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Issue 103
April 2012
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Smartphones: The road ahead

Best of MWC

Canon EOS 5D Mark III

A long awaited follow-up

Lenovo U300s

Sleek and slender ultrabook

The Mobility Issue

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The Mobility Issue April 2012

TV or not TV

I recently unplugged my television. Not because it was old and ugly, which it was, but because the internet has taken over. Granted, the programming on offer from the free channels is bad enough to force an early night in, while the high cost of DStv is too much to pay for simply watching the rugby.

Like a number of friends and colleagues, I now live off digital downloads, plus series and movies swopped around on portable hard drives. Legal? No, but the alternatives are not locally available yet. If we had, for example, Netflix's offering available here in SA ($8 a month for unlimited movies & TV episodes streamed via the net), I would be their first subscriber. Fact is, I do not want to own these movies or series, I simply want easy access to what I want to watch (which includes more than just blockbusters), when I want to watch it.

The popularity of torrenting sites, such as The Pirate Bay, goes to show that there is a demand that the current supply chain does not fulfil, or fulfils insufficiently. Up until it does, for many flying the Jolly Roger is the unfortunate alternative.

Enjoy the issue and please feel free to distribute the mag's PDF, available at techsmart.co.za.
Mike (michael@techsmart.co.za)

6 Top 5 entry-level cars

Less seems to be a whole lot more these days, at least when it comes to compact cars. We gear down to bring you the best entry-level cars currently on market.

8 The best of MWC 2012

Recently held in Barcelona, Spain, Mobile World Congress 2012 revealed just what to expect from the big smartphone/ tablet manufacturers in the foreseeable future.

12 Review: BlackBerry Curve 9380

What is the Curve series without its illustrious physical keyboard? We caress the all-touchscreen BlackBerry Curve 9380 to find out.

14 The new iPad: What you need to know

Steadfastly refusing to call it the iPad 3, Apple has revealed the new iPad with a pin-sharp Retina display. Here is all you need to know about Cupertino's latest heartbreakingly desirable tablet.

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Top Tech Titbits

Apple tablet sales per day keeps competitors at bay

Apple managed to set a new iPad sales record last month, when they launched the highly anticipated new iPad (not iPad 3 as most people expected), selling three million tablets during the first weekend of its availability. Cupertino's latest device boasts a remarkable new 9.7" (2048 x 1536) Retina Display, a quicker A5X SoC, improved 5 MP iSight camera as well as 4G connectivity. The best news for local users is that the new iPad brought iPad 2 prices down, now starting at R3999 for the 16 GB Wi-Fi version.

Changes to Google's search functionality on the horizon

Google is looking to dish up search results via the integration of semantic search, which provides extra facts, relevant info as well as traditional hyperlinks. This adoption will not however result in the discontinuation of Google's current keyword search system, meaning a website's relevance will continue to be determined by the words it contains coupled with the frequency that other websites link to it.

Nashua Mobile introduces Xtreme Data offer

Nashua Mobile has joined forces with Nokia to bring its Xtreme Data offering to the local market. Like Research In Motion's BlackBerry Internet Service (BIS), this offer sees internet browsing, social media, email and instant messaging, all being delivered at a flat-rate of R59 per month. Unfortunately, this deal is limited to Nashua Mobile's contract customers that are using certain Nokia handsets such as the E5, E7 and N8 smartphones.

Apple sitting on hundred billion dollar cash pile

Given the desirability of most Apple products, it is understandable that the company is sitting on a cash reserve of $100 billion. The world's richest technology company will be spending $45 billion thereof over the next three years via a $10 billion share buyback program, kicking off in fiscal 2013 and issuing a quarterly dividend of $2.65 per share starting in its fiscal Q4 2012.

Google and Asus to bring out Nexus tablet?

The latest news from the tech rumour mill is that Google and Asus are collaborating on a 7" Android-powered tablet that will sport an affordable pricetag of $150 to $200 (around R1150 – R1530). Although details on specs is very limited, the two firms may go for a less costly dual-core processor alternative to Nvidia's blistering quad-core Tegra 3. Nokia is also apparently working on a tablet device, which will run on Windows 8.

HP launches Z range of workstation PCs

HP has showcased its new line of Z Workstations that will be available globally as of April. Headlining the Z Workstations series is the range-topping HP Z820, which can be specced to feature up to 16 processing cores (two eight-core Intel Xeon E5-2600 processors), as much as 512 GB of DDR3 memory, up to 14 terabytes of high-speed storage and dual Nvidia Quadro 6000 graphics cards, to go along with a potent pricetag ranging up to R60 000.

Hot New Products

Ducati Monster Diesel motorcycle

The sublime Ducati Monster Diesel motorbike is the product of a fashionable union between the Style Design team from Italian clothing brand Diesel and Ducati's Design Center. Ducati believes the bike brings an "urban military chic" look to the firm's 1100 EVO, which the Monster is based upon. The beating heart of the Monster is a 1078cc Type L-Twin cylinder Desmodromic air cooled engine delivering 73.5 kW at 7500 RPM. It will be posing for close-ups in the company's show rooms around the world as of July. The monster goes for $14 000, with no local price available yet.

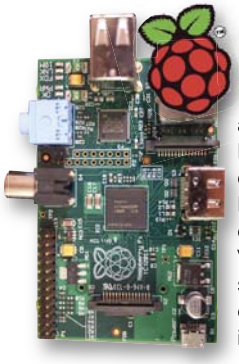
Rolex Oyster Perpetual Sky-Dweller watch

What do you give to the successful globe-trotter who has everything? How about the ability to keep track of time across multiple time zones? Yes, we know there's an app for that, but it's not quite a Rolex now is it? Rolex's new Sky-Dweller watch enables one to keep track of the local time of your destination being visited via the traditional hour, minute and second hands, whilst the reference time for home is viewed on its unique 24-hour inner ring. Two things are for certain: it's going to be ridiculously expensive (no price yet), but you should find a cheap Chinese knock-off soon.

Polaroid SC1630 smart camera

Cellphones already made the leap from feature phones to smartphones and now cameras are heading in the same direction. This is if Polaroid's SC1630 smart camera is any indication to go by. Like other high-end digital cameras, the SC1630 boasts features such as a 16 MP sensor, a 3.2" (800 x 400) widescreen touch-enabled display and 3x optical zoom. Where this camera breaks away from convention is in its incorporation of Google's Android mobile operating system (version not specified), giving it access to phone functionality and a wealth of camera apps from the Google Play Store.

Rasberry Pi



UK based charity, the Raspberry Pi Foundation, is aiming to promote the study of computer science and programming with the cheap-as-chips Raspberry Pi PC. This credit-card sized (85.6 x 53.98 x 17 mm, 45 g) computer plugs into TV or monitor (via composite or HDMI port), running on a Broadcom BCM2835 system-on-a-chip, containing a 700 MHz ARM processor and Videocore 4 GPU. Good news is that its heading to local shores and you can order one (model B, one per customer) via bit.ly/SAorders for around R320, which includes shipping but excludes VAT.

Jelly Bean and Key Lime Pie. The reported names for the follow-ups for Google's Android 4.0 (Ice Cream Sandwich).

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Sci News

H is for happy

Seems your feelings can influence your words. According to a recent article in the *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, letters on the right side of the QWERTY keyboard often pop up in words linked to positive emotions rather than in those describing negative feelings. The effect occurred across English, Dutch and Spanish words tested, regardless of word length, frequency of specific letters or handedness of the typists. When asked to judge the meanings of nonsense words or new abbreviations like LOL, people tended to associate words consisting of right-side letters with happier thoughts than those on the left. Researchers suggest that words consisting of right-side letters may be easier to type, which invokes positive feelings. No wonder the smiley face sits to the right of the T-G-B line.

Planet of the apes

The idea of intelligent apes ruling the world may not be quite as incredulous as it sounds. An international team of scientists recently announced the completion of the genome sequence for the gorilla in the journal *Nature*. And we share more genetic features with these apes than previously thought. The study confirmed that chimpanzees are humans' closest animal relatives, but 15% of our genetic features are closer to those of gorillas than chimps and some of these seemed to have evolved at the same time. The genome sequence also allows the genetic features of the four great ape species – chimpanzees, gorillas, orang-utans and humans – now to be compared with one another. The findings can help palaeontologists and geneticists work together to understand how apes went human.

