

**THORSTEN HEINS**  
**Can He Save RIM?**

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**FAIR TO MID-RANGE**  
**The Huawei Honor**

# distro

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DON'T CALL IT AN  
**ULTRA  
BOOK**

The Latest New Thing  
Is Anything But

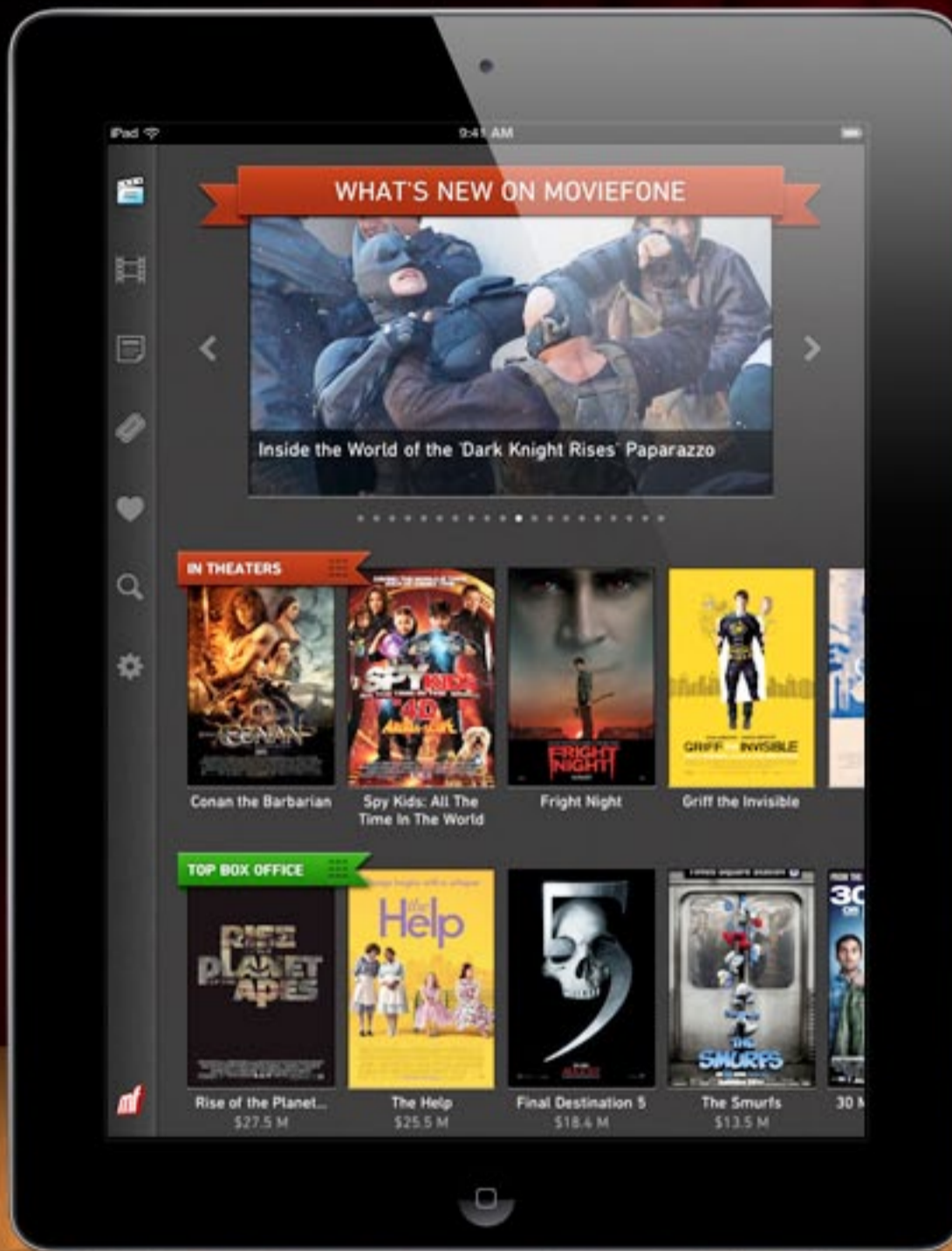
**THE \$2,300 PHONE**  
**BlackBerry**  
**Porsche Design**  
**P'9981**

**GINA  
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**TACKLES THE**  
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**MICRO FOUR**  
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# DISTRO Issue #25...



*It's not just  
hype, it's  
misplaced  
hype.*

## » *Enter*

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# RIM's Conservative New CEO and Apple's Bonkers Financial Report

*Editor's Letter*

**RIM has been stuck in a rut for what seems like an eternity, spinning its wheels as its competition drives off over the horizon. Many have pointed the blame at the company's stereo CEOs, a split hierarchy creating a lack of focus and vision. Whether that was the case or not we probably won't know until a pair of scorching autobiographies come out in a decade or two (possibly as a boxed set?), but we do now know that RIM has implemented a solution: Thorsten Heins.**

Still, the company chose a predictably curious way of making the announcement: letting loose the news late on a Sunday evening when much of the tech journalism world was away from their keyboards. But we were there, and we were also present for the 8AM Monday morning conference call in which Thorsten got to say his piece — though in a mostly scripted way.

His plan is very conservative: to refocus the company on moving forward and to deliver on what it has rather than endlessly iterating and improving without releasing anything. During the call I was reminded of Steve Jobs gradually shifting to the mantra of “Real art-



ists ship,” though it remains to be seen just how much artistry there is left at RIM. I'm still vaguely hopeful, but then, I've been overly optimistic at times when it comes to these things. The market, however, didn't seem to suffer the same afflic-

tion; RIM's stock price tumbled a further eight percent that day.

But, even the most dire pessimist would be forced to crack a smile when looking at Apple's most recent financial reports. It's earnings season again and Cupertino takes the cake with \$46.33 billion in revenue, over \$13 billion in earnings in one quarter. That's *double* what the company profited last quarter and a pretty ridiculous sum by the standards of anybody this side of Exxon Mobil.

Those numbers were driven by sales of 37 million iPhones (mostly the 4S), 15.4 million iPads and the same number of iPods. That compares to a relatively scant 5.2 million Macs, and Tim Cook admitted that iPad sales were cannibalizing sales of the company's desktops and laptops to some degree. But, he gleefully indicated that they're seeing sales of Windows machines being cannibalized at a far greater rate, and so that was alright with him.

Nokia threw up



# Even the most dire pessimist would be forced to crack a smile when looking at Apple's most recent financial reports.

its numbers as well, but they landed with something of a thud compared to Apple's. It posted an operating loss this quarter of \$1.3 billion on \$13.1 billion in net sales. That's 21 percent lower than this time in 2010. The company did manage to move a full million Lumia smartphones, and if that pace increases, perhaps this could mark the end of the bleeding. It was also revealed just how much Microsoft paid the company to... encourage jumping onto the Windows Phone bandwagon: \$250 million dollars. That seems like a lot of money until you stack it up against the losses this quarter alone.


Speaking of Microsoft, we got some reasonably solid sounding information on what is commonly called the Xbox 720, but really, could be named anything by the time it ships — which will be in late 2013 if this info pans out. Performance is said to be a (generally meaningless) “six times faster” than the current system's, based on AMD's 6000 series GPU. That sounds nice now, but surely won't be that impressive


in another 18 months. Other rumors mention the inclusion of a Blu-ray drive, which would mean Microsoft isn't quite going whole-hog on the digital distribution route just yet.

Finally, it was a week of ups and downs for civil libertarians when it comes to technology. On the up side, the US Supreme Court ruled that GPS devices cannot be affixed to suspects' cars (or, presumably, their persons) without a search warrant — that the act of applying one constitutes a “search.” So, that means if you have some wires hanging down from beneath your bumper, it's probably just your fog lights coming loose and you should take off the tinfoil hat and head to your mechanic.

On the flip side, a Colorado judge ordered a defendant to decrypt her laptop. Ramona Fricosu is being tried for bank fraud and it's believed that the computer contains information relevant to the case. The judge found that, by being asked to unencrypt the laptop, Fricosu's Fifth Amendment rights protecting her from self-

incrimination are not being violated. Naturally, her lawyer disagrees and is planning to file an appeal, so this isn't over yet.

