, 70 percent of the purchases were made by first-time buyers.

By the end of 2011, sales of the iPad 2 will no doubt surpass the original iPad's. I'm going to go out on a limb and predict that by the end of 2011, Apple will have sold over 22 million iPad 2s.

Last Tuesday, I joined the throngs of iPad 2 owners. Nearly one and a half weeks after the iPad 2 was released, I stood in line at the Apple Store at 7 a.m. on a Tuesday with approximately 100 other anxious Rochestarians. Three hours later, I left triumphantly with my new iPad 2 in hand, affectionately naming it "Dorothy" once it emerged from its packaging.

Now some have asked me why I bothered to buy Dorothy when I already own "Alice," my first generation iPad. The reason is simple: I am tired of constantly battling my family for access to Alice. My husband and 9-year-old are now regularly reading books using the Kindle app. And both of my kids love to play games on the iPad. So I decided to buy Dorothy for my own use and gave Alice to my family. Now we're a two iPad family, as I predict many families will be within the next year or so.

I am very confident in this prediction, given that my forecast regarding the original iPad, made last year in this very column just a few weeks before it was released, came to fruition. In my column published on March 16, 2010, I concluded that the iPad would change the way we obtained and consumed information:

"The iPad will not fill an already existing niche — it will create a new one. It will be ever-present in our homes, during daily commutes and on airplanes. The iPad will be prevalent where people tend to read books or magazines, but will be far less visible at locations where people mostly work or socialize. It will be our conduit

for media consumption and our interface of choice. The iPad is a game changer of epic proportions — of that I am sure."

I also asserted, correctly, I believe, that the iPad would not replace laptops or smart phones:

"It won't be a portable work station. Laptops will continue to serve that function far better than the iPad. The iPad will suffice for composing e-mails and short documents but, for most businesses, laptops and desktop computers will remain the interface of choice. Likewise, the iPad will not replace the iPhone. Smart phones will continue to function as miniature connectors to the information super highway. Their smaller size and GPS functionality make smart phones ideal for certain tasks that the larger, less portable iPad will not be able to duplicate."

Of course, I wasn't the only one to make these predictions. Many industry experts and analysts came to the same conclusion — just as others claimed, vehemently and incorrectly, that the iPad would be a tremendous failure.

Industry experts aside, even my decidedly non-techie husband accurately predicted the iPad's importance last April when, after he'd had a few minutes alone with the iPad, he handed it back to me and said, "I totally get it now. In a few years, every member of the family will have one of these and will use it as their own personal computer. And people will pass iPads around the family room like a magazine or book."

My husband was right. The iPad and other tablet computers will soon be mainstays in most middle-class American homes and will be the personal computing device of choice. Mark my words — within two years, at least one member of your family will own one, if not more.

Nicole Black is of counsel to Fiandach & Fiandach in Rochester. She co-authors the ABA book Social Media for Lawyers: the Next Frontier, co-authors Criminal Law in New York, a West-Thomson treatise, and is currently writing a book about cloud computing for lawyers that will be published by the ABA in early 2011. She is the founder of lawtechTalk.com and speaks regularly at conferences regarding the intersection of law and technology. She publishes four legal blogs and can be reached at nblack@nicoleblackesq.com.



By **NICOLE BLACK**

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Columnist