Hot wires

Spider silk never ceases to amaze us. Now scientists write in the journal *Advanced Materials* that we can add yet another item to its list of wonders. Although being 15 times thinner than human hair, spider silk is remarkably strong and can be stretched by up to 20%. And the new findings show that it also conducts heat better than copper, trumped only by silver and diamond. What makes the finding even more remarkable is that materials from living things generally do not conduct heat very well. For example, skin tissue conducts heat almost 700 times worse than spider silk. The heat conduction properties may be linked to the molecular structure of the proteins that form spider silk. The results could prove useful for developing materials used in devices where effective heat transfer is important.

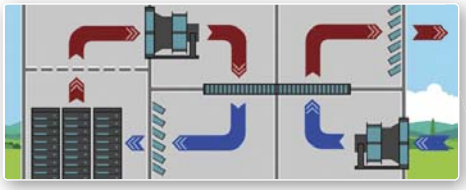
More amazing great science

An interactive Periodic Table: **http://bit.ly/interperiod**

Why there is an imbalance between matter and antimatter: **bit.ly/mattantimatt**

The northern lights from space: **bit.ly/northlightvid**

Green News



IS unveils innovative green data centre

Internet Solutions (IS) recently launched Randview data centre, utilising an innovative green approach for its cooling system. Designed to operate without conventional air conditioning in most conditions, Randview's cooling consists of three Kyoto Cooling Cells. These are mechanical wheels (six metres in diameter) constructed from conductive aluminium, with half of the wheel exposed to outside air and the other half to the data centre air. The cooler exterior air is transferred into the building as the wheel turns, cooling the racks inside. Barry Hatfield, IS business development manager for cloud solutions, explained that because cooling is the costliest item on a data centre bill, reducing the need for compressor based air conditioning will significantly impact a client's data centre costs.

Philips lights up local eco lighting business

Philips last month launched their Lighting Solutions business in South Africa, bringing the latest, cost-effective, energy efficient lighting solutions for buildings and businesses. These include LED-based systems, with the benefits of upgrading business lighting to these more eco-friendly lights, being a drop in energy consumption and lower installation maintenance costs. Philips brings a total project solution to the table, including lighting surveys, advice, project management, installation, maintenance and more significantly, guaranteed energy savings over a planned period of time. According to the company, lighting typically accounts for around 20% of a commercial building's electricity consumption, and can be halved by switching to eco lighting solutions.

Green to play role in new SimCity

Fans of the SimCity gaming series can look forward to address real-world eco concerns, within the virtual world of the next instalment of this franchise. The forthcoming SimCity title will deal with climate change and environmental issues, and players will be educated around climate change issues, and will also be able to compete against friends, to see who can construct the 'greenest' city.

Besides educating players on green matters, SimCity 5 will also feature added realism and enhanced graphics due to developers Maxis' use of a new gaming engine called GlassBox. Unfortunately gamers still have a long wait in front of them, since it will only be released in 2013.

Other interesting green news

US firm delivers sleeker, flexible silicon solar cells to decrease solar cell production cost: **http://cnet.co/solarslice**

Car makers exhibit portable chargers to address electric car buyer concerns: **http://yhoo.it/portcharsol**

US claims China is hoarding rare metals used in smartphone production: **http://on.mash.to/Chinraremet**

850 000. Each day that many new Android-running devices are being activated.

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TechSmart's TOP 5 entry-level cars

For most things in life it's a case of you get what you pay for. But these days however, budget vehicles aren't merely just the car you drive until you can afford something better. They offer excellent fuel-consumption and great looks – all at a nice price (sub-R120k) that won't put a crater sized dent in your budget. We take to the road to find the best compact cars currently on offer.

VW Polo Vivo 1.4

Volkswagen's Polo Vivo sports a highly functional and comfortable interior, while that silver badge on the radiator grill means that it will most probably have the best resale value out of the whole bunch. However, you have to pay for that privilege, since it is also one of the more expensive cars listed, and the most spartan in terms of its standard feature set. It goes for R118 300, and then you have to fork out more cash to get your specs up to the same level as most of the other vehicles being compared. For instance, it will set you back R2040 for ABS brakes and R2250 for a radio and speaker system that sports four speakers.

Ford Figo 1.4 Ambiente

Unlike the Polo, Ford's Figo 1.4 Ambiente offers excellent spec bang for your bucks. Its retail price of R118 670 is a little bit more than that of the Polo Vivo's, however, you get features such as an air-conditioning, radio/CD plus auxiliary jack for an MP3 player or iPod, as well as ABS with EBD (electronic brake-force distribution) as standard. Other specs include dual airbags, power steering and key operated manual central locking. The Figo is also quite zippy in terms of performance, with the 1.4l Duratec engine developing 62 kW of power at 6000 rpm as well as a maximum amount of torque that comes to 127 Nm at 4000 rpm.

Chevrolet Spark 1.2 L

The American car maker's Spark boasts a 1206 cc DOHC four cylinder engine that delivers 60 kW of power and 108 Nm of torque. This with Chevrolet claiming an impressive combined fuel consumption figure of only 5.4 litres per 100 km. Like Ford's Figo, the Spark also boasts many standard features such as power steering, radio, air-conditioner, airbags for the driver as well as the front passenger, and remote central locking. You also get ABS with EBD, height adjustable driver's seat, airbag de-activation switch for when you a have small toddler in the front seat as well as an isofix child seat in the back. Pricing for the Chevrolet Spark 1.2 L kicks off at R115 495.

Hyundai i10 1.25 GLS manual

The baby Hyundai's 1248 cc four-cylinder motor manages to push out 50 kW of power at 5500 RPM and 99 Nm of torque at 4500 RPM. According to Hyundai, it will provide you with a combined fuel usage figure of a mere 4.8 liters per 100 km, the best out of all the cars on our list. Even so, this little car will get to 153 km/h and goes from 0 to 100 km/h in 15.2 seconds. Buyers will receive a driver and passenger airbags as standard along with a passenger airbag disable function, radio/CD sound system with four speakers, and air-conditioner. You can get behind the wheel of one for R 114 900.

Renault Sandero 1.4 Ambiento

Taking top place on the budget podium is the locally constructed Renault Sandero 1.4 Ambiento. At only R109 900 we think it's a steal, offering power steering, height adjustable driver's seat, four speed heating and ventilation with air-recycling feature plus air-conditioning. Those concerned by safety will be impressed with the ABS with electronic brake force distribution (EBD) and side protection beams on all the doors.

The Ambiento is quite the zippy little car, since 112 Nm of torque is available from low down in the rev range (3000 RPM), whilst 55 kW of power is on tap at 5500 RPM. It comes with a five year or 150 000 km warranty, as well as a claimed combined fuel usage figure of seven litres per 100 km. [HD]

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The best of MWC 2012

The annual World Mobile Congress (MWC) held in Barcelona, Spain, gives a good indication of what handset users can look forward to for the rest of the year. For 2012, even larger screens, quad-core processors, faster connectivity and fancier built-in cameras are appearing on the smartphone menu.

Nokia

If there was an attention hog at this year's show, it must have been Nokia's 41 megapixel beast, the 808 PureView. 41 megapixels feels like overkill (five megapixels more than what Nikon crammed in its latest D800 full frame DSLR camera), but a lot of the resolution is used in the phone's pixel oversampling technology. According to Nokia, this takes information from seven pixels and distills it into one for the best possible picture. The Carl Zeiss optics equipped 808 (1.3 GHz) is not part of Nokia's new Windows Phone range, instead running on Nokia Belle.

Nokia did not neglect their Windows devices, announcing the Lumia 900 and Lumia 610. The 900 (1.4 GHz) is the Finnish company's first LTE phone, looking a lot like the 800 already available in SA, only with a larger screen (4.3") and battery. The 610 comes with a 3.6" screen and 800 MHz processor.

LG

LG had a busy MWC 2012, rolling out a heap of new smartphones and also a new design identity, dubbed LStyle. The device we're most excited about is the 5" Optimus Vu (1.5 GHz dual-core), a smartphone tablet hybrid which competes directly with Samsung's 5.3" Galaxy Note. At 8.5 mm thin, LG believes it's the slimmest LTE phone currently in operation. When it comes to sheer power, their new Optimus 4X HD is up there with the best, boasting a Tegra 3 processor and a delicious 4.7" screen (1280 x 720), but only 3G connectivity.

Samsung

Those holding their breath for an announcement on the Galaxy S III eventually passed out, since Samsung was not forthcoming on their highly anticipated flagship device. Instead, on the smartphone side, they had rather minor announcements, including the Galaxy Ace 2 and the Galaxy mini 2. A bit of attention also went to the Galaxy Beam, which comes with a built-in projector. But with a resolution of 800 x 480 and an LED beam worth only 15 lumens, we can't quite see this screening the game on Saturday.