But, the week is over, or at least nearly so, meaning it's time to curl up with another edition of Distro. Don Melanson tells us why the “Ultrabook” moniker is already dead. Darren Murph weighs in on why Mr. Heins is not pushing for the kinds of changes RIM needs, while Brad Molen offers a review of the most radical thing to come out of the company in ages: the Porsche Design P'9981. We also have reviews of the Huawei Honor, the Panasonic Lumix DMC-GX1, a CES-themed IRL, more Recommended Reading and a new feature called Snap Analysis in which we solicit your bite-sized opinions on what's happening this week. It's a weighty issue, so get comfortable and enjoy. 



TIM STEVENS  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,  
ENGADGET

# THE BLACKBERRY SHUFFLE

**Early this week**, Research In Motion made what could be considered a bold move, dethroning co-CEOs Jim Balsillie and Mike Lazaridis. However, as our Darren Murph points out, their successor, Thorsten Heins, embodies the same corporate culture that resulted in waning interest in the brand and backlash from investors. Following the announcement, the market made its opinion known, when RIM's stock price took an 8.47 percent hit.

*So, can RIM's new CEO pull the troubled company back from the ledge? Or is this BB business as usual?*

## *Selected Reactions*

### **Would you like some Thorsten Heins ketchup with that BlackBerry toast?**

*@tnkgrl, Myriam Joire, Senior Mobile Editor*

Long overdue and probably too late. An acquisition is probably their best bet. *+Bill Burbage, via Google+*

Yes, and no. Very much of his success or failure will depend on the BlackBerry OS 10. — *Himmat Singh, via Facebook*

No, they need a drastic shift to pull through. The farther they push out a serious ecosystem, the smaller the window becomes.

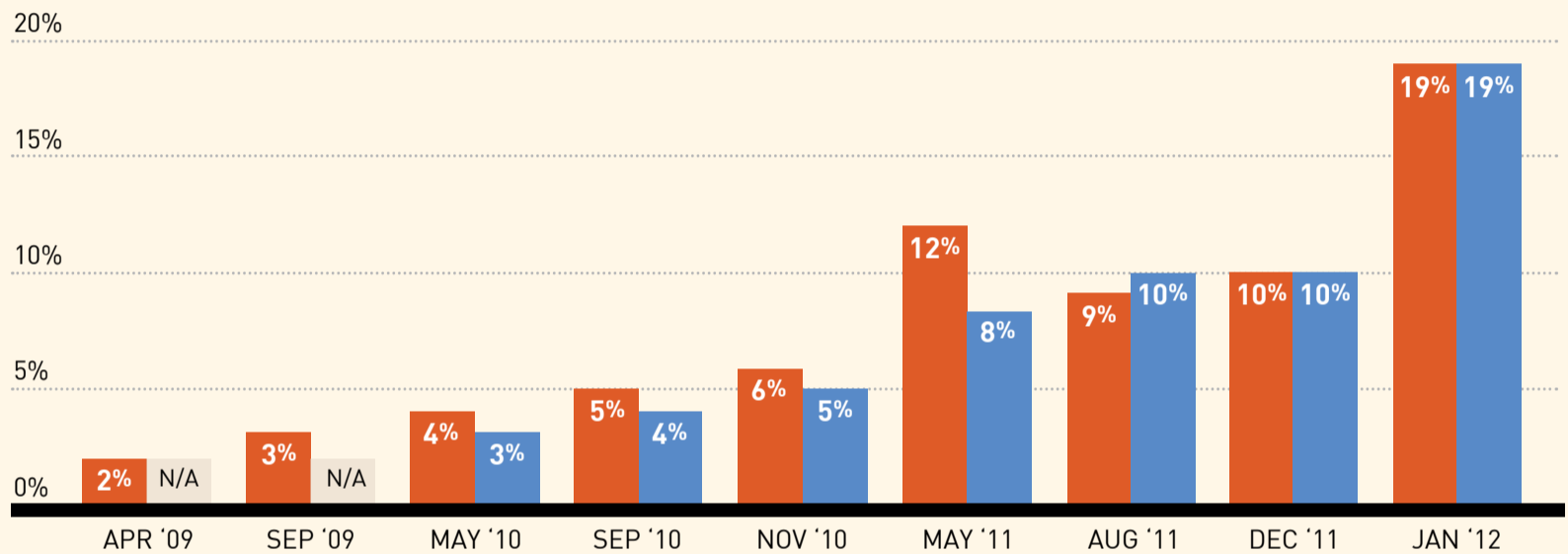
*@dantecesa, Dante Cesa, Contributing Editor*

**I reckon they'll be bought over, or their IP hung out for the highest bidder. Still, the BB os is a fast little fugger. *+theTokyoBlonde, via Google+***

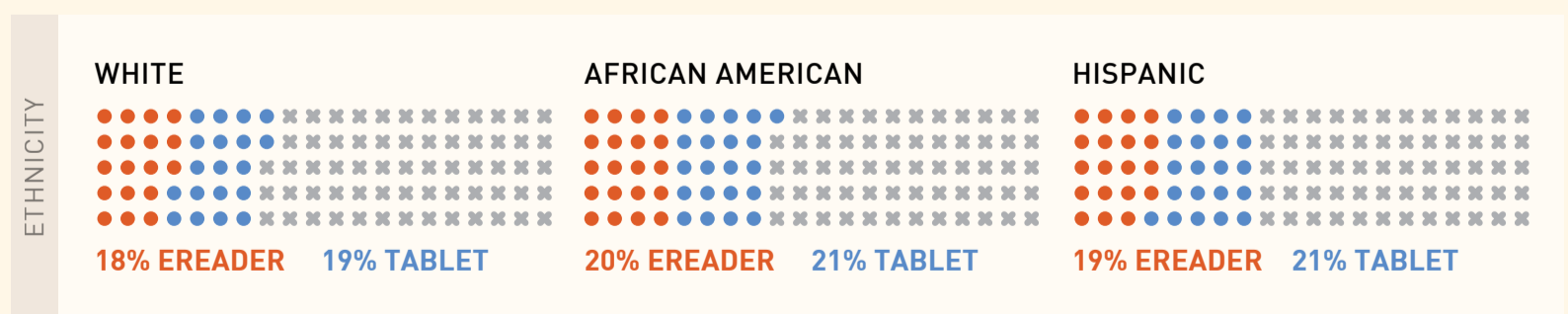
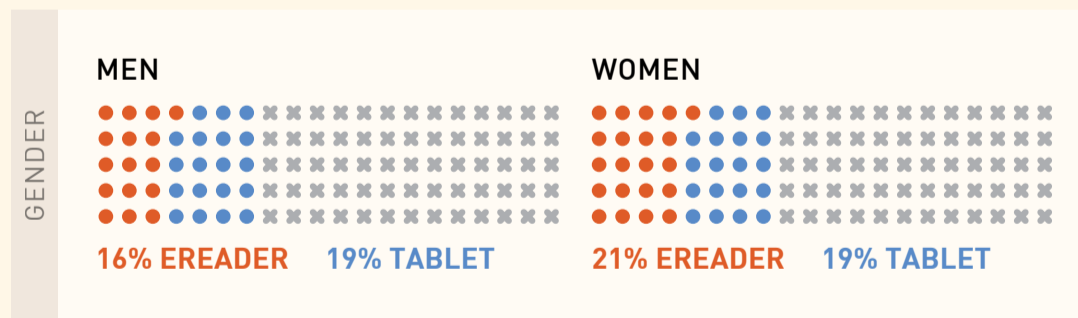
# The State of the Slate

The number crunchers over at the Pew Research Center have released another batch of market statistics, this time, with a focus on tablets. According to the Center's latest survey, 19 percent of all adult Americans now own some form of tablet, marking a nearly twofold increase over figures from a poll conducted in mid-December. E-reader ownership, meanwhile, increased by exactly the same margin over this period, jumping from 10 percent to 19 percent. These numbers also signal a healthy acceleration from the middle of this year, when the slate and reader markets apparently stagnated, ahead of the holiday shopping rush. Overall, about 29 percent of US adults own either a tablet or an e-reader, up from 18 percent last month. — *Amar Toor*

