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Jim Boomer • Aug. 15, 2013



You have a tablet. Hey, maybe you're on your second or third generation. And you're still trying to figure out exactly how this device can make you more productive in the workplace. You're not alone. Apple re-defined an entire product category when it introduced the iPad and, in the process, they sold over 100 million devices (and sparked countless competitive offerings).

Today, many tablet owners are pondering the question, “Is it just a tech toy? Or is it a

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(including remote desktop connection apps) that allow them to get their accounting work done from their tablet. However, most will agree that we aren't able to completely ditch the laptop or desktop computer in lieu of a tablet for a lot of the work we have to accomplish.

Is it a Tablet or a Really Small Laptop?

We are seeing a growing adoption of the Microsoft Surface with Windows 8 Pro. Accountants like it because it gives them a more of a natural link to the Microsoft world where they live. However, there is also another debate growing around this device, “Is it really a tablet? Or, is it just an extremely small laptop?”

Regardless of the answer to that question, it appears Microsoft is on the right path. If they can figure out a few glaring issues like battery life, they might find themselves in the thick of the mobile device space. And I don't know that people really care what category the device falls into if it meets their needs.

It's All About the Apps

When it comes to mobile devices, it truly is all about the apps. The device itself is useless without the apps that unleash the power of the device and allow users to accomplish countless tasks. And it's this very fact that leads me to believe that it's too soon to make a call on the toy vs. tool debate.

There is no shortage of apps we use on a daily basis to make our personal lives easier and it's only a matter of time before the business apps arrive. The majority of the software providers in our profession have some type of mobile strategy in place today.

Where they are in the execution of that strategy varies, but we will see several new apps hit the app stores with the specific purpose of making mobile devices an

integral and useful part of accountants' daily lives. For this reason alone, the way

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applications to accomplish tasks and won't have to rely as much on "work-around" solutions.

I recently moderated a panel at the AICPA Practitioners Symposium and TECH+ Conference in Las Vegas. On that panel were two firms that had rolled out iPads to every employee in the firm. One provided tablets as part of the standard technology toolkit to every employee and the devices are owned by the firm.

The other gave them as year-end gifts so they are now employee property and they gave employees a choice to use them for work or not. While each firm's story differed in the business drivers behind the rollout and the method in which the tablets made their way into the hands of employees, these firms obviously see potential or they wouldn't have made the significant investment that they did. And they wouldn't be continuing to invest further in custom mobile applications to make the devices more useful to employees.

So bottom line on the tech toy vs. tool question – the jury is still out. I believe it's in your best interest to stay in the game and watch the evolution continue on – one app at a time.

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