HTC

HTC bolstered their Android presence with their new flagship, the HTC One X. The One X is the company's first phone powered by a quad-core chip, in this case the powerful Tegra 3, moving away from their good relationship with Qualcomm. With a massive 4.7" screen (1280 x 720), 32 GB of storage space, Beats Audio and Android 4.0 (ICS), the One X is sure to be a hit. Also announced in the One range, were the V and the S. The One V (1 GHz, 3.7") looks a lot like the old HTC Legend, while the One S (1.5 GHz, 4.3") is closer to the company's Sensation. Both comes with Android 4.0 (ICS) and Beats Audio.

continued on page 10

900 000. Nokia's global Windows Phone OS smartphone shipments during Q4 2011, giving Espoo a 33% share of the Windows Phone OS market.

Y'ello to the rescue

Being 'techsmart' doesn't just mean being clued up on gadgets; it's knowing what apps and services give you the best value for your money. IT guru Johnny Stephens (38) is a regular 'Dr Gadget', so we decided to ask him what comes up trumps with the latest cellular and Internet offerings.

Q *I love going online – surfing, emailing, facebooking, but I have to watch my spend. What would you recommend?*

A MTN has a great offer on at the moment – a 2GB Internet bundle at the greatly reduced price of R189. What's even better is that MTN customers can buy it as an add-on on their package, or any other Internet-capable device simply by dialling *141*6# or visiting www.mtn.co.za/selfservice. It can be purchased as a once-off or as a monthly recurring bundle.

Q *I hear that MTN has Internet services for Nokia?*

A MTN has partnered with industry giants like Nokia and Opera Mini Software to enable their customers to make the most of their smart-phones. For example, MTN now offers an MTN Nokia Smartphone Service for R49, where you get access to various Nokia smartphone applications. These apps include OVI email, OVI IM and Nokia Maps, and can be added on to any of the current MTN price plans, such as PayAsYouGo, contracts and TopUp.

Q *And if you don't have a Nokia phone?*

A Well, the MTN Smartphone Internet Service (R49) caters for all other smartphone users to use on mail, IM, navigation and other Internet services. Once the bundle's been depleted, the out-of-service (OOS) rate will apply. (This is still cheaper as you only pay R0.50 as compared to R2 per MB that you would normally pay.) This way you have endless access to mail and instant messaging!

Q *I'm mad about social networking. Are there any special deals out there if you live on Facebook and MXiT?*

A MTN has that covered too, thanks to its Social Networking Internet Service for R29. This one's geared especially for people like you. Dial *141*6# to enjoy endless access to Facebook and MXiT via m.facebook.com and m.mxit.com.

Q *Are their any nifty ways that make the Internet faster and cheaper? I've heard that certain apps can do this...*

A Ah, yes! Normally you'd have to pay for these sorts of apps, but MTN has partnered with Opera Mini Software to provide Opera Mini Browser (OMB), giving customers access to the phone application. MTN's Opera Internet Service allows Internet access for a full calendar month, which means you get cheaper, faster Internet. To download this browser for free, visit http://m.opera.com. MTN customers can now also purchase the Opera Mini Internet Voucher for R35 which, together with the OMB, gives you even cheaper Internet. Simply dial *141*6#.

Q *If I've bought airtime and need an Internet bundle, can I convert it?*

A These days, almost anything is possible! Thanks to tailormade offerings such as MTN's Internet Services, you simply call *141*6# to make the conversion – no need to call the call centre! There's a whole bouquet of Internet bundles and services on offer, ranging from 10MB to 2GB and the best part is that you can purchase an Internet bundle right from your phone from as little as R10.

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The best of MWC 2012: Part 2

And the winners are:

Top honours went to Samsung's Galaxy S II, which was crowned as Best Smartphone of the year, while the iPad 2 took the title as Best Mobile Tablet for 2012 (incidentally also the way we called it in our Top 5 of 2011 back in December). In recognition of an excellent 2011, Samsung took home the Best Manufacturer of 2012 award, while the Nokia 808 PureView took Best New Mobile Handset, Device or Tablet at MWC 2012.

Those Angry Birds won Best Mobile App for Consumers, while instant messaging app WhatsApp snapped up Best overall Mobile App. Adding a bit of local flavour was Brandtone's Carling Black Label "Be The Coach" campaign, which grabbed the prize for Best Mobile Advertising and Marketing campaign.

Sony

So long Sony Ericsson, since this year was the first year Sony took on smartphones on their own, after announcing last year that they acquired Ericsson's stake in the company. The new Xperia P forms part of their new NXT range, and comes with a 4" display, which debuts extra bright WhiteMagic display technology. With a definite focus on music, the Xperia U comes with xLoud and Sony 3D surround sound audio technology, while an illuminating transparent band matches the colour of album art or photos on display. Both run dual-core 1 GHz processors and Android Gingerbread, with planned upgrades to Ice Cream Sandwich in future. They should arrive here in May/ June.

Huawei

Chinese manufacturer Huawei clearly knows how to draw the battlelines. At MWC 2012 they revealed their Ascend D smartphone, which they claim is "the world's fastest quad-core smartphone," thanks to its K3V2 quad-core 1.5 GHz processor built by the company itself. For that claim we would have to see what the benchmark tests reveal, but we're also excited about the mention of two to three days battery life on a single charge thanks to its 1800 mAh battery. Featuring a 4.5" screen with a pixel density very close to the iPhone 4s (326 vs 330 pixels per inch), the Ascend D runs ICS out the box.

And what about tablets?

Asus' Transformer Pad Infinity held the honour of being the highest resolution tablet on the market, unfortunately only until the new iPad (see p 14) came along. Still, its 10.1" 1920 x 1200 pixels (compared to the iPad's 2048 x 1536) Full HD IPS+ display is nothing to mess with, while it also runs a zippy Qualcomm 1.5 GHz Snapdragon S4 dual-core processor.

We really enjoyed our time spent with Samsung's tablet/smartphone hybrid, the Galaxy Note, so we're really glad to see a 10.1" version coming out. Why? Because of the included S-Pen that makes sketching on the tablet an exciting prospect. With a 1280 x 800 resolution, ICS, HSPA+ and a 1.4 GHz dual-core processor (make not specified), it looks like a winner. The Note 10.1 lands locally in May for R8699.

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BlackBerry Curve 9380

It's all in the Touch

Research In Motion's (RIM's) BlackBerry Curve 9380 smartphone has the distinct honour of being the first touch-only smartphone to fall under the company's Curve range.

Compared to devices within the Bold- and Torch ranges, the 9380 is RIM's effort to bring a scaled down (in regards to CPU, screen resolution, etc.), but more affordable, touch experience to BlackBerry fans.

New form factor, new design

With its new design the BlackBerry Curve 9380 measures in at 109 x 60 x 11.2 mm and barely

> "It brings a fast and smooth touch-only experience to the Curve range, thanks to BlackBerry 7 OS and its snappy CPU."

tips the scales at 98 g. Since it forgoes the usual physical QWERTY keyboard, the Curve 9380 can offer screen real estate amounting to 3.2", compared to the 2.44" you get on the Curve 9360. This TFT capacitive display is quite responsive and offers a good resolution (360 x 480 pixels, 188 pixels per inch) for a budget-friendly device.

The small keys on the portrait QWERTY will take some getting used to for anyone switching from a Curve 9300, but typing in landscape mode might help, seeing that the size of the individual keys and the space between keys are larger.

Processor and camera

Powering the new Curve is a Marvel Tavor MG1 processor running at 806 MHz, which enables smooth and fast navigation of the BlackBerry 7 OS. That said, there is a fair amounts of lag when running multiple apps simultaneously though, for example listening to music through your headset, whilst chatting on BBM and intermittently checking Facebook for updates.

BlackBerry 7 OS handles the operating

As is the case on the Torch 9810 and Bold 9900, the Curve 9380 operates on RIM's BlackBerry 7 OS. According to the Canadian firm, OS 7 is 40% quicker than OS 6, due to Liquid Graphics, which combines a dedicated graphics processor with the speedy CPU and capacitive display, to deliver a highly responsive touch-friendly user interface. Finally, the Curve 9380's lithium-ion (JM-1) battery enables it to last well past a full working day, as we managed a good 1½ days from a single charge.

Final word

RIM's BlackBerry Curve 9380 smartphone brings a fast and smooth touch-only experience to the Curve range, thanks to BlackBerry 7 OS and its snappy CPU. We recommend the Curve 9380 to users that are done with physical keyboards and simply want an easy to use, compact, feature rich and touch-only device that is a lot more affordable than the Torch 9860. R3800. [HD]

Sony Ericsson Xperia Neo V

Working it

While the Xperia Neo V is undeniably a great effort, we are left wondering if it does enough to stand out from the crowd.