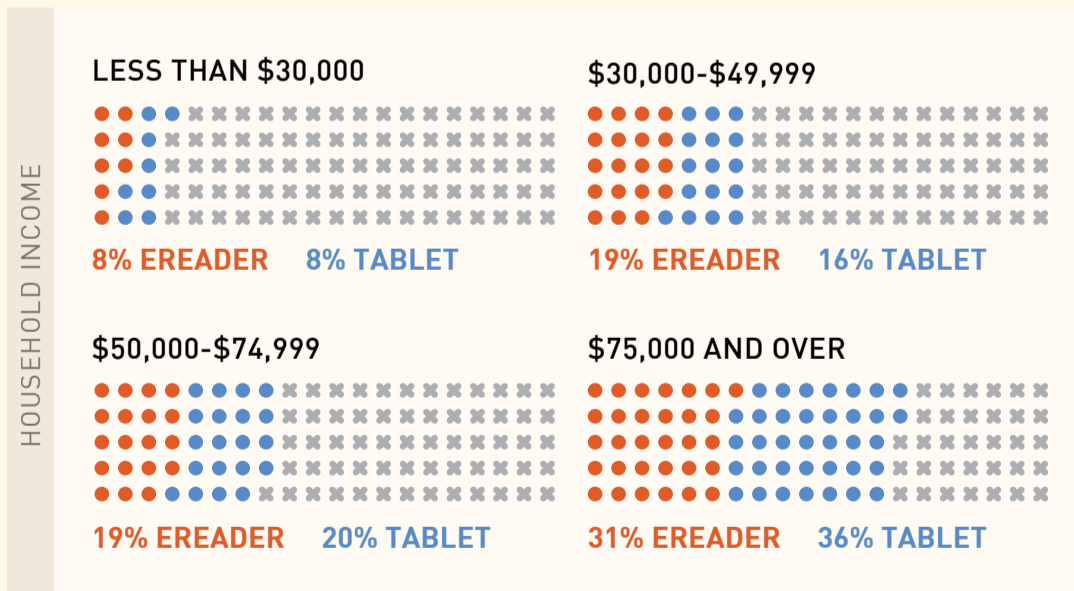
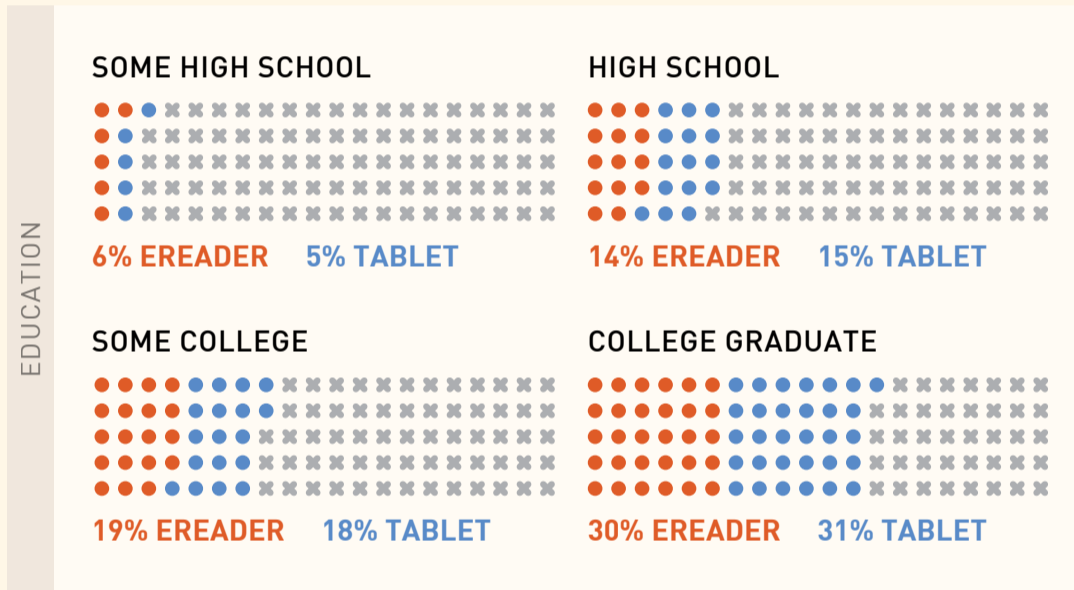
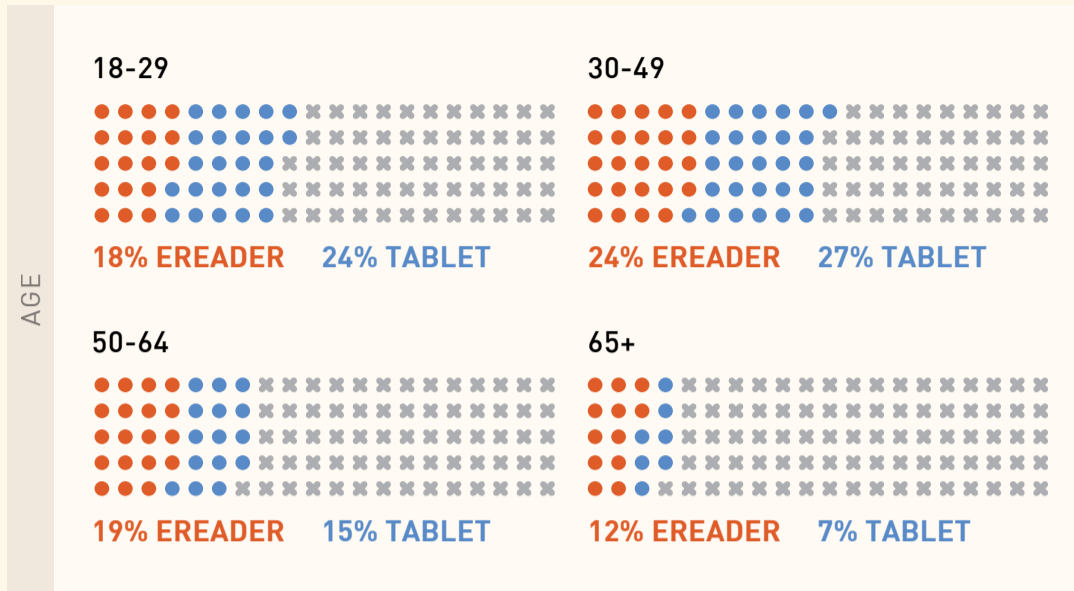
% Of Adults Who Own ■ e-Readers and ■ Tablets



## The Demographic Breakdown: Who's Buying What?



## The Breakdown: Who's Buying What?



“ Overall, about **29 percent** of US adults own either a tablet or an e-reader, up from 18 percent last month. ”

# YOU TELL ME IT'S THE INSTITUTION

*Switched On*



BY ROSS RUBIN

Apple rose to dominate sales of digital music by more or less mirroring the way consumers acquired music in the physical world, that is, purchasing songs, but providing a greater degree of granularity. This worked well for music and has also held true for apps and best-selling books, but hasn't been as in-step with consumer media acquisition habits for other content. ¶ For example, before Apple brought sales of video material to iTunes, most consumers did not generally own TV shows except for perhaps a few cherished series on DVD. They either watched them as they aired as part of a cable-like subscription or paid a flat monthly fee for the privilege of recording them on a DVR to be viewed at a later date. Furthermore, both Blockbuster's physical stores and later Netflix's DVD by mail feature relied on a system of one-time consumption via rental or subscription that eschewed ownership of movies. And today, Vevo.com offers free streaming of many music videos that Apple still seeks to sell. ¶ Apple then, is not surprising us by pursuing the same approach to textbooks that it has with virtually all other digital content that it is in the business of offering — a straightforward purchasing model. Removing a potential resale opportunity mitigates the digital advantage of being able to annotate and highlight without destroying the original text, but substitutes lower prices for the opportunity to purchase used textbooks or earn money reselling them. Overall, the model runs consistent with how most college students acquire textbooks, and the iPad is a relatively minimal expense in the overall context of a typical college education. But while Apple is certainly aiming for the college textbook market, it will initially focus on high school texts. This exposes two

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*Ross Rubin (@rossrubin) is executive director and principal analyst of the NPD Connected Intelligence service at The NPD Group. Views expressed in Switched On are his own.*

# Apple could be banking on leading ‘the consumerization of education.’


main challenges.

