



Daniel Nye Griffiths, Contributor

At the intersection of entertainment, technology and business.

TECH | 6/19/2012 @ 1:40PM | 1,578 views

IDC Analyst: Microsoft's Surface Sizzle Needs Win8 Steak

Francisco Jeronimo, IDC's European Research Manager for [Mobile](#) Devices, has commented on the announcement of [Microsoft's](#) Surface tablet.

Jeronimo noted that the device's killer app would be Office integration – or would need to be. For better or worse, Microsoft Office is still the dominant professional software, and every tablet in the market so far has had to make a more or less kludgy peace with Office – apart from tablets running Windows 7, which have, it is fair to say, not set the market on fire.



The Surface tablet - Microsoft is still not giving up on stylus input, although it's changed a lot since my Toshiba Pocket PC. (Image credit: Getty Images via @daylife)

Hey there, Samsung Series 7 tablet.

Looks a mite lonely there. What's that you say? Your friend the HP Slate is coming over? Series 7, I just don't know how to tell you this...

If Microsoft are able to deliver a genuinely superior Office experience, this could be a real selling point – and the amount of time spent promoting text input methods is Monday's announcement was telling.

Jeronimo, however, is still waiting for the other shoe to drop on the software:

Despite some interesting hardware features, very little was said about the software, the user interface, the user experience and the ecosystem. Some of these were discussed by Microsoft during earlier Windows 8 presentations, but it needs to start bringing together the different pieces of the Windows 8 story. What makes the iPad the most successful tablet on the market is the software, the applications and the added value that end users perceive from that.

The reason why Android tablets need to be cheap is because they do not deliver as much when it comes to value. Besides [Apple](#), no other manufacturer has captured significant market share in this segment.[...] I was expecting to hear from Microsoft today about how the Surface delivers an integrated experience with the PC, what additional services or features are available and how the Microsoft ecosystem is growing to be a real alternative to the iPad and Android tablets.

Hardware-wise Microsoft has done a very good job of launching a device that is exciting and different, but it needs to deliver what it has been promising with the new Windows 8 strategy. Consumers will not buy, and specially not pay a premium for, the Surface until

they understand the additional value they can get compared with the iPad and how the device integrates with their PCs, gaming consoles, Windows Phones, etc. The entire ecosystem — and not unlinked pieces of it — is what will make Microsoft's proposition attractive.

Microsoft has also shown how serious it is about controlling the hardware. The Surface could have been announced with any of its partners, but by designing and launching its own branded tablet, Microsoft is clearly refocusing its approach on a more closed strategy. And if that is the case the company will need to take a different route and to acquire a manufacturer that knows and controls the entire supply chain.

There are probably things there which one might take issue with – for some, it will be dismissal of Android tablets, for others the suggestion that the old enemy's tablet offering is exciting and different (it has a kickstand! what do you want, blood?) Nonetheless, the point is a good one.

It is not necessarily a good sign when most of the excitement around your product comes from the accessories, not least because accessories are relatively easy to imitate. A screen cover that turns into a keyboard is indubitably ginchy, but is it sufficiently ginchier than, say, a [Zaggmate](#) case for the iPad?

Microsoft has advantages – that many, many people who currently covet an iPad spend a lot of their time using Office. That even those who covet an iPad may well use a Windows PC for general computing, and that even those who already own a Mac may well have an Xbox 360 under their TVs. Windows Phone has been much-mocked for its lack of a software ecosystem, but in the PC and console fields Microsoft already has an ecosystem – it just happens to be one, largely, that other people have physically made. Or rather, which have been assembled in the same Chinese factories where the Xbox 360 is made, but to the designs and under the brand of different PC makers. Nifty integration – such as the SmartGlass shown at E3 – could offset the lack of Windows RT apps out of the blocks.

Next: IOU a tablet

There has been some gentle mockery of the ways in which the Surface launch event resembled or did not resemble an Apple keynote – but one way in which it did not was the release date. The Surface tablet is pegged to the release of Windows 8 and Windows RT, which should mean late Q3 or Q4. A release of the Pro version 90 days later would miss Christmas but be in time for the bonfire of remaining IT budget before year end.

I'm just saying.

Apple have taken to showing off their latest pretties, getting the assembled notables a whooping' and a-hollerin', and then announcing, as if as an afterthought, that they will be available in stores the next day. Microsoft's presentation, conversely, was more of an earnest request not to buy an iPad just yet, delivered in the form of an IOU. It is more than possible that Ballmer and company wisely decided that they would not be able to keep the secret until release, as the spymasters of Infinite Loop largely manage to, and so launched early and on their terms. However, they will need to provide some further and better particulars soon. This is a brave new world for Microsoft, and having decided to build the hardware on their own terms, they now need to deliver more convincingly than their last Windows 8 tablet reveal at Build in 2011.

Some pricing details would be nice, as well. No doubt this is being discussed with interest between Microsoft and their OEM partners.

This article is available online at:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnyegriffiths/2012/06/19/idc-analyst-microsofts-surface-sizzle-needs-win8-steak/>