The phone is certainly an attractive looking device, as silver accents along the side plus silver buttons punctuate our model's midnight blue body. This is further complemented with an ergonomic design that slides quite comfortably into one's hand, while still feeling solidly constructed yet light to carry.

Performance

We also had no complaints on its performance; the 1 GHz Qualcomm MSM8255 Snapdragon CPU seemed to cope speedily with the onboard Android OS 2.3.4. Certain functions though, such as start up, and playing back images were on the slow side.

While the 3.7" screen is bright and clear, it felt a little cramped to type on, but in so far as looking at images and video, the 480 x 854 display was a pleasure to behold. A very decent five megapixel camera offers various capturing modes, while its focusing ability and images produced were rather impressive, something we've come to expect from Sony Ericsson.

To the point

Despite a thin back plate that was a pain to remove, the Neo V is a decent enough mid-range offering. While it performed ably on most fronts, it didn't quite deliver enough to wow us enough to want to rush out and buy it. R4300 is a decent price though. [RN]

1 million. In February Apple surpassed this iPad sales figure in South Korea, dominating (70-80%) the tablet market in Samsung's back yard.

20 million. Samsung's Galaxy SII smartphone range remains a popular mobile choice, as the company passes this sales milestone in just ten months after launch.

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The NEW iPad

What you need to know

After month's of rumours, Apple has finally pulled the wraps off the latest edition iPad. Here is what you can look forward to.

Referenced as simply "the new iPad", the company's third generation tablet boasts a high definition Retina display, a zippy new processor that incorporates quad-core graphics, as well as a 5 MP iSight camera with advanced optics. Oh, it's also 4G (LTE) enabled for much better connectivity speeds, that is if you have a cellular network that supports it.

Bucking the trend of a new Apple device being lighter and thinner than the previous generation, Apple's new tablet is 9.4 mm thick compared to the iPad 2's 8.6 mm frame and weighs (Wi-Fi + 4G version) in at 662 g, which is heavier than the previous 613 g.

New Retina display

The Cupertino-based tech firm stated that the new iPad's 9.7" (2048 x 1536) Retina display delivers four times the number of pixels

> "The 3.1 million pixels in the Retina display are over one million more than one would find in an HDTV."

compared to the iPad 2's 9.7" (1024 x 768 pixels) LED-backlit IPS LCD touchscreen. According to Apple, this results in a pixel density which is so dense that the human eye is unable to distinguish individual pixels when held at a normal distance.

The iPhone maker said that the 3.1 million pixels in the Retina display are over one million more than one would find in an HDTV. Movies can now be viewed in full HD (1080p), and, as expected, the added pixels will make websites, text, photos and video look incredibly detailed, sharp and realistic.

New, quicker processor and improved snapper

Powering the new iPad is Apple's A5X processor, which, like the current iPad 2's A5 chip, sports a dual-core CPU but boasts enhanced quad-core graphics. Cupertino said that this new application processor doubles the graphics performance of its A5 chip, which is also employed in the iPhone 4S. It did not yet divulge info on the processing speed of the A5X.

New snapper

Also new is the 5 MP iSight camera that features advanced optics, allowing it to capture high-resolution photos as well as full HD video. As is the case with some forthcoming new Android-powered smartphones, including the HTC One X and LG 4X HD, the latest iPad's snapper boasts backside illumination (BSI), enabling users to take detailed shots even in low-light conditions. Besides BSI the iSight camera also features a new video image stabilisation feature that the company says will remove shakes whilst filming.

Enhanced connectivity and mobile OS

Like the iPhone 4S, the new iPad will enable users to download info much quicker from the internet, since the Wi-Fi + 4G versions of the new iPad boasts 4G (LTE) connectivity as well as support for fast networks worldwide, using HSPA+ amongst others. By employing the Personal Hotspot functionality, users will also be able to share the fast network connection on their iPad with up to five other devices via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth 4.0.

Pricing and availability

Apple stated that the new iPad will be available in either black or white on 16 March, but South Africa is not included in the list of initial countries.

Theres no word on a local release date yet.

The new iPad goes for $499 (around R3785) for the 16 GB Wi-Fi model, up to $829 (approximately R6289) for the 64 GB Wi-Fi + 4G model. [HD]

Should you upgrade?

With the release of the new iPad, which Apple has steadfastly refrained from calling the iPad 3, a question no doubt on many iPad owner's mind: Should I upgrade?

For owners of the first generation iPad, the answer is easy: yes. An improved processor (a dual-core A5X) and more memory (1 GB) would easily justify the move, even if the new iPad didn't sport that magnificent 2048 x 1536 Retina display.

For iPad 2 owners, the answer is a bit more nebulous: it depends. Firstly, for many second generation owners the biggest drawcard is undoubtedly going to be the screen; and for those for whom clarity and graphics is of prime importance, that is certainly a valid reason. However, the performance jump between the iPad 2 and the new iPad is apparently not quite as noticeable as it would be between the first generation iPad and the new iPad. For fans of gaming though, the A5X does make a difference.

Additionally, until more apps are developed specifically for the new iPad that take advantage of the new iPad's upgraded features, users may not see as much of a performance benefit as yet in terms of apps.

Additionally, there appears to be some teething problems with regards to heat on the new device. Our advice: wait a few months before ditching your trusty iPad 2 in favour of Apple's latest. [RN]

450k and 500k. The gap between the amount of apps available via Google's Android Market and Apple's App Store comes down to 50 000.

Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime

Superlative hybrid

As the first tablet with the Tegra 3 processor onboard, Asus' Transformer Prime manages to stand out from the rest of the fray.

When we reviewed Asus's Zenbook ultrabook, we loved the design and build, and in many respect, the Transformer Prime shares those qualities. For starters, the Transformer Prime

> "The Transformer Prime the most impressive Android tablet we've tested yet."

docks into its optional (R1600) keyboard so firmly that you would be forgiven for thinking it's a slightly smaller Zenbook, another ultrabook or perhaps even a high performing netbook.

However, it's none of these. Instead, it is an extremely sturdy, well-constructed and exceptionally stylish Android tablet that, judging by appearances alone, hints to having the chops to take on the iPad juggernaut.

Performance

The most interesting part of the Transformer Prime comes from its performance, most particularly in light of the fact that it sports the Tegra 3 quad core processor (actually 4 + 1 companion core), and the latest Android operating system (OS), Ice Cream Sandwich. On this front, we were pleasantly surprised by how quick the tablet is. In fact, swiping between different screens proved to be quite a bit faster than swiping between the iPad 2's screens, which is no slouch by any means. In terms of benchmarking, the four cores make a big difference, topping the rest of the Android tablets we've tested.

Screen

Equally worth mentioning is the Transformer Prime's beautiful Gorilla Glass screen. Admittedly, it is not a Retina display, and instead offers a 1280 x 800 resolution. However, it was still clear and crisp, while offering vivid colours and proving bright enough to cope with moderate sunlight outdoors and still be clearly visible.

Keyboard

However, as previously mentioned, the Transformer Prime's particular strength is how quickly and sturdily it transforms from being a 10.1" tablet into a tablet/ultrabook type hybrid. Sliding the tablet into a slot on the included keyboard strongly locks the screen in place, and suddenly the full sized QWERTY keyboard, with trackpad, is ready for action.

To the point

In the final analysis, the Transformer Prime is the most impressive Android tablet we've tested yet. Its sharp screen and general build quality impressed, and we loved how quickly and easily the tablet transformed not just from a tablet to a netbook, but also into anything but run of the mill. The price though might be a bit steep: the 32 GB version goes for R6 000, while the 64 GB runs for R7 000. Wi-Fi only. [RN]

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30. Court battles that have taken place in over ten countries during the continuing patent war between Apple and Samsung.

First impressions:

Dell XPS 13 ultrabook

Lenovo IdeaPad U300s

Sleek and Slender

The IdeaPad U300s is the first ultrabook offering from the world's second largest PC manufacturer. Does it crack a TechSmart nod?

In short, yes. We are particularly fond of the Lenovo's design, with its sleek brushed aluminium shell hiding a metallic grey bezel and keyboard panel. At just 14.9 mm thick (the thinnest out of all the ultrabooks we've tested), and with minimalism written ever so tidily over the package, it's an appealing machine in anyone's books. Moreover, its weight of 1.3 kg should make many a shoulder a happier place.