First, unlike college students, most public high school students have their textbooks provided to them by the school. Apple is banking that the money saved by purchasing physical textbooks could be applied to significantly cheaper and perpetually current iBooks. But, depending on the cost of the physical textbook, it’s doubtful that many districts could afford upgrading to iBooks. And that’s not even taking into account the cost of an iPad for each student.

Apple counters that iPads could be purchased in lieu of the computers relegated to labs today, but, even with Bluetooth keyboards, there is likely curriculum that could not be replicated on an iPad. Of course, over time, Apple could introduce cheaper iPads as it has cheaper iPods and iPhones after their introduction, and they could well develop into more capable PC replacements.

Second, unlike the sale of entertainment content, which is sold directly to consumers, selling high school textbooks would require the intervention of school districts. Amidst educators and principals, Apple’s videos did feature one administrator from Los Angeles. But, for better or worse, intermediary bodies will often decide whether high schools make the move to iBooks. This

will require a different approach than the direct messaging that the company enjoys with end users; one that emphasizes the kind of manageability, maintenance, cost and multiple-sourcing that is in some ways more akin to an enterprise purchase discussion. There is also the need to convince these decision-makers that iPads — or at least tablets — are the future, and that it is better to prepare youngsters for the world with them than traditional computers (because that’s likely what the budget decisions will involve).

There are other issues that Apple’s proposed textbook revolution faces beyond cost and a go-to-market approach, such as the much-publicized distribution lock-in of iBooks Author or the terms of its End-User License Agreement. But the only lever that Apple ultimately doesn’t control is the purchasing structure of public schools. In a world where we so often hear about “the consumerization of IT,” Apple could be banking on leading “the consumerization of education,” in which principals or teachers — perhaps even students — bring iBooks in through the back door. That could certainly help establish a market for the company, but would not be enough to foment the kind of industry shift it has driven in music. 



# How the US Lost Out on iPhone Work

Wonder why the iPhone is Designed by Apple in California, but Assembled in China? Charles Duhigg and Keith



by Charles Duhigg  
and Keith Bradsher  
*The New York Times*

Bradsher provide some of the obvious and not-so-obvious answers in this extensive piece

for *The New York Times*. Among the highlights are some new details from President Obama's now-famous dinner with Silicon Valley executives early last year — in which Steve Jobs reportedly told the President quite bluntly that “those jobs aren't coming back” — and an account of the development of the original iPhone, including the last-minute switch from a plastic to glass screen. Of course, while the focus is on Apple, much of it is also applicable to the broader challenges the US faces with manufacturing in the changing global economy.

## AROUND THE WEB

**Why History Needs Software Piracy**  
by Benj Edwards  
*Technologizer*



While efforts like SOPA and PIPA attempt to curb software piracy, Benj

Edwards argues that some piracy is actually essential to keep the history of the medium from disappearing.

**The Secrets Apple Keeps**  
by Adam Lashinsky  
*Fortune*



Another look at Apple, this time an examination of the exhaustive measures the

company takes to protect its secrets — an excerpt from Lashinsky's forthcoming book, *Inside Apple*.

**Why the Clean Tech Boom Went Bust**  
by Juliet Eilperin  
*Wired*



Much has been written about the possibility of a new tech or dotcom bubble —

here, Juliet Eilperin examines a tech boom of a particular sort, and how so much has changed in a few short years.

**Why is Snooki Trying to Sell Me Headphones?**  
by Joseph L. Flatley  
*The Verge*



What does it mean when CES and celebrities have become more inseparable

than ever? Joe Flatley dove into the madness to find out.

*Recommended Reading*



# Panasonic Lumix DMC-GX1 Micro Four Thirds Camera

With the GX1, Panasonic's acclaimed GF1 finally has a worthy successor.

BY ZACH HONIG

**It's no surprise** that the mirrorless interchangeable lens camera category is continuing to grow at a rapid pace. These compact, pro-featured ILCs undoubtedly have a strong future, with mass consumer appeal and a widening assortment of price points. We're particularly taken with the technology's compact footprint — we're focusing our camera reviews on mirrorless models, and even outfitted our entire CES team

with Sony's NEX-C3. But long before the likes of Sony and Fujifilm launched their first cameras, Olympus and Panasonic dominated the then-infant mirrorless category, developing the Micro Four Thirds sensor standard that, for better or worse, has failed to catch on among other manufacturers. Surprisingly, Panasonic's pioneering days were far stronger than those of recent past, with the company's GF1 melting the

hearts of compact-seeking professionals. But following that successful first model, Panasonic opted to take the GF series in a different direction, launching a dumbed-down GF2 (and later GF3) in what was likely an attempt to appeal to the much larger amateur category. This left the GF1 faithful without a worthy successor — until now.

The Panasonic Lumix DMC-GX1 looks pretty standard on paper: there's a 16 megapixel Live MOS sensor, a choice of body colors, RAW shooting, HD video and a top sensitivity of ISO 12,800. Just as it did with the GF2 and GF3 *body* designs, Panasonic took a different direction with its new X-series lenses, swapping the traditional manual zoom for a motorized version, enabling a much more compact footprint. The difference when positioned alongside the NEX-C3's 18-55mm zoom is staggering, but Panasonic didn't arrive at this slick design without compromise, particularly noticeable when it comes time to swallow the \$950 kit price. Still, one look at the hardened matte black metal body is all it takes to know that this is no GF4 — this is *it*, the long-awaited successor to the GF1 has finally arrived. So, will the GX1 be our new top pick for the mirrorless category? Read on ahead to find out.

## Hardware

Canopied in varying shades of matte black paint, the GX1 has a sleek and elegant retro design. Panasonic didn't exactly take many risks when it came to



the camera's physical appearance compared to the GF1, but if we have any complaints about that model, design doesn't come to mind. The GX1's metal construction makes it heavy enough to feel solidly built, but it's still light enough to be worn comfortably around your neck. This should of course come as no surprise to GF1 vets, but the GX1 is far too large to fit in your pocket. Still, the control layout and instrument placement is very efficient, albeit a bit cluttered, so there's very little wasted space.

While it's certainly an upgrade, Panasonic didn't intend the GX1 to replace the GF3 — the company's more, shall we say, *beginner-friendly* model, from both a price and design standpoint. The GX1 marks the return of the full-size hot shoe, however, which made its way from the GF1 to the GF2, but was notably absent on the GF3. The hot shoe doubles as a base for the new 1.440k-dot LVF2 electronic viewfinder, which can be added to the kit for an additional \$250. That accessory is powered by a proprietary connector, positioned directly below the hot shoe and there's

also a stereo mic on the opposite side of the shoe, with clearly defined left and right positions.

Still up top and to the right of the hot shoe, you'll find a dedicated mode dial, with positions for aperture- and shutter-priority, program mode, manual, two custom modes, a scene mode with access to 17 programmed shooting modes and a Creative Control mode with a handful of artistic settings that we'll expand on a bit further below. There's no auto mode on the main dial itself — instead, you

## Advanced photographers may not be so keen on the lack of manual zoom and focus ring control...

can launch Intelligent Auto by tapping a dedicated button to the right of the dial, with the button glowing blue when activated. There's a power lever to the right that, just like the mode dial, takes just enough force to turn that you need not worry about accidentally activating it while recording. There's also a dedicated still shutter release along with a video record button. Notably absent,

however, is a zoom slider, which you'll instead find mounted to the left side of the lens.

Speaking of those lenses, the GX1 doesn't ship with one at that \$700 sticker price. Instead, you can purchase either the new Lumix G X Vario PZ 14-42mm f/3.5-5.6 ASPH Power OIS lens for \$400, or a Lumix G 14-42mm f/3.5-5.6 Mega OIS optic with a \$200 list price (or you can opt for a kit that includes the X lens for \$950). Both lenses offer a 28-84mm 35mm equivalent focal length, but the former (and pricier) version includes electric-powered zoom functionality, enabling smoother zooming during video capture and an overall (much) more compact design. We tried out the GX1 paired with the new X-series lens, which performed very well during our weeklong test period, offering excellent focus speeds and smooth zoom. Advanced photographers may not be so keen on the lack of manual zoom and focus ring control, but the size tradeoff is worthwhile for most.

