I've got an iPad Pro yesterday

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When iPad Pro came out, I got really excited. The price was fairly high, but this model seemed to include all features I always wanted from a tablet.

My priorities when making a tablet purchase:

- big, high resolution screen. Should mean no more eyeballing of A4/American Letter size documents on small screen with scaled down fonts; also more trees saved on printing down things I'd only read once.
- decent pencil for drawing
- a lot of memory for podcasts, trainings and audiobooks

I got iPad Pro. It is my first tablet ever. Up until this point I felt like buying a tablet would be a total waste of money, since the features from the list are pretty essential for my usual workflow.

Decision process

I considered Surface Pro 4, but didn't like the keyboard. Stylus was fine, but somehow I felt there was less apps which could take advantage of it. Frankly, when Surface Pro 4 came out, Microsoft store I went to had 0 drawing apps to try the stylus with. I ended up drawing some doodles in PowerPoint.

I also didn't like the idea of using Windows, since it'd make things more complex too me, as I'm already using some of Apple stuff.

And so that's pretty much it about iPad Pro vs the rest of the world. Why not iPad Air 2?

When I looked at the tablet vs. document sizes in the recent years, I had the feeling that we are not getting things right, since most of the PDFs and books are still formatted as if they were to be printed. Your code's API documentation has 700 pages – of course you're going to just print it!

Right now when I take a random PDF and open it on iPad Air 2, the 2nd biggest tablet after Pro, the letters will most likely be small, and everything will require swiping the screen and panning the documents around, which makes me dizzy, always.

So yes, paper is still around, and it seems like we haven't yet figured out that PDFs could in fact be formatted for a different screen sizes to deliver something readable for the user. So here I am – instead of buying compact tablet where everything I read would fit nicely, I go with hyper-resolution monster.

Buying iPad Pro

Depending on what you do 32GB model may be right for you, and to be honest, the very first device I picked from the store was that big. Then I installed couple of apps and recorded a session of me playing drums, and I realized that I have 5GB of free storage. Mea culpa. I ended up upgrading 128GB model. Thank you for a 14-day return policy, Corporate America.

My hands are too big even for an iPad Pro, thus I can't type on the screen keyboard long-term. While in the store, together with my iPad I tried Apple and Logitech cases. Both are case + keyboard combo, and they are both pretty solid.

Logitech case was the one which I picked first and decided to give it a shot. The deciding factor was a mechanical keys, similar to something you'd find in a typical keyboard.

Logitech case pros:

- mechanical keyboard
- nicely wraps iPad from top to bottom; protects the back well.
- has backlit keys

My biggest cons:

- very heavy.
- snapping to the magnetic connector didn't work too well. It seemed like the grip wasn't strong enough, so if you lie and want to slightly bend the keyboard and write on it, it just wasn't working.
- the whole case is plastic, and each time magnetic strip would get released, I felt like I was scratching the edge of the iPad. No visible damage to the edge has been
- there was no good way to fold it behind iPad. Looks like this case was designed for people who'd use iPad only with this case. For me keyboard is "nice to have", while reading on is probably my top choice. So I didn't like it.
- They placed a "lock" key just above "Delete", which I keep typing all the
- did I mention it's heavy?

And this is how I returned the Logitech case and I went with the Apple one.

Thank you for 14-day return policy, Corporate America.

Smart Keyboard pros:

- lighter
- good key placement
- strong magnetic snapping

Smart Keyboard cons:

- no backlit in the keyboard
- doesn't protect back of the iPad when closed
- not so good feedback on key press

I suggest you go to the store and play with both keyboards in order to prevent yourself from surprises. Also note that Pro + Logitech case is probably as heavy as Macbook Air.

So how is the iPad Pro?

As always Apple delivered great hardware. Specswise, this a great machine. The Apple Keyboard is difficult to use at first, but after couple of hours of writing on it, I'm getting used to it. In fact, this article was written on an iPad.

My biggest problem is openness, of course. I'd really like being able to use an external medium to transfer files, but I guess that's not happening anytime soon in the workshop of uncle Apple.

I have an iPad for 2 weeks, and I can't come up with reasons to criticize the hardware. It's fast and I haven't had any issues. Upon upgrading to iOS 9.3 beta I did have hiccups, but that's expected.

How's the pencil?

I tried numerous styluses and Apple Pencil is basically the best. It has the sharp tip - like a normal pen, and it reacts very well with the screen. I've tried it with "Sketchbook", "Notes" and my favorite app – Concepts. Nice thing is that it saves the vector form of the drawing, so for some simple design work I do, it's perfect, since I can cut from analog-to-digital vectorization. If you don't get the stylus, you miss a lot.

iOS and Apps for iPad Pro

Most of the time I don't complain about software. There are cases where I open an app (including Apple Apps) and realize that with this huge screen the navigation takes like 1% of available space, which is pretty frustrating. Other than that, some notes below.

iOS 9.3

Finally there's some progress on screen dimmers: Night Shift mode. Basically your iPad's screen can get more sane colors for working at night. If you've ever frowned at night in front of the LCD because it was blasting bright light straight into your brain, fear no more. Night Shift may help.

I'm still waiting for an app or update to the iOS so that I can invert the colors and get full black background/gray letters, which is the best for astigmatism.

Duet Display

First thing I wanted to try is to use Pro's screen along with Macbook Air. I installed Duet Display and it started to work, but unfortunately I have failed to get an optimal resolution configured. It has always been blurry and didn't take advantage of the full power of the Retina screen. Slightly disappointed. Reported the problem to the authors. Time will show.

Notes

This app is kicking. Not only one can write, but you can also put drawings along with the text, and everything seems to work nicely. I haven't been using Notes much yet in my workflow, but I may consider doing so.

Notes work great in stylus, and if Apple keeps making progress on it, we'll no longer have to install custom apps for simple drawing. Very nice.

Dash

Dash is the first app which I actually paid for. If you're a software developer, it's totally worth $10. This gem provides you offline packages of documentation to the most popular software projects available around. No more stealing of your LTE's plan data, no more frustration because of the crappy Wi-fi. You can have your favorite documentation for the vacation reading anywhere you go.

Wunderlist

Nicely looking on iPad; feels like a workspace for your productivity. I wish the note taking in Wunderlist would be more fully-featured (at least full screen...), then I could do all my editing in here. But since it doesn't..

Ulysses

It's probably the best writing app on iOS. With an ability of setting correct background/fonts and nicely structured layout plus functional export, it does the job. Pretty depressing is that for $20 you get pretty much something you'd have gotten for free on a PC. My biggest buyers remorse is here, I guess. Additionally

Pages on iOS are pretty pathetic, since I can't find a way to set inverted color scheme there.

HipChat

Didn't yet catch-up with iPad I think. Looks like it's displaying the iPhone storyboard.

Complete Anatomy

I don't know how and why, but once I experienced the feeling of control with touch-based interface, I installed the Complete Anatomy right away. Man, this is fun. It's a pity the free version is limited, and more fully-featured requires monthly plan. Will explore Essential Anatomy as well, since it seems like it's a fixed-price, waaay cheaper version.

iPad Pro alternatives

As of writing this article (2016/MAR) I could view Surface as a strong competitor. Honestly, I pondered Surface since it makes so much more sense: fully featured PC, expandable and can read SD card. However because I write iOS software and my phone and computer are Apples, iPad Pro was a no-brainer. If you don't have strong ties to Apple, I'd consider Surface.

Summary

Is iPad Pro for you? I suggest you go through your wishlist and figure out whether Pro meets your needs. Feel free to send me an e-mail about your findings and experiences with your iPad Pro.