Performance

There's no worrying about performance, since the Lenovo (at least our unit) packs one of Intel's second generation Core i7 processors (2677M @ 1.80 GHz), with 4 GB of RAM onboard. Like most other ultrabooks, the U300s only offers Intel HD graphics onboard which does not really cater for the latest games. Thanks to its 256 GB SSD drive and good ventilation system, the U800s was dead quite in operation, with a slight amount of heat noticeable on its bottom.

> "With minimalism written ever so tidily over the package, it's an appealing machine in anyone's books."

Screen

With a resolution of 1366 x 768, the U300s's 13.3" screen is HD-ready but not full-HD, a feature that would have made the machine a lot more desirable, but also have upped the price. Video and pictures displayed well, although we would have preferred to see it being brighter and slightly less reflective.

Ports

If you've come to look for a multitude of ports, the U300s will point you in another direction, since on this slim body you'll only find one USB 2.0 and one USB 3.0 ports, while an HDMI port also makes an appearance. It's not a lot, and we especially missed an SD card slot to quickly transfer pictures from cameras, but this is on-par with similar offerings.

Keyboard

The U300s might be part of Chinese manufacturer Lenovo's IdeaPad range (aimed at the consumer market), but it definitely took a few typing lessons from their business focused ThinkPad notebooks. Much like the ThinkPad X1, the U300s's chicklet-styled keyboard is impressive, offering just the right amount of pressure, with key size that is not too small. Unfortunately it's not backlit, a feature we've grown very fond of in the office.

To the point

At R13 000 the Lenovo IdeaPad U300s is cheaper than Asus' Zenbook (R17 000), but more expensive than the Acer S3 (R10 000), which reflects our overall impressions of the units. The highly elegant U300s certainly makes our mouths water at the prospect of what Lenovo has in store on the ultrabook front for their ThinkPad range. [MJ]

We had a brief hands-on session with Dell's forthcoming ultrabook, the XPS 13, and we must say it looks highly promising.

Design wise, the aluminium and carbon fibre construction lends the XPS 13 a sleek and solid, even futuristic appearance, while a carbon fibre base offers dual benefits of being strong while simultaneously not conducting heat. This, along with a barely noticeable weight of 1.3 kg, should make it quite comfortable to perch on one's lap for extended periods.

Despite the portability of a slightly larger than 11" chassis, the ultrabook still manages to squeeze in a 13.3" edge to edge display, coated in second generation Gorilla Glass (much like the Lenovo X1) and offering up a brightness of 300-nit and a 720p resolution of 1366 x 768.

Innards and extras

As to the innards of the devices, users can expect a choice between Intel Core i5 2467M and i7 2637M processors, along with 4 GB of memory, and either a 128 GB or 256 GB solid state drive.

Apparently the XPS 13 boots up in five seconds, while the built-in battery offers almost nine hours of working life.

To the point

Our first impressions of the XPS 13 ultrabook were resoundingly positive. A solid build, beautiful design, comfortable – and backlit – keyboard, and a sharp screen make this an ultrabook worth watching out for. The XPS 13 will apparently be available in shops before the end of the March, and will range in price between R13 000 and R18 000 depending on the configuration. [RN]

Help! Kaspersky Lab calls for assistance in identifying unknown programming language used in the Duqu Trojan.

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What you need to know:

Canon EOS 5D Mark III

A legend revitalised

In a move that many professional and enthusiast photographers have been eagerly anticipating, Canon unveiled its latest full frame DSLR, the EOS 5D Mark III.

For starters, the camera boasts a new 22.3-megapixel full-frame Canon CMOS sensor, a high-performance DIGIC 5+ Imaging Processor and six frames-per-second continuous shooting speed.

The camera's new DIGIC 5+ Imaging Processor is apparently 17 times faster than DIGIC 4, and uses that extra speed not only for improved image quality, but also to add no less than nine new features that do not exist on the 5D Mark II.

These new features include six fps continuous shooting, HDR and Multiple Exposure modes, in-camera RAW processing, a comparative playback function, Scene Intelligent Auto mode, two forms of movie compression, and support for high-speed UDMA 7 Compact Flash memory cards.

Further features

More good news is that the camera has borrowed the EOS 1 D X's impressive 61-point high density reticular autofocus (AF) system, which offers up to 41 cross-type points and five dual cross-type points available, depending on the lens in use. The EOS 5D Mark III further offers six AF point selection modes: Spot, Single Point, Single Point with surrounding four points, Single Point with surrounding eight points, Zone selection and Automatic AF point selection.

Additionally, the lustworthy device brings a sensitivity range from ISO 100 to 25 600, as well as a new low ISO 50 setting for studio and landscape photography and two extended ISO settings at the high end of 51 200 and 102 400. Also found onboard is a 3.2" Clear View II LCD screen with 1 040 000 dot resolution, support for both Compact Flash Type 1 and SD/SDHC/SDXC memory cards.

> "The new DIGIC 5+ Imaging Processor is 17 times faster than DIGIC 4."

Video star

Enhanced video features for video professionals range from better noise reduction and longer recording times to a built-in headphone jack for audio monitoring. More specifically, the EOS 5D Mark III captures 1080p full HD video at 24, 25, and 30 fps; 720p high definition recording at 60 and 50 fps; and standard definition recording at 30 and 25 fps.

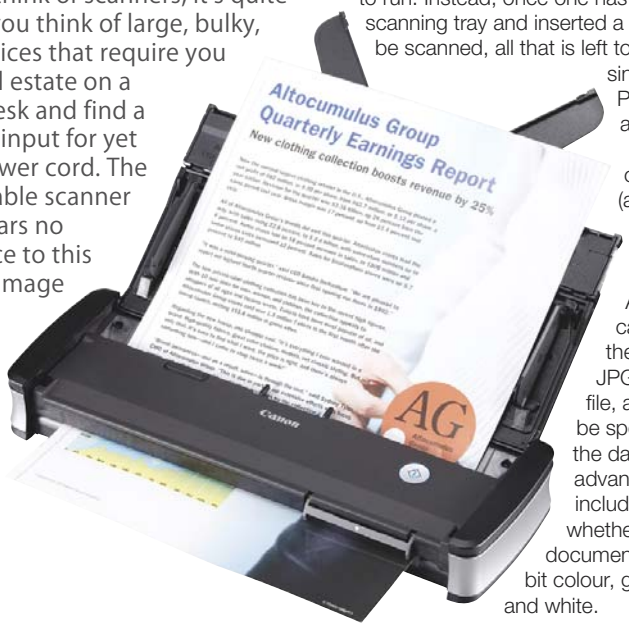
To the point

Indeed, at $3500, and a stated sub R34 000 price tag locally, the camera looks that much more attractive for photographers who are willing to pay a premium but are still budget conscious. It is set for launch in April. [RN]

Canon ImageFormula P-215 scanner

Flatbed be gone

When you think of scanners, it's quite likely that you think of large, bulky, flatbed devices that require you to clear real estate on a crowded desk and find a free power input for yet another power cord. The P-215 portable scanner though, bears no resemblance to this traditional image at all.



The device itself folds in on itself to resemble perhaps a large notebook 'power brick', which results in a neat, compact unit. Additionally, the scanner draws power from a USB connection, making it genuinely portable.

Setup

The setup of the device comprises of not much more than plugging it into a free USB port and pressing a button to turn it on. The software for the scanner is included within, which means there is no CD to insert or installation procedure to run. Instead, once one has unfolded the scanning tray and inserted a sheet of paper to be scanned, all that is left to do is press a single button. The P-215 then automatically scans both sides of the document (although blank sides can be set to be ignored). Additionally, users can choose to save the scan as a PDF, a JPG, TIFF or BMP file, and file names can be specified to include the date or not. Further advanced options include specifying whether you want the document scanned in 24 bit colour, grayscale or black and white.

Quality and speed

One can easily accept the default settings of 200 dpi, and enjoy rather speedy scans (about four seconds per page) which equates to 15 pages per minute. While we found this quality to be perfectly acceptable for typed and written documents, the option also exists to customise the quality of the scan, up to 600 dpi. This though, did affect the speed of the scan somewhat, taking between sixteen and twenty seconds per page. Scanning in an image at the 600 dpi setting delivered beautiful, rich and vibrant colours, a sharp rendering of details and some superlative colour range from dark shadows, detailed midtones and bright highlights. Suffice to say, we were exceedingly pleased with the text and images that the scanner produced.

> "We were exceedingly pleased with the text and images that the scanner produced."