Continuing the tour, the majority of the GX1's backside is occupied by a 460k-dot 3-inch LCD. Unlike the GF1, this successor's display includes touch functionality, though you certainly don't need to use it — the touchscreen interface enables you to zoom, touch-to-focus and even fire the shutter without using physical controls, though dedicated buttons are available as well (with the notable exception of touch-to-focus). The display is acceptably sharp and responsive, and there's a nifty level



gauge on screen to help ensure the correct horizontal and vertical position. There's also an on-screen histogram option, which you can position anywhere you'd like just by tapping and dragging it on the screen. The LCD occasionally displayed the image preview with incorrect color balance, though the captured image was typically accurate, even when it didn't match the preview.

To the right side of the display, you'll find a playback button, AF/AE lock, along with function, display, quick menu and AF/MF buttons. A five-position selector also brings direct access to ISO, white balance, shooting speed, focus area and menu controls. Finally, there's a flash release button just above the LCD — pushing it activates the pop-up flash, which extends above either lens but can also be used in a variety of manually-controlled positions. On the right side of the camera, there's a remote connector, an HDMI port along with a proprietary PC/AV connector. The bottom includes a metal tripod connector and a battery cover that slides to reveal an SD card slot and a 1,010mAh rechargeable battery.

## Performance and Battery Life

A far cry from the GF2 and GF3, the GX1 offers generally excellent performance from a shooting perspective, with an interface and control layout that will feel quite familiar to GF1 owners. The camera can power on and fire its first image in just 1.4 seconds, including the time required to focus. Once it's powered on, it can change focus from a far subject to one that's near and capture an image in less than a half second after pressing the shutter release — if you're capturing another image after focusing, the delay is virtually unnoticeable, with the camera firing instantaneously.

Even low-light subjects come into focus in a small fraction of a second, resulting in a very pleasant shooting experience, regardless of condition. This incredibly fast focus time made shooting moving subjects not only possible, but even enjoyable — we noticed a unicyclist riding down the sidewalk just a moment before he passed directly in front of the lens, yet the camera was able to capture him with sharp focus, as if we had time to prepare composition. This rarely tends to be an issue with

full-size DSLRs, but mirrorless cameras (and especially point-and-shoots) rarely offer this level of performance.

We also had a positive experience shooting 720p video, thanks to the GX1's accurate focus and exposure. (The camera is also capable of 1080/60i capture.) We noticed a delay when rapidly switching between near and far subjects during video capture, but Panasonic may have opted for a more gradual adjustment to avoid dramatic shifts and unintended focus hunting, which is an issue on other cameras — even the beloved Sony NEX-C3. Since you're very unlikely to jump back and forth between subjects near to the camera and those in the distance while capturing a single clip, this shouldn't be an issue for you.

The camera's 1,010mAh battery, while not particularly generous in size, was perfectly sufficient over our nearly week-long test period. We were able to capture 530 photos and 12 minutes of video in a variety of conditions, including low light and a few shots with flash. Speaking of the flash, there's a compact model built-in, but it didn't perform very well during our test, blowing out details even when shooting in Intelligent Auto mode. We spent a significant amount of time reviewing images and adjusting settings on the LCD, which contributes to power draw as well. The battery is incredibly lightweight, which matters less on a camera of this size than it does on a compact point and shoot, but we're happy to reduce weight wherever possible.

## Image Quality

The GX1's image quality is definitely an improvement over the GF3, which suffered from significant noise in low-light shooting and had an awfully difficult time white balancing during our brief indoor test period. As with any camera, the GX1 performed at its best when shooting outdoors in bright light, where focus, exposure and white balance were typically spot-on. Bright light shooting also allows for low image sensitivity, and noise was undetectable in any of these outdoor images, even at a 100 percent view. Details often didn't appear tack-sharp at a 1:1 pixel view and some scenes were occasionally flat, but overall image quality was quite good for a Micro Four Thirds camera.

As you've probably noticed, the GX1 offers an image sensitivity of ISO 160 - 12,800, making it theoretically capable of competing with the big guys, at least when it comes to low-light shooting. But it's one thing to /claim/ that a camera can capture usable images at high ISOs — actually delivering on that promise has traditionally been a challenge. As expected, especially given the sensor size, images were very noisy at 12,800, even when scaled down to 600 pixels wide (the size we use on the web). There was a staggering improvement at ISO 6400, however, with the camera capturing usable photos at any size, though noise was clearly visible at a 100 percent view. Image quality was excellent once we dropped to ISO 3200 and below — at that sensitivity noise was vis-



ible at 100-percent view, but we would be comfortable leaving the ISO fixed at that setting for everyday straight-to-web shooting. Noise became barely perceptible at ISO 1600, and was hardly noticeable at all at ISO 800 and below.



## User Interface

For the most part, the GX1's user interface is intuitive enough that you can just pick up the camera and start shooting without flipping through the manual. More advanced adjustments, like changing exposure compensation (push in the rear control wheel) and moving the histogram (click and drag it using your finder) probably require an hour or two with that little black and white book that advanced photographers tend to set aside, or never unwrap. Once you've got the hang of it, however, the user interface is incredibly easy to maneuver, with logical button and settings placement.

In addition to the buttons that we outlined along with the rest of the hardware above, there's also a slide-out touchscreen drawer with options to control zoom, activate screen-tap shutter release, enable/disable the on-screen position guide and activate/move the histogram. You'll probably be more comfortable using hardware controls for most of these functions, so it's convenient that the drawer can be tucked away out of view. The camera includes a fairly comprehensive display overlay, with readouts of all critical settings at the top and bottom of the frame. Unfortunately there's no battery percentage meter — instead, you're left with a standard three-level indicator. The camera (almost) makes up for that with the inclusion of a precise focal length readout, along with a nifty countdown for long (one-second-and-up) exposures.

Often-used settings like metering mode, flash, picture and movie recording size and quality, histogram, guidelines and photo style are accessible by tapping the Q Menu button. Other adjustments may require a trip to the main system menu, which you can access using a dedicated menu button in the center of the five-position controller. Menu items are presented on five multi-page tabs, including Record, Motion Picture, Custom, Setup and Playback. Some of these sub-menus are many pages deep (seven for the Custom menu, for example), though intuitive placement makes it fairly easy to find the setting you're looking for.

## The Competition

Until now, we've spent little time focusing on price, since the GX1 is powerful enough to justify that \$699 body-only sticker. But once you factor in the lens (even at the \$950 kit price), you're getting dangerously close to mid-range DSLR territory. Still, this is really the first mirrorless camera we've come across that offers an overall package that rivals the NEX-C3, which has been our top pick in the category from a cost:benefit perspective. From a strict value standpoint, the Sony cam still offers the most bang for your buck, especially when you consider that you can get a body and lens for \$150 less than the GX1 alone. If you're looking for a camera with similar focusing performance and a Micro Four Thirds sensor and mount, then Olympus's E-P3 is another excellent choice. It also offers a retractable lens, but with a manual twist-zoom function. And you can take home the kit (with 14-42mm zoom lens) for \$900 — 50 bucks less than the GX1. When push comes to shove, Sony's NEX-C3 still remains the one and only steal, at \$550 including an 18-55mm lens, a larger APS-C sensor and a slightly smaller form factor, lenses not withstanding.

## Wrap-Up

All things considered, we're quite thrilled with the Panasonic Lumix DMC-GX1. Micro Four Thirds early adopters who fell for the GF1's sleek, retro design two years ago finally have a successor worth considering, and we may even

# BOTTOMLINE

## Panasonic Panasonic Lumix DMC-GX1

**\$699** *body only*


### PROS

- Full-size hot shoe
- Retro, GF1-like design
- Very good image quality
- Fast and accurate focus and exposure

### CONS

- Pricy when paired with 14-42mm X lens
- Poor built-in flash performance

» With the GX1, Panasonic's acclaimed GF1 finally has a worthy successor.

go so far as to say that Panasonic has undone the wrong caused by the misdirected marketing strategy adopted by the GF2 and GF3. The GX1 is, in fact, a terrific shooter, exceeding our expectations and giving us the first viable alternative to the stellar Sony NEX-C3. If you have deep pockets and a desire to continue your love affair with the GF-series that never was, look no further than the GX1. 

