

Year of the tablet

 By [Toby Shapshak](#)

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If 2010 was the year of the apps (as I [wrote](#) this time last year), then 2011 will be the year of the tablet. Last year was supposed to be the year of the tablet (after Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer showed off an HP Slate in January) but it was really the year of the iPad.



Apple sold more than 10-million iPads last year (giving it 95% of the nascent tablet market) and iPads accounted for 17% of Apple's revenue in the first quarter (to December). The iPhone contributed 39%.

We'll also see a lot more on apps and cloud-based computing, as well as the rise and rise and rise of Facebook and Twitter.

So, the top trends for 2011 will be:

1. **Tablets:**

The iPad showed that this new category of mobile computer has a place. Samsung's Galaxy Tab and BlackBerry's Playbook, Dell's Streak and HP's soon-to-run WebOS tablets will all give the slick iPad a run for its money. But the competition will need to raise its game.

2. **Cloud computing:**

The server-based way of working will go from strength to strength this year. Cell C last week announced a new service, called MyTools, to let its subscribers manage their contacts, call records and voicemail through a web-based service - something it claims is a world-first for a mobile operator.

3. **The Social Network:**

That the film about Facebook's origins is in Oscar contention (with eight nominations) is as revealing as our new-

found joy for online socialising. There'll be more Facebooking, emailing, tweeting, as social networking becomes even more mainstream. Check-in services like Foursquare and Gowalla will be eclipsed by Facebook Places as location becomes all-important.

4. **Apple iOS4 vs Android vs Windows Phone 7:**

The three major cellphone operating systems are going head-to-head this year. Apple's iPhone OS is the oldest at four years, Android is two behind it and Windows less than four months but already the battle lines are drawn over which will be top dog. It's good news for consumers (isn't competition always?) and cloud-based computing features in all three.

5. **Chrome OS:**

The Google alternative to Windows will make it's long-awaited appearance this year and it's going set the cat amongst the pigeons. Will it be a viable alternative to Windows as a laptop/desktop alternative? Or is it just going to be the operating system of choice on netbooks? Much is expected of Chrome OS, given the joyride with Android - which Google gives away free to smartphone manufacturers and which runs the current crop of non-Apple tablets, and saw 300,000 activations a day by late last year.

6. **Broadband takes off:**

Faster wireless broadband, and cheaper wired broadband - a perennial Christmas wishlist from geeks and power users. MWEB's uncapped ADSL and Cell C's fast new network have spurred on competition. Vodacom is probably the largest seller of laptops, with USB data dongles, and is the largest internet service provider (ISP) in the country. Even though Telkom, and sadly Neotel too, are going through pain, the cellular operators will roll out innovative services and (hopefully) cheaper access.

7. **Solid-state hard drive:**

Using similar storage to those USB flash drives, they are much faster to access data and use much less electricity. They therefore speed up a computer and give a vital boost to its battery performance. Kingston, which makes its own range, predict that all mid- to top-tier laptops will come standard with them by 2012. You'll see these expensive options appear, but prices will fall as demand takes off.

8. **Motion gaming:**

Nintendo's Wii showed there's life after hard-core gaming - for a previously untapped casual gaming market. The Xbox Kinect and PlayStation Move are, respectively, Microsoft and Sony's powerful responses. Gaming just got more energetic, and more fun.

9. **3D:**

After a slow start, 3D TV sales may (and the word is may) go up. As innovative as the technology is, there is still a significant barrier to entry: the 3D glasses themselves. Nintendo has released a handheld console, the 3DS, which does without them. Expect this trend to grow.

10. **Apps, apps, apps:**

Last year was a stellar year for these mini-programs that run on smartphones. They are going from strength to strength as Android, BlackBerry, Windows and Symbian's app marketplaces grow and more are available.

11. **Goodbye feature phones?**

The costs of smartphones keep dropping and so-called feature phones may be usurped by these more powerful handheld computers, certainly with Android being given away for free. Cell C CEO Lars Reichelt recently said eight out of 10 South Africans will be using smartphones by 2015.

It's early days but 2011 has already seen noteworthy growth in some key areas - especially mobile computing.

Part of this column originally appeared in The Times newspaper and has been republished and expanded with permission.

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