To the point

Admittedly, it's not often that we get excited about scanners. However, the P-215 makes scanning so smooth and easy, with so few hassles, that we can unhesitatingly recommend it. It retails for R3000. [RN]

Full Article
bit.ly/canonp215

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HP unveils its ProLiant Gen8 servers

Reveals IT industry changing breakthrough

It is not every day that a prominent IT company claims it will revolutionise the IT industry, and then proceeds to show you, in detail, how. That however, is exactly what HP did in Las Vegas at the launch of its Proliant Gen8 servers. TechSmart was in Vegas to get the scoop.

Dave Donatelli, HP's EVP and general manager enterprise servers, began by pointing out that while consumer technology had grown in leaps and bounds, many businesses were frustrated by the fact that their IT budget appeared to be spent on "just keeping what they have running," instead of being directed towards implementing innovative technology.

This though is set to change, thanks to the Project Voyager initiative, which has been two years in the making and cost a staggering $300 million. It includes the launch of the company's ProLiant Gen8 servers, and introduces a broad array of innovations, that apparently produced 900 patents.

Put simply, Project Voyager's aim is to automate every aspect of a server's life cycle, and effectively enable servers to become self-sufficient and "intelligently take care of themselves", explained Donatelli.

Advances and Benefits

To this end, HP's ProLiant Gen8 servers features the company's 3-D Sea of Sensors, a technology that identifies over-utilised servers based on real-time location, power, workload and temperature data. This enables users to increase their data centre's computing capacity per watt of energy by 70%. And with HP Active Health and HP Insight Online respectively, HP ProLiant Gen8 automatically analyses its own health across 1600 data points.

Despite the fact that data centres are extremely expensive, content is only expected to grow. Mark Potter, HP's senior vice president and general manager Industry standard Servers and Software, elaborated that two years ago, HP recognised that the way data centres were managed was "simply unsustainable".

This spurred the company on to make a breakthrough in data centre management. "We have fundamentally changed how a server behaves, from automatically communicating which rack it is in, validating power feeds to offering a 3D visualisation of the entire data centre so that customers can see where power and cooling is available," he elaborated.

Gen8: the power of saving

Potter continued that the net result of deploying the new ProLiant Gen8 servers is a conservative estimate of five months return on investment, while doubling a data centre's capacity. The list of savings offered by the new servers is impressive and extensive. In a nutshell, the following are some of the main savings and benefits that HP asserted will be afforded to ProLiant Gen8 users:

- Nearly double compute-per-watt capacity and potential financial saving of $7 million (R56 million) in energy costs in a typical data centre over three years.
- Seamless support and security via Insight Online, enabling customers to manage and monitor their data centre using a cloud based portal from wherever they are.
- Reduction of time spent on manual operations, such as server updates, from five hours down to ten minutes, freeing up administrator's time for better productivity.
- Resolution of unplanned downtime issues up to 66% faster, affording an incalculable benefit considering the potential $10 million per hour cost of unplanned downtime.
- Saving in excess of 30 days of administration time a year per person in a typical 10 000 square-foot data center, due to the acceleration of application deployment and automation of manual tasks.

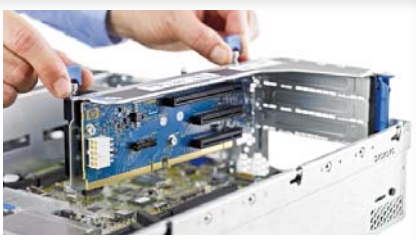
To the point

While advances in servers and storage may usually be one of those developments that happens in the background and is given little attention to by technology enthusiasts, it is nonetheless the backbone of many businesses that users benefit from. Moreover, the ramifications of the announcement – what it can mean to businesses of every size, to the industry as a whole, and to users who rely on and benefit from data centres and servers, left us with the distinct impression that we were witnessing yet another watershed moment for the technology industry. [RN]

Patently innovative

Amongst the hundreds of patents that have emerged from Project Voyager, one particularly interesting one addresses an all too common problem of human error. The company's SmartSocket technology addresses a common problem, in which technicians bend the pins on motherboards when inserting a processor.

Instead of placing a processor onto the motherboard and potentially damaging them, SmartSocket allows users to slide the processor into a separate tray, which then precisely aligns itself to the motherboard pins. Another technology, known as SmartDrive, addresses the problem of customers removing the wrong drive, resulting in data loss, by showing via LED light warnings which drives must not be removed.



25 billion. Apple has surpassed this milestone for apps downloaded from its App Store and is on track to reach 15 billion downloads during 2012 alone.

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[1]Refers to diagonal measurement of display.

[2]All specifications represent the typical specifications provided by HP's component manufacturers; actual performance may vary either higher or lower.

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Samsung NX200

Access all areas

The mirrorless standard has done a great deal to reduce camera size while still allowing for interchangeable lenses. Samsung, in particular, has had a lot of time to get their mirrorless formula right, with the NX200 the fifth in their series. It's also the best we've tested to date.

There's a number of features we like on the NX200, none more so than the dual control dials on offer. Located at the top and the back of the device, these allow easy adjustment for example of aperture on the one, and speed on the other. It's a feature not found on either Nikon nor Canon's entry-level DSLRs, and one that

> " The NX200 left us very impressed, almost to the extent that we consider this the best mirrorless camera we've tested thus far."

speaks volumes about the NX200's ability to not only cater for the entry-level crowd, but also those photographers requiring faster access to key functionality. In fact, the NX200 has a plethora of options to help you adjust settings, including the new Smart Panel display and the i-Function lens ability.

Quality

Unlike the smaller sensor offerings from Olympus and Nikon, Samsung includes an APS-C CMOS image sensor in the NX200, the same size found in many DSLR cameras. It's a redesigned 20 megapixel beaut and it did a lot to impress us on the image quality side. Performance on the low end of the ISO spectrum was very impressive, and comparative tests we did between the NX200 and a Nikon D5000 (granted it's a 2009 model) were clearly in favour of the NX200. Even images of up to 1600 ISO (with up to 128 000 available) provided very decent results, keeping noise to a large extent in check. The NX200's 1080p (30 fps) video recording capabilities also merits commending.

Conclusion

The Samsung NX200 left us very impressed, almost to the extent that we consider this the best mirrorless camera we've tested thus far. This is because we never needed to dig for features as with the Sony's NEX offerings, while we preferred the NX200's layout to that of the Nikon J1. The camera looks great, feels decent in hand and we put a lot of trust in the 20.3 megapixel sensor.

But the NX200 struggles with one problem – price. It retails for R8000, which includes the 20-50 mm kit lens. For the same price (and less) we found local retailers selling other cameras with a twin lens bundle, making it difficult to justify the extra money. [MJ]

25 billion. Apple has surpassed this milestone for apps downloaded from its App Store and is on track to reach 15 billion downloads during 2012 alone.

PowerMonkey Discovery

Power up when you need it

Without power, any mobile device is rendered little more than a beautiful and expensive paperweight.

The PowerMonkey Discovery offers portable life support for a range of devices, including iPhones, iPods, e-readers, smartphones, handheld games consoles and portable GPS systems for when one's battery is close to drawing its last breath. The device is capable of recharging an iPhone twice, standard mobile phones 3 – 4 times, or giving iPods and MP3 players up to an additional 120 hours playtime.

The sleek and portable PowerMonkey Discovery accomplishes this via a 3500 mAh lithium polymer battery housed in an attractive aluminium case. Six green LED lights show the unit is fully charged and when the unit needs to be recharged a LED will turn red. The PowerMonkey Discovery can either be charged via a USB port or the mains using an optional universal travel charger. Five adapter tips for numerous phones are included. It costs R699 from The G.A.D.G.E.T. Shop.

Energizer SP1001 Portable solar charger

Portable in the sun

Going where no electrical plug will be found? Energizer's SP1001 can help out getting a few extra hours from your electronics. Charge it beforehand and its 1000 mAh Lithium Polymer battery will add at least a few more hours to your smartphone. It comes with its own solar panel and a carabineer clip, so you can clip this to a backpack and let it recharge in the sun. Just don't expect too much of the SP1001, since it recharges quite slowly and definitely will not power your smartphone to full capacity. It comes with a number of ports to help recharge MP3 players, cameras and other gadgets. The SP1001 retails for R420, go to www.portablepower.co.za for more info.

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@lantic's ADSL data bundle will suit any need and any pocket

@lantic, the home and small business internet service provider within the Vox Telecom group, has introduced a new range of ADSL data bundles designed to fit the needs of any lifestyle, with prices starting at just R89 for 10 GB of data.