*Zach is a Senior Associate Editor and heads up Engadget's features content. He's also a lifetime lover of everything aviation and photography.*

# RIM'S NEW CEO ISN'T THE SHAKEUP IT NEEDED

*Editorial*



BY DARREN  
MURPH

For a brief moment, I had hopes that RIM had made a move that would unseat it from the funk it's been sitting in for years. And then I watched the introductory video of newly appointed CEO Thorsten Heins. Anyone who assumes that a simple CEO swap is the answer to all of RIM's issues is woefully misinformed, or worse, just blinded by false hope. Sure, removing Jim Balsillie and Mike Lazaridis — both of whom have been rightly criticized for not responding to market pressures quickly enough — is a start, but it's not like they're *gone*. In fact, the two are still situated at a pretty fancy table within Research in Motion's organizational chart. ¶ Have a listen at this: Mike is hanging around as the Vice Chair of RIM's Board and Chair of the Board's new Innovation Committee. You heard right — the guy who has failed outright to innovate at anything in the past handful of years is now championing an *innovation committee*. Sounds right up his alley, no? Jim's staying put as an outright director, and if you think anyone at RIM is going to brush aside the input of the founders, you're wrong. Jim and Mike may have new titles, but they're still here, and I have no reason to believe that they'll act radically different going forward than they have in the past. Oh, and about Thorsten Heins? Let's go there.

According to RIM's own profile of Heins, he held several positions in the wireless arena prior to joining the company in 2009. He was the Chief Technology Officer of Siemens' Communications Division, and held several general management positions in Hardware and Software businesses. For those firmly planted in the present, you may not remember the wilds of 2007; by my own estimation, that's when the entire smartphone arena was turned upside-down by one multifaceted device. In '07, the BlackBerry was a potent communicator — the OS was comparatively snappy, BBM was a hit and the hardware

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*Darren holds the Guinness World Record for being the most prolific professional blogger on planet Earth. He's also an argonaut.*

## RIM needs a shock to the system. RIM needs a reboot.

was practically unparalleled. And then, iPhone OS was launched.

Almost overnight, consumer expectations regarding smartphones changed. They weren't swayed; they were obliterated and reborn. Suddenly, BlackBerry OS looked antediluvian, and it has ever since. What's all this have to do with Heins? A lot, I'd say. Before being given the CEO badge, he served as Chief Operating Officer of Product Engineering, overseeing the BlackBerry smartphone portfolio worldwide. Digest that for a moment — this is the guy who oversaw the same BlackBerry smartphone platform that the entire North American (and beyond) consumer base has been lambasting for being so last decade. This guy not only had a hand in pushing out countless lackluster phones over the past five years, but he was at the top of it. He had *plenty* of power to make changes — radical or subtle — in what was coming out of Waterloo, and so far as I can tell, he didn't. Color me jaded, but I have a hard time believing that the man in charge of some of the most forgettable BlackBerry handsets in recent memory will suddenly put RIM in a position to compete with and / or dominate the likes of iOS, Android and Windows Phone.

Let's go back to that video introduc-

tion a bit. These are actual quotes from the mouth of RIM's new CEO:

**“We have taken this to totally new heights and that journey isn't over yet.”**

**“If we continue doing well what we're doing, I see no problems with us being in the top three players worldwide in the next years in wireless.”**

**“At the very core of RIM... is the innovation. We always think ahead. We always think forward. We sometimes think the unthinkable. And that is fantastic.”**

**“Internally, from a process perspective, I think we need to get a bit more disciplined in our own processes.”**

**“We are a great innovative company, but sometimes we innovate too much while we're building a product.”**

**“What we need to get a bit better at here is to have a little bit more of an ear toward the consumer. I want to strengthen this by bringing really good marketing expertise in.”**

**“...With the 'Be Bold' campaigns, starting right now, I find this really exciting. I'm getting good feedback and we want to continue driving this.”**

**“Don't lose focus on what the present is. Congratulations to the team;**

**great success with PlayBook 2.0 at CES. We are heading absolutely in the right direction.”**


**“BB 10, needless to say, gotta ship on time... Make this the blow-the-socks-off experience...”**

**“I’m also very performance driven. When we decide on getting something done, I want it to be done on time at good quality and at good cost... That defines our customer satisfaction...”**

I’m pulling for RIM as much as anyone. The absolute *last* thing I want is one less (good) option in the mobile market. But this CEO speak smacks of the exact same thinking that has positioned RIM where it is today: miles behind Android and iOS. He mentions, “continuing” what RIM is doing. That’s actually the exact opposite of what it should be doing. If he truly believes that RIM “always” thinks ahead, there are thousands — perhaps millions — of consumers and investors that would *love* to know who is stifling all of this innovation that’s evidently happening internally. He’s getting great feedback on the Be Bold campaign? Who’s feeding him this line? In the consumer world, I can think of a handful of campaigns that are getting far more traction than the touting of a smartphone platform that hasn’t innovated in the better part of Android’s life on this planet. If he’s seen “great reviews” on PlayBook 2.0, he’s reading from the wrong book — the hard truth is, RIM’s tablet hopes

are grim without a vivacious developer community that doesn’t yet exist. Oh, and he can’t wait to see BlackBerry OS 10? By the time it hits, the iPhone 5 will be a reality. Need I really say more?

I fully understand that I’m being harsh here. Bullet, taken. But RIM needs more than an enthusiastic, intelligent guy who has already been soaked up in the company’s culture. RIM needs a shock to the system. RIM needs a reboot. Truth be told, I’m getting an all-too-familiar “burning platform” vibe here, and while I’m not saying that RIM should just adopt Windows Phone or Android and toss the admittedly delectable QNX aside, Heins is clearly sipping some strange, strange sauce if he’s mulling the licensing of BlackBerry 10 to other manufacturers. He also mentions great marketing — ironic, given that the biggest RIM story in the past five years hit directly during an undoubtedly enormous event that had the attention of both Silicon Valley and New York. You think it’s a minor thing that RIM’s new CEO debuted on a Sunday evening whilst everyone else was watching an NFL game? I think it’s something that could’ve been planned a bit better. This is RIM’s story to tell, and delivery is vital.

Perhaps, though, RIM’s going to be perfectly fine situating itself in third or fourth place. Perhaps it has no intentions of ever trying to out-Apple Apple or one-up Google. But if Heins is secretly scheming to blow the socks off of either, I’ve yet to be convinced by the introductory clip we saw. Tick, tock. 



REVIEW

# BlackBerry Porsche Design P'9981

The P'9981 is little more than a luxury BlackBerry Bold 9900, and will appeal only to a select few.

BY BRAD MOLEN

**Research in Motion**, regardless of how you may view its recent history or its long-term future, still has a stronghold on the corporate world. Its lineup of BlackBerry smartphones is known for great battery life, comfortable keyboards with intuitive shortcuts, top-notch native email and Enterprise clients and — most important to busi-

nesses — unrivaled security features. Sure, its influence is waning as competitors have caught up in some areas (and surpassed it in others), but there are plenty of companies that have clung to their CrackBerries and held on tight.

RIM's been hard at work trying to regain lost momentum by introducing a series of new devices featuring its latest



OS, BlackBerry 7, and the BlackBerry Bold 9900 / 9930 series has been the star of the show so far. The problem is, it's not flashy enough. How is a C-level exec supposed to walk proudly on the golf course with a \$300 (subsidized) phone? Talk about embarrassing. Have no fear, corporate top dog, Porsche Design has a solution: the \$2,350 Porsche Design BlackBerry P'9981, a Vertu-ized version of that lesser handset you wouldn't be caught dead using.

The P'9981 is available only in the UK and the Middle East for now, so until the device arrives in the US this Spring, anyone who lives stateside will have to rely on retailers to import some in. Fortunately we got the hookup by our friends at Negri Electronics, who happily lent us one of the few handsets they have in stock. As a result, we're now able to discuss the real questions circling around such a Richie Rich smartphone: what in the blue blazes makes this so



expensive? Is it even worth it? How different is it from a standard BlackBerry Bold 9900? You'll find these answers and plenty of mysteries as you read on.

