



Amazon launches new £50 and £80 Fire tablets with Alexa digital assistant

Amazon hopes its low-cost, feature-rich Fire 7 and HD 8 tablets continue to buck market trend thanks to improved battery life, screen and storage

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Amazon has launched two new budget Fire tablets, with one costing just £50, and has brought its Alexa voice assistant to tablets in the UK.

The new thinner and lighter £50 Fire 7, which has an improved screen, longer battery life and more storage, hopes to continue the success of the previous Fire 7 tablet, which won plaudits for balancing low cost with features. At the same time, Amazon has launched a new version of its Fire HD 8 tablet, with similar improvements and a lower starting price of £80.

Kevin Keith, Amazon's general manager for Fire tablets, said: "The Fire 7 for under £50 shocked a lot of folks, and became the bestselling tablet we ever built. We found most of the folks who buy our devices do so for entertainment, or what I like to call digital snacking: social media, light email, apps, games and music. So we've really focused on those areas."

Both tablets now come with Amazon's Alexa virtual assistant in the UK - the same one available through the Fire TV set-top boxes and Amazon's Echo devices - allowing users to get information, control smart-home devices and play media with voice commands.

The Fire 7 and Fire HD 8 will also be available in “kids editions”, costing £100 and £130 respectively, coming with a large rubber protective case, more storage, a two-year guarantee and a one year subscription to Fire for kids unlimited. The kids editions do not come with Alexa enabled and have extensive parental control features, no advertising or in-app purchases and thousands of child-friendly books, videos and games, which have seen them become popular with parents.



The new Fire HD 8 looks like a larger Fire 7 with similar colours but a larger, better screen and longer battery life. Photograph: Amazon

With its Fire tablets, Amazon has found a niche and by successfully populating the market with low-cost but feature-rich tablets it has undercut the competition by hundreds of pounds in some cases. While the majority of the tablet computer market has seen sales decreasing, with even market-leader Apple and its iPad struggling to persuade people to upgrade, Amazon’s tablet business has steadily improved, with double-digit growth in its media-positioned tablets.

Francisco Jeronimo, research director of European mobile devices for IDC said: “Price is key in the low-end market, but consumers prefer to buy from a known brand than from unknown Chinese manufacturers. Amazon’s brand coupled with the selling power of having the world’s largest online channel gives it a big advantage.

“At the same time, while some things costing £50 are considered disposable, gadgets such as tablets are not, and so Amazon providing pretty good customer service makes them ideal for what many people want to do with a tablet.”

According to data from IDC, 174.8m tablets were shipped globally in 2016, a figure down 15.6% from 2015. Amazon was the third-largest tablet manufacturer that year, shipping 26.2m tablets (up 98.8% from 2015), while market leader Apple shipped 42.6m iPads in 2016 (down 14.2% year-on-year) and second-placed Samsung shipped 26.6m tablets (down 20.5% year-on-year).

Amazon’s £50 Fire 7 has been particularly popular, seen as both an impulse purchase and a good second tablet or computer, often given to kids or used in situations where a device costing £400 or more might seem a risky option. Despite its low cost, the Fire 7 has also proved to be durable and performed well above expectations considering its price tag.

The Amazon Fire 7 and HD 8 tablets will be available to pre-order from Wednesday and ship on 7 June. Amazon will roll out the entertainment-optimised version of Alexa, including interactive cards, to more of its Fire tablet devices in the UK in June through a software update.

Amazon Fire 7 (2015) tablet review: a lot of tablet for just £50

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