Tablet PC: An Overview

White Paper

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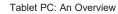
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Introduction

The Tablet PC is a next-generation PC—the evolution of the notebook PC. Running the Microsoft® Windows® XP Tablet PC Edition operating system, which is a superset of Windows XP Professional, the Tablet PC provides all the performance and features of today's notebook PCs, and then some. Advanced handwriting and speech recognition capabilities, a natural interface for entering data using a digital pen in addition to your keyboard, an ultra-light form factor, the ability to run full versions of standard Windows applications--these and other features of the Tablet PC open exciting new options for mobile computing.

This paper provides an overview of Windows XP Tablet PC Edition features, the multiple Tablet PC form factors available from original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), and considerations for deploying the Tablet PC in the enterprise.

Driving a New Generation of PC

Notebook PCs have been among the fastest growing category of computing devices, and for good reason. Increasingly, more and more users spend time away from their desks, whether they are "road warriors," such as sales managers or senior executives who travel frequently, or "corridor warriors," who spend hours a day in the office but are away from their desks attending meetings.

In spite of the productivity benefits of today's notebook PCs, typical mobile workers often spend a significant amount of time gathering and distributing information on paper. Microsoft research indicates that the typical manager or knowledge worker attends 40 meetings a month or more and jots down literally hundreds of notes on paper. Whether it's a phone number, a tentative date for the next meeting, or notes on a presentation, knowledge workers spend many hours manually transcribing and merging handwritten information with computer-based applications.

A major reason knowledge workers spend time transcribing paper-based notes is the simple fact that they do not have PCs with them in key situations throughout the business day. Desktops are immobile and even notebook PCs are routinely not used in business meetings. One reason for this is the negative social aspect associated with laptop use in meetings. The clicking of keyboards can be distracting and the presence of an open laptop screen often creates a literal and figurative barrier between the user and others in the room, which impedes communication.

The Tablet PC's light weight and innovative form factor overcome such barriers. The mobility and versatility of the Tablet PC enables users take their PCs with them and use them in new places and in new ways.

Tablet PC: The Next-Generation Mobile PC

In response to the evolving needs of computer users, Microsoft and its hardware partners have developed the Tablet PC, a next-generation mobile business PC that will be available from leading computer makers in the second half of 2002. Tablet PCs are full-featured laptops running the Windows XP Tablet PC Edition operating system. The Tablet PC has all the capabilities of current business-class laptops, including attached or detachable keyboards, docking stations that enable the use of common peripheral devices such as CD ROM drives, printers, and external monitors, and the ability to run all Windows-based applications, including Microsoft Office XP suite.

Microsoft is partnering with a range of hardware vendors, including ACER, Compaq, Fujitsu, NEC, Toshiba, and ViewSonic, among others, to manufacture Tablet PCs running Windows XP Tablet PC Edition. Tablet PCs will be offered in a variety of form factors. Some will be "pure tablets" without an integrated keyboard while others will be "convertible" tablets with more conventional clamshell laptop designs. Convertibles will be equipped with rotating screens that allow them to convert to a tablet. All Tablet PCs will be very light—ranging from two to three pounds—and will have all the features needed by mobile users, including long battery life, great displays, networking capability, and integrated support for peripherals through USB or FireWire ports. Tablet PCs will also support docking stations and a variety of external peripherals.

The following provides a closer look at specific features of the Windows XP Tablet PC Edition operating system.

Built on Windows XP Professional

Windows XP Tablet PC Edition is a complete superset of Windows XP Professional, delivering the features and performance of the latest Microsoft operating system for PCs, while offering additional capabilities that deliver enhanced performance to the user. The following chart illustrates the foundation on which the Tablet PC platform was designed and the added features it offers, including advanced handwriting and speech recognition, rich inking capabilities, and features that enhance mobility.

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