## ...There's no question it's an artfully made piece.

### Hardware

Handsets that cost more than two grand — the Nokia Oro, Tag Hauer Link Phone, Motorola Aura and anything Vertu come to mind — aren't meant to be blockbusters. In fact, most are purely intended to be sold as limited editions, with only a small number rolling off the production line. Porsche Design decided to follow the same strategy, and the company paired up with RIM to craft a new masterpiece using some of the finest materials lying around.

The brand's choice of manufacturer may come as a surprise to many, given the company's recent rocky history, but it shouldn't. After all, Porsche Design CEO Juergen Gessler and several of its executive underlings use a BlackBerry as their daily driver. It's only natural, then, that if they were going to begin selling premium smartphones through

their very own stores, they'd buddy up with their favorite phone maker to make it happen, right? Gessler met with RIM to inquire about a collaboration, and boom — the rest is history.

Let's begin digging into what will interest the business elite: the phone's design and hardware. First off, we'll need to answer the first burning question: does the P'9981's cost have anything to do with functionality? After all, a device that costs that much should *certainly* do our laundry for us, right? Nope. Wash the dishes? Nuh uh. Walk our dogs? Strike three. The use of "fine materials," as well as the limited production and eye candy factor, all contribute to the sky-high costs, and it has absolutely nothing to do with *what* you can do with it. But, if functionality is all you're looking for, you can find that just as easily in top-notch mainstream devices for less than \$700 unlocked. In the case of the P'9981, stamping the Porsche logo across the top is what draws curious eyes (and wallets).

We'll offer a disclaimer here: when mentioning that the P'9981 is eye candy, allow us to point out that we're not *smitten* with its looks, per se. However, there's no question it's an artfully made piece. Porsche and RIM appeared to put a solid amount of TLC into the thing, and it shows in its craftsmanship. Save for the plastic bottom, which lets the antenna do its thing without unnecessary interference, the entire body is forged out of stainless steel. The battery cover is wrapped in



real leather, each individual key on the QWERTY keyboard is made of metal and the navigation buttons sitting below the screen are fashioned out of individual pieces of glass.

And yet, its resemblance to the 9900 is unmistakable. There's a reason for this: they're essentially the same phone. Much like its sibling, the P'9981 sports a 1.2GHz Qualcomm MSM8655 CPU and 768MB of RAM, a 2.8-inch touchscreen with a resolution of 640 x 480 (giving it a pixel density of 286ppi), BlackBerry OS 7.0 with Liquid Graphics, a 1,230mAh battery, GPS, NFC and a 5MP rear camera with an LED flash and 720p HD video capture. For all intents and purposes, Porsche Design pretty much took a Bold 9900 and stuck it in a more arresting chassis.

Measuring in at 115 x 67 x 11.3mm (4.53 x 2.64 x 0.44 inches), it's one millimeter wider, an eighth of a millime-

ter thicker and 25 grams (0.88 ounces) heavier, but it justifies its extra heft with a reassuringly solid feel. This hasn't been much of an issue in the past, as most BlackBerry devices we've tested have felt as though they'd survive two years worth of sporadic drops. Sure, the P'9981's sticker price is motivation enough to keep a death grip at all times, but truly, it feels as durable and well-constructed as its brethren.

The button selection should look mighty familiar too: they're all in nearly the same place as they are on the 9900, with a few minor adjustments. The top is reserved solely for the lock button, while the bottom has two connector ports — one on each end — that allow the phone to fit perfectly on the desktop docking station that comes included in the box. Over on the left sits the micro-USB charging port and 3.5mm headphone jack, while on the opposite side



you'll find BlackBerry's signature convenience key just below the volume rocker and mute button (which is sandwiched in between). Turning to the back will reveal the leather-wrapped battery cover, which features a metal bar on the top with "P'9981" engraved in the middle, and the camera and LED flash to its sides.

Unsurprisingly, the battery cover also bears the BlackBerry logo underneath the metal bar, embossed into the leather. The Bold 9900 lump is still present, though the one found on the P'9981 is slightly more subtle. Speaking of which, the two covers are also different in the way they attach to the body — the Bold's is smaller, comprising only the bump, whereas the Porsche Design model fits over the entire back of the phone.

Lastly, we move to the front where we find the LED notification light, touchscreen display, the standard set of BlackBerry navigation buttons — call, menu, trackpad, back and end / power — and a uniquely designed keyboard. More on that soon.

Performance is exactly what we'd expect from a BlackBerry: great reception, wonderful call quality and robust battery life, despite only offering a 1,230mAh juicepack. Our SunSpider 0.9.1 tests resulted in better scores than with the 9900, interestingly enough — we averaged 2,495ms, a convincing 150ms lead over the phone's fraternal twin. Our intensive battery rundown test, however, kept the juice flowing for eight hours and fifteen minutes, which we found to be about the same as the Bold.

## Keyboard

Truth be told, the keyboard may very well be the most interesting thing about the P'9981. As mentioned earlier, each key is individually crafted from metal, which should do an even better job withstanding your repeated phalangic abuse over the years. On the version we reviewed, each key has a letter and symbol / number inscribed that glows white when you're in a low light area, and an Arabic character which glows red at the same time.

Of course, it wouldn't be a BlackBerry keyboard — at least, not a high-end one — without the frets, and they're present here. Granted, they're located in a radically different position than the 9900, found on the lower half of each key instead of on the side. This, along with its shorter and wider keys, contribute to a more difficult typing experience. The buttons are rather clicky, yet it's not as easy to spring from one to another. The



SAMPLE  
IMAGES

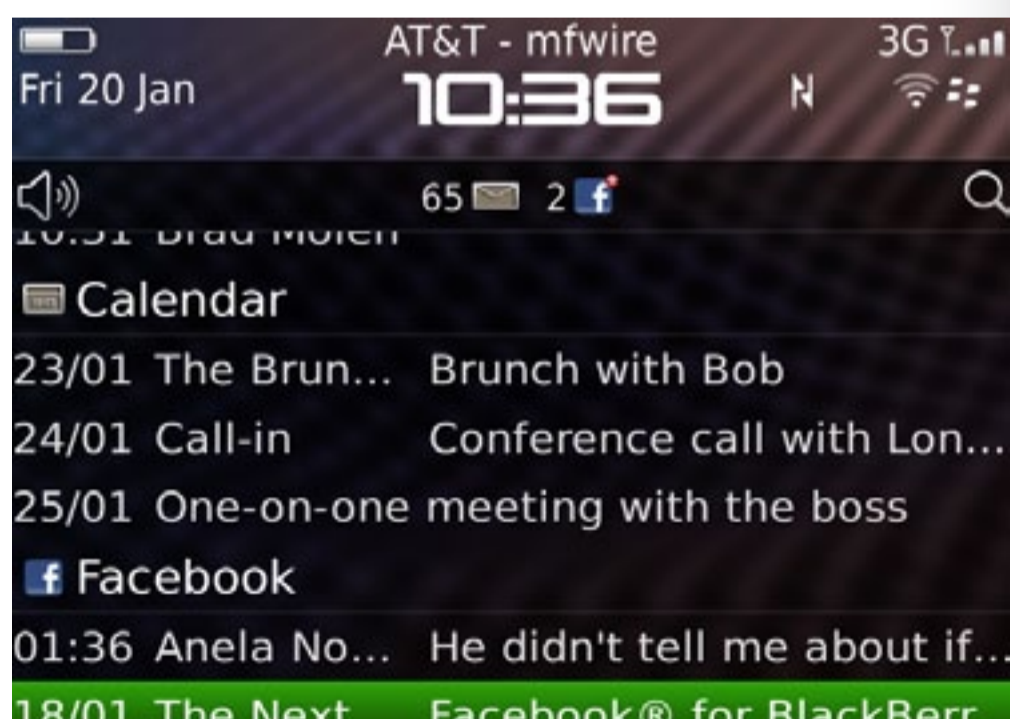
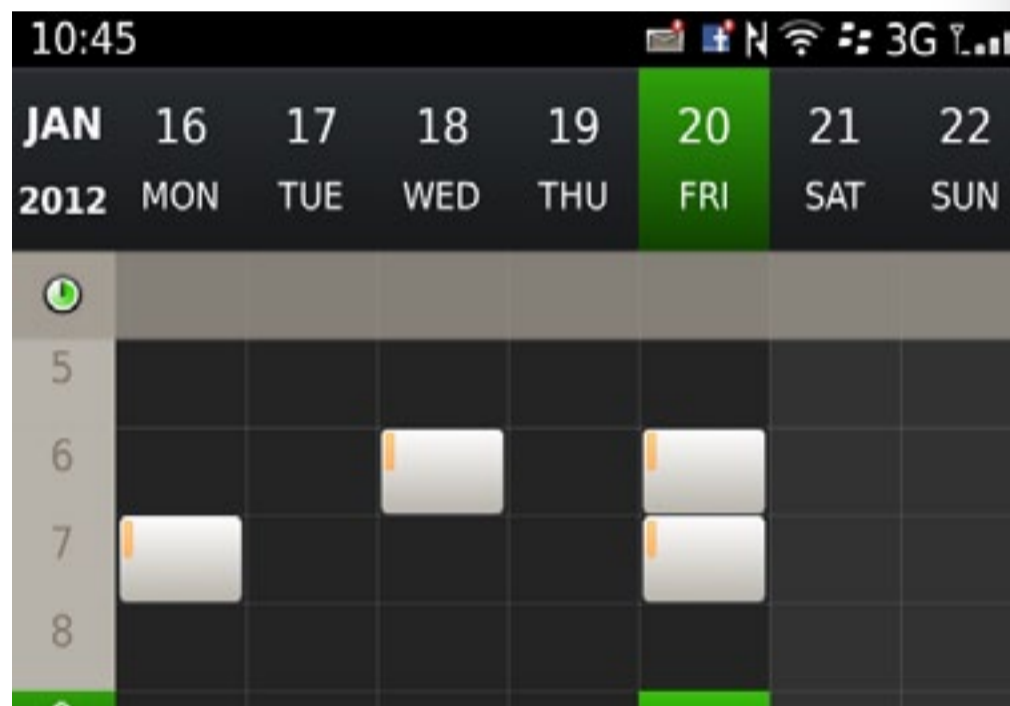