"Families and small businesses have very diverse needs when it comes to their internet connectivity," says Dederick Venter of @lantic. "If you're at work all day and only use the internet at home during the evenings, there's no point paying for daytime access you'll never use. But if you have a home office as well as teenage kids researching their homework, a sister overseas you want to Skype and a favourite online game, you need much more."

The new @lantic ADSL 6-2-6 product is a 10 GB data bundle that is valid for three months, can be used between 6pm and 6am and costs just R89. "This is ideal for people who want to do fast web browsing in the evenings," explains Venter. "For those who want more flexibility, our ADSL Anytime bundles are the way to go."

ADSL Anytime is the comprehensive service with no time access

> "This is ideal for people who want to do fast web browsing in the evenings"

restrictions and starts at just R99 per month for 5 GB of data, going all the way to R799 per month for 50 GB of data. "Both these products are premium data services – you will get great speeds no matter what online services you're using, whether it's stock trading or World of Warcraft," says Venter.

@lantic
Simplified telecoms

Backup troubles for SMEs solved

@lantic's hosted backup gives small businesses peace of mind

If your laptop is stolen, how much of your business will go with it? If the answer is anything other than "nothing", it's time to review your backup policies.

Dederick Venter of @lantic, the consumer and small business service provider within the Vox Telecom group, believes every small business owner should ask this important question.

"Small businesses very often fail to keep adequate backups of their critical files and servers because it seems complicated and expensive," says Venter. "But losing data can be crippling. We've seen too many businesses lose out on opportunities because someone's contact database went missing along with their laptop. That's why @lantic has introduced a hosted backup solution that makes backup as easy as possible, at a price that small businesses can genuinely afford."

For just R15 per GB per month, says Venter, Xpress Hosted Backup offers an efficient way to back up and restore everything from individual laptops to data centres. "The whole point of keeping backups is so that if and when disaster happens and you lose data, you don't lose your business with it," he adds. "Xpress makes it quick and easy to restore a lost file, disk, machine or even your whole office. "

The solution uses a number of techniques to make storage more efficient, including data compression and de-duplication to make sure clients don't end up paying to store multiple copies of the same file.

> "For just R15 per GB per month, Xpress Hosted Backup offers an efficient way to back up and restore everything from individual laptops to data centres."

Xpress Hosted Backup is available for Windows and Mac platforms, and can handle mixed environments, explains Venter. "The best thing is that you don't need an IT specialist to manage it – it's one single application that's simple to set up and manage. We come from an SMME background ourselves and we know how important it is to provide services that genuinely save the entrepreneur's time rather than adding yet more admin tasks."

For more info visit www.lantic.net/power-ten/index.html and www.lantic.net/hosted_backup/index.html.

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Android Apps of the month

With over 450 000 apps available for Android smartphones at the Android Market, TechSmart would like to help you get to the good ones first. Here are our top Android Apps of the month.

Apple iOS Apps of the month

You'll never come close to going through all the apps in Apple's App Store. TechSmart finds the best free apps that the App Store has to offer.

Onava Data Usage tracker

Keeping track of data usage can save you a heap of money. Onavo makes this easy by allowing you to enter the size of your data bundle (and when it ends), then monitoring usage each time you switch to 3G. We liked the fact that it tells which apps are "data hogs", while the live widgets were the cherry on top. These provide you with accurate information regarding daily data usage, and the ability to see exactly how much data is going into each of your apps. If a specific app munches too much data, simply restrict it to Wi-Fi only, or uninstall the app.

Go Launcher Ex

Go Launcher Ex is a full featured launcher application, which gives the stock Android look-and-feel a bit of an extreme makeover. While it maintains the familiar Android navigation, it does liven one's home screen up considerably, thanks to customisable effects, and the ability to easily customise one's background, icons and fonts. Additionally, we particularly liked the widgets on offer, for such essentials as email and task manager, as well as GoWidget Switch, which enables one to easily control Wi-Fi, GPS and screen brightness.

Skater Boy

Admittedly, we are constantly on the lookout for decent games on our Android devices, and Skater Boy fits the bill perfectly. While the artwork is pretty simplistic, the gameplay easily makes up for it, enabling you to skate, speed up, jump and perform tricks mid air, while avoiding running into a variety of obstacles. The game boasts thirty levels spread across three areas (city, forest and graveyard), with more promised. For some quick, enjoyable and bite sized play, Skater Boy is a lightweight (6.4 MB) app that is as easy to recommend as it is enjoyable to kill time with.

Camera Awesome app

Although Apple's iPhone boasts some impressive camera technology from a hardware perspective, the interface and what it allows you to do is a bit basic. For users looking to squeeze more functionality from their smartphone's snapper, downloading the Camera Awesome app is a must. It expands the options you have at your disposal, enabling you to capture timed shots, slow and quick bursts, and set which part of the photo needs more exposure. Additionally, the app gives you access to an arsenal of post editing tools including numerous filter effects. Further editing options include the ability to alter the sharpness and contrast of the image.

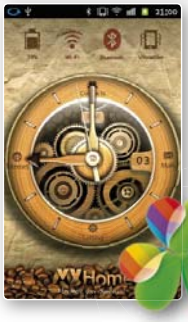
Chaton: (IM) Service app

The handy iMessage instant messaging (IM) service, enables iPhone users to send text messages, photos, videos, and their location info to other iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch users. Unfortunately, you are restricted to chatting with people using devices powered by iOS 5. Luckily, Samsung recently made its IM messager, Chaton, available on the App Store for free. As with Whatsapp (a paid app, eventually), you are able to chat to users on multiple mobile platforms including bada, Android and iOS, with BlackBerry OS and Windows Phone to follow soon. It's as easy as adding chat buddies via their cellphone number.

Data Usage Monitor app

Unless you're using a BlackBerry smartphone subscribed to Research In Motion's BlackBerry Internet Service (BIS), then data consumption will always guide the way you employ your smartphone. Wali.com's Data Usage Monitor app assists iPhone users in preventing nasty data bill surprises come month's end. It monitors data usage (amount being used and for what), in real time and will notify you on occasions of excessive usage, as well as when you're close to exceeding your daily/monthly limit. Users are also able to perform connection speed tests to help locate the best hotspots at home or work.

Android Tip of the Month: Launcher heaven



The beauty of Android lies in the fact that it's very customisable, so just because your phone came with a certain look, does not mean you need to stick with it. If you haven't already, play around with home screen or launcher apps, since it's the easiest way to make your phone feel "new". Go Launcher Ex (see above) is an excellent one, as is ADW Launcher, while Launcher Pro and Regina 3D Launcher are also worth your time.

iPhone tip: Rebooting your iPhone

Although iOS is one of the most stable mobile operating systems around, your iPhone may freeze up on occasion. If this happens, you simply hold the Home and Sleep buttons down at the same time for about eight seconds. This will force a reboot.

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14 million. According to a published report from the IDC, cloud computing will create that number of jobs around the globe by 2015.

Web Time Wasters

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Pinterest

www.pinterest.com

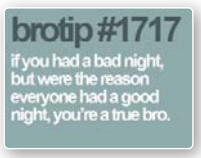
A site that of late has captured the attention of many, Pinterest is a virtual pinboard which enables its users to visually 'pin' photos of content that is of interest and share what they have found with others.

Every topic from food, recipes and fashion to nature, animals, and design for example, can form a pinboard. People can then post comments, like or 'repin' content they come across. The site is apparently being used as a planning tool as well. You do need to be invited to join though, and we are told that for some reason it has a strong female participation.

Galaxy Zoo

www.galaxyzoo.org

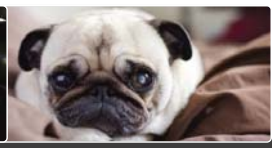
Ever so often we come across a site that really piques our interest. Galaxy Zoo is one of them, asking regular internet users to help in classifying galaxies. Apparently humans are much better in doing this than computers can ever be, but it's a labour intensive programme, thus the need for as much help as possible. Assistants are shown pictures of galaxies taken by the Hubble Space Telescope, with a number of rather easy questions about it that needs answering. There's not a lot in terms of rewards, but we believe helping to map the universe should be reward enough. Sign up now.



Brotips

www.brotips.com

While Brotips, as the name implicitly implies, is primarily aimed at men, the site is amusing enough to merit a visit by either gender. It consists of numerous (close to 1700) short, thought provoking, amusing and even witty tips for post-adolescent men. Tips include gems such as "if you're always five minutes late, leave five minutes early", "if they only like you when you're drunk, they don't like you," and "if there's anyone who is always trying to bring up your past, consider making them a part of it." Individual tips can easily be shared with Facebook, Twitter or via email.



