



**Erik Kain**, Contributor

I write about video games, nerd culture, and social tech.

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## Microsoft Takes Aim At Apple With Business-Friendly 'Surface' Tablet

*[Microsoft](#) is doing its best to make Windows 8 as attractive as possible, especially to business users, in an attempt to carve out a space in an [Apple](#)-dominated tablet market with its Surface tablet.*



Microsoft unveiled its new Windows 8-touting Surface tablet yesterday.

That Microsoft is manufacturing its own device has some eyebrows raised – after all, Microsoft is a software company first and foremost. What does this move mean for the company's hardware partners?

Of course, Microsoft has ventured into the hardware arena before.

Its Zune was mildly successful, though it has been essentially devoured by Windows Phone now. The Xbox and Xbox 360 have been far more lucrative ventures, with the Xbox 360 [effectively winning the current generation console wars in the United States](#). (Though I'd still [recommend the PlayStation 3](#).)

“This product line marks a crucial pivot in Microsoft’s product strategy,” [writes Sarah Rotman Epps](#), a Senior Analyst at [Forrester Research](#). “It blends the Xbox first-party hardware model with the Windows ecosystem model. It puts the focus on the consumer rather than the enterprise. And it lets Microsoft compete with vertically-integrated Apple on more even ground.”

### **The new Surface is designed for business users.**

The integration of a keyboard that doubles as a screen cover is a brilliant touch, though how that keyboard actually functions will be key.

Meanwhile, the ability to stand the tablet up on a built-in kickstand and use the device like a laptop is something that should appeal to anyone with an inclination toward productivity. Touch-screen computing can be enormously fun and fluid, but if you want to get anything done (like writing a blog post) a keyboard is essential. There’s no app for that.

“The physical keyboard, the lack of a camera and the focus on the MS Office environment shows that Microsoft is targeting the business segment,” writes Francisco Jeronimo of IDC Research, “where it can differentiate and take some share from Apple.”

Windows 8 has been designed with touch-based computing in mind, but the inclusion of a keyboard means that Microsoft is keeping an eye on its core Office suite, which needs to make the leap to tablets in an era increasingly dominated by cloud computing.

### **Microsoft is putting pressure on its partners.**

Unlike Apple, Microsoft will not be the only company manufacturing a Windows 8 tablet. By producing their own flagship tablet, the company sets the bar higher for its partner hardware manufacturers.

This is actually in keeping with the Windows Phone requirements, which set hardware requirements higher than on Android devices, guaranteeing a certain quality level.

That’s long been Apple’s domain, actually. While we’ve always been able to purchase a high-end PC that dwarfs anything on offer from Apple, at least with Apple you’d know that the hardware you purchased would run the software and operating system adequately. With a PC, quality varies a great deal from one box to the next.

Microsoft is probably not looking to make Surface an iPad killer; rather, the new tablet will serve as a demonstration of what Windows 8 can do, and a baseline for future Windows 8 tablets from HP, [Dell](#), and other hardware manufacturers.

### **Microsoft is trying to make quality a priority, while at the same time bringing the sexy back to its products.**

Certainly the [colorful Metro-style Windows 8 OS](#) is a bold new look for the company. While the Surface tablet is not yet on store shelves and hasn’t run the review gauntlet yet, it also looks like a promising new piece of hardware. Meanwhile, the [Nokia Windows 8 phones](#) have been [widely praised by users and critics alike](#), though the Windows Phone market share remains stubbornly low.

By focusing on a unified aesthetic (the Metro-style UI) and attractive hardware design, Microsoft hopes to lend its products some of the sex-appeal that drives Apple sales.

Will this new focus on quality work for Microsoft?

Maybe, maybe not. Certainly improved integration between Microsoft devices

would be a strong selling point in the Surface's favor. Linking your tablet, PC, Xbox and Windows Phone makes each product more valuable. Whether Microsoft will make this a simple, seamless process for casual users remains to be seen.

But one thing is certain: competitive pressure from Apple and [Google](#) in both desktop and mobile computing, and competition from Nintendo and Sony in gaming, have fueled all these moves by Microsoft. The more competition in tablets, gaming, and mobile the better. A better Microsoft tablet will spur Apple to new heights, which will in turn inspire Android and Windows device manufacturers to innovate and improve.

In the end, so long as the patent wars don't stifle creativity, consumers win with better products and lower prices. That's why I always root for the new thing, whether or not new ends up meaning better.

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