The best (and weirdest) YouTube can offer:

The Fastest and Funniest Lego Star Wars: story ever told bit.ly/legostarvid

Exploding iceberg in Antarctica: bit.ly/exiceplode

Synchronisation of metronomes: bit.ly/metronome

Fun at the world's largest rope swing: bit.ly/swingrock

Best of the rest:

Great blog for photographers: http://blog.photoshelter.com/

Clients from Hell: http://clientsfromhell.net

Playing Farmville, CityVille, CastleVille away from Facebook: www.zynga.com

Attack of the cute stuff: Attackofthecute.com

TechSmart's top tweets

Here are the tweets that struck our fancy last month

vincent hofmann @vincenthofmann
Having sat, head in hands, behind a desk trying to resurrect a server, I now feel a bit sick when I see big corp. sites topple.

Gus Silber @gussilber
I've lived in Joburg all my life, but I can't recall an evening or an event that moved me as much as the RunJozi.

Neil deGrasse Tyson @neiltyson
In 7-billion years our Milky Way collides with the Andromeda galaxy. Not to worry. Sun burns Earth to crisp well before then

Xeni Jardin @xeni
One of my chemo rules:"Don't tweet or blog while high on meds." Gotta add Amazon now, too. Why, WHY did I buy an entire pound of dried Kelp?

Miss O'Kistic @missokistic
New iPad owners are going to feel silly when the cursed app that kills them as a sacrifice so that Steve Jobs may live again is activated.

Jonathan van Blerk @sunglassguru
That awkward moment when a GPS tells a gay person to go straight.

Marina Martin @MarinaMartin
Dear Netflix, I rate 1032 movies and you suggest VEGGIE TALES as the #1 best thing for me to watch next???

Matt Comi @mattcomi
Tim Cook to announce massive kitchen renovation.

Simon Pegg @simonpegg
I discovered today that it is impossible to make an emphatic, dramatic exit through a beaded curtain.

Twitter: Six years strong

The popular social networking site Twitter celebrated its sixth birthday last month. The very first tweet sent? "just setting up my twttr" by the company's co-founder and executive chairman Jack Dorsey, on 21 March 2006.

After being introduced to the public on 15 July 2006, the micro-blogging site quickly grew in users to encompass a current active user base of 140 million. According to Twitter, these users post over 340 million tweets per day, amounting to more than a billion every three days.

TechSmart.co.za online poll results

Will you be buying the new PlayStation Vita?

Nope	67%
Yes	15%
Not sure, still making up my mind	14%
Already got it!	4%

Total Votes: 160

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BluWave CRM: Clients come first

Closing sales in the cloud

Imagine a world where you can access your CRM system anywhere, anytime and from any device.

BluWave CRM leverages the power of tablet devices to ensure you have access to your data while you are on the move, with the result being more face-to-face selling opportunity and increased sales. Data entered from different devices is stored in a single database, so there is no synchronising and you always process and retrieve data in real time.

Activity and Diary Management

BluWave CRM integrates to Outlook and the web-based Gmail calendaring software, so when an appointment is created in BluWave, a related appointment is scheduled in your default calendar. In addition, a meeting request is generated and will be sent to the invitee at the customer. All this is achieved in one process, thus saving time.

External sales reps access CRM in the field

BluWave uploads sales history daily per customer and by product sold, with the data presented in monthly totals in volumes and rands. Sales reps can then use this information to see if a customer has placed his monthly order or to support up-selling and cross-selling. One can also check sales trends against the previous year's sales or alongside a customer budget.

Issue quotations on the road

BluWave supports quoting directly from a tablet device, enabling the sales person to issue quotes on the move. Bradley Venske, sales consultant at Mercedes Benz Commercial Vehicles, East Rand, find this feature helpful: "My customers are located outside the main city centres and BluWave allows me to generate a quote while at the client," Venske says.

The integrated quoting achieves three processes from the quotation input. As the system generates a PDF quote document, it also automatically updates the sales person's management pipeline of opportunities. Lastly it schedules a follow-up activity in the sales person's diary.

Manage from anywhere

If as a manager you find yourself out of the office much of the time, or if your sales team is distributed around the country, you can still keep your finger on the pulse. Managers can access up to date sales staff productivity statistics, view the status of deals in progress and access management reporting. In addition the system pushes management graphs to you each week via email.

For more information call Tania Cooke-Tonnesen on 011-462-6871 or mail sales@bluwave.co.za.

41 years ago. In 1971 the first email was sent via ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network).

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4.5 million. The number of Nintendo 3DS portable gaming consoles in the US alone, during its first year of availability.

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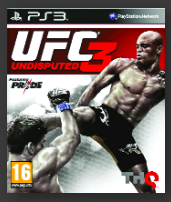
48 hours of sales. Remedy recoups the development and marketing costs for the PC edition of Alan Wake in that amount of time.

UFC Undisputed 3

The king of the octagon returns



Although there have been other contenders such as EA Sport's MMA, THQ's UFC Undisputed franchise is still the go-to series for mixed martial arts (MMA) fans. The latest title in this series, UFC Undisputed 3, enters the virtual octagon looking to make the competition tap out.

Those new to the phenomenon of MMA will appreciate the choice between using the regular controls and a beginner-friendly control scheme, which sports easier grappling mechanics and ground work. Fans of the series might turn up their noses at the thought of simplified controls, but along with the really extensive tutorial system, the new control scheme makes life a lot less complicated for casual fighting gamers more used to button-bashing combos than the authentic, tactical and far more engrossing style on offer within UFC.

Another new feature we loved is the revised submission system, which making winning fights by submission, or avoiding having to tap out to a submission, more rewarding and less of a hassle than in previous iterations. Submission attempts result in a circle-based mini-game popping on-screen. In order to get your opponent to submit, you have to line up your gauge with his for a short period of time, which in practise is far more intuitive than it sounds.

Looks so good that it could hurt for real

Along with engrossing gameplay mechanics, the impressive visual presentation further helps set the tone for matches. Additionally, it assists in immersing players within the world of UFC, especially as you ascend to the top within the expansive career mode. This is done via the incorporation of numerous photos in the menu system and video footage in between fights, showing spectacular moments from real UFC fights, as well as interviews with fighters on topics such as what it felt like to win their first fight.

> "The new control scheme makes life a lot less complicated for casual fighting gamers."

In terms of graphics, the fighter models in this game are achingly detailed, to the point where even their tattoos would survive being photographed and given to a tattoo artist to replicate.

Conclusion

UFC Undisputed 3 will manage to bring a smile to the face of MMA fans craving authentic presentation, graphics and challenging gameplay. At the same time, the latest title makes it easier for newbies to don a pair of virtual gloves and put in a mouth guard thanks to the new amateur control scheme and extensive tutorials. A ringside seat will set you back R599.

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

RPG Glory

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning showed great promise in its demo, leaving us eagerly waiting for, and wanting more. It also left us wondering whether the full title would live up to our expectations though. In short, it does.

Amongst the many things that a great game needs to do, a role playing game (RPG) in particular, such as Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning (KAR), must accomplish one task above all else in order to succeed. It needs to draw you into its world and leave such an indelible impression that you keep coming back for more. KAR does just that, and quite a bit more.

> "Melee combat with a sword or axe feels especially visceral for a role playing game"

Seductive story

The game begins with you being resurrected by the mystical Well of Souls, which has reunited your soul with your body and also granted you the honour of being its first success. This apparently is essential in turning the tide in the ongoing war with the fearsome Tuatha Deohn, the soldiers in a seemingly unstoppable army which has waged a relentless war on Amalur, under the control of a mad king.

A world worth returning to

The game's world was no less engaging when we ventured further into it, encountering an array of side quests that were interesting enough to compel us to wander from the main story. Whether it was finding a cure for a brutalised Fae, aiding a wolf regain his animal form after being cursed, tracking down and destroying a shipment of a deadly plague, or aiding a village beset by giant spiders, KAR gave us enough reason to keep exploring off the beaten path.

Convincing combat

One of the game's many strong points though is its combat. Melee combat with a sword or axe feels especially visceral for a role playing game, while quick access to a secondary, ranged weapon, makes switching between the two fluid and easy. Along with magic (sorcery) attacks, and the ability to 'rip fate' from your enemy when your fate meter is full, and thus finish combat more quickly, battling KAR's numerous enemies was especially satisfying.

To the point

Add in one of the most accessible lockpicking elements we've played in a while and an abundance of treasure and gear begging to be found, high production values, particularly with regards to graphics and sound, and KAR quite simply does everything we hoped it would, namely give us another fantastic world to get wonderfully lost in besides from Skyrim's. [RN]

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