keyboard in general was still pleasant to use, but it just wasn't as good.

## Camera

We were hoping that some extra expense would go into making the P'9981's camera more magical than the Bold's, but it wasn't meant to be. Indeed, the five megapixel rear shooter — complete with an LED flash and 720p video capture — produced very similar results. Much like its brother, the P'9981 uses an EDoF sensor that's unable to take macro shots and thus up-close images are unfortunately blurry. The pictures taken from a greater distance turned out better, though we had to mess around with the white balance settings a bit to get some decent shots. As BlackBerry cameras are typically stripped bare of any other special settings, the ability to manipulate such features as exposure, saturation, ISO or anything else manually was unfortunately not an option.

With 720p video, too, we achieved roughly the same results as the Bold. Because the camcorder is fixed-focus, footage remained crisp throughout the entire clip, with the exception of excessive jiggle distortion. At first, we just chalked it up to having somewhat shaky hands — a direct result of not eating our veggies, we figured — but then we recalled having the same experience with the 9900. That's not to say it's impossible to film a home video free of the shakes, but it will definitely involve an incredibly steady hand or an armrest to make it possible.



## Software

The P'9981 runs BlackBerry 7.0, and we won't spend too much time delving into the OS; we cover the topic at length in our review of the Bold 9900 / 9930. However, one thing that really sticks out in the device's firmware is — drum-roll, please — its custom theme. That's right, proud owners of the phone can feel comfortable knowing they're using a hoity-toity Porsche Design BlackBerry 7 theme. Honestly, very little is new outside of the home panels, which now offer a special set of icons and background options. Aside from this, the differences between firmware are very few, if any. For instance, the menus are the same, the UI elements aren't dissimilar and you have the same applications pre-loaded on each phone.

This new skin was designed to be exclusive to the phone, giving users a chance to feel elite and oh-so special. Do you feel like your life isn't yet complete because you don't have this special theme? You can now die satisfied, as someone has unsurprisingly found a way to port it to the Bold. For better or worse, that gives theme lovers one less reason to go with this device. Although, how many reasons did you have to get it in the first place?

## Wrap-Up

The P'9981 isn't going to change the world. It won't fight hunger or cure diseases. Yet to the general population, that's exactly what it's expected to do for

# BOTTOMLINE

## Research In Motion BlackBerry Porsche Design P'9981

\$2,350


### PROS

- Made with high-quality materials
- Offers same performance as Bold 9900
- Above average battery life

### CONS

- Functionality doesn't justify the cost
- Keyboard isn't as easy to use as the Bold 9900
- No improvement in components

» The P'9981 is little more than a luxury BlackBerry Bold 9900, and will appeal only to a select few.

a whopping \$2,350 sticker price. The first Porsche Design smartphone will be a screaming deal to anyone who has way too much money to burn and just happens to crave a “fashionable” BlackBerry. For the rest of us, we see this for what it truly is: a BlackBerry Bold 9900 in a fancy Halloween costume. 

*Brad is a mobile editor at Engadget, an outdoorsy guy, and a lover of eccentric New Wave and electro. Singer and beatboxer.*

# DON'T CALL IT AN ULTRABOOK

*Editorial*



BY DON  
MELANSON

Every year at CES, the tech-watching masses engage in a bit of trendspotting — an attempt to identify the one or two big themes of the show that may or may not come to define the year in technology. Some years those are easy to spot (tablets and 3D TV were two big ones recently), and other times they involve a bit of guesswork. This year, one of the most oft-cited trends is the “ultrabook.” Judging from the companies’ announcements at the show and some of the coverage they’ve received, you might think that’s a new sort of device or a radically new type of laptop. But, really, they’re just laptops. Small, thin laptops — but laptops. ¶ It’s actually Ultrabook, with a capital “U,” and a (TM). The name is a wholly-owned creation of Intel, and the hype you’ve seen for them at CES is only just the beginning. Intel is reportedly planning its biggest advertising push in eight years to promote Ultrabooks, and it’s clearly already done a decent job of bringing hardware manufacturers on board the bandwagon. How many new “laptop” announcements do you remember from CES? ¶ Though they received a bit less hype at the time, Ultrabooks actually made their official debut in May of last year at the Computex trade show in Taiwan, where Intel described the devices as computers that “marry the performance and capabilities of today’s laptops with tablet-like features and deliver a highly responsive and secure experience, in a thin, light and elegant design.” ASUS Chairman Jonney Shih went even further, promising that Ultrabooks will do nothing short of “change the way people interact with their PC.” “Ultrabooks” may yet evolve into something that’s truly different, but right now it’s hard to see how they’re deserving of a title all their own, let alone the hype surrounding it. Outside of some concept devices, none have what can legitimately be called “tablet-like features,” and we’re already seeing the term being applied to devices that

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Acer Aspire S5

are indistinguishable from the average mid-sized laptop released over the last few years. Even Intel itself says that 50 percent of 75+ Ultrabooks expected this year will have 14- or 15-inch screens. And just as tellingly, Intel was also using another term, CULV, to describe these very sorts of laptops until it came up with the catchier Ultrabook moniker.

That's not to say they're not great

products. It's exciting to see laptops that are smaller, thinner and just as capable as their larger counterparts, but that's just how laptops have been evolving all these years. The obvious example is the MacBook Air — which you technically can't call an Ultrabook, even though it is arguably the main competitor to all of the new devices introduced at CES. The first version released back in 2008

was certainly thin and light, but it was also severely underpowered. Then, last summer, Apple released a pair of new models that were not only thin and light, but truly powerful enough to be a viable alternative to the MacBook Pro — at least for those who don't absolutely need a larger screen and a built-in optical drive. Still, it's a laptop.

Another comparison that often comes up is the netbook. It's a term that has managed to exist alongside laptop (and notebook, for that matter), but it's useful because it defines what the device *is not* more than what it is. A netbook is not a laptop replacement for most people. It's smaller and generally far less expensive than a proper laptop, but that comes with some real trade-offs. Indeed, calling netbooks laptops would actually be doing a disservice to consumers.

So why all the hype for Ultrabooks? As is often the case, there's not a single reason, but there are a couple of big factors. Kit Eaton recently explored some possibilities in a piece for *Fast Company*, including not just the threat from Apple, but the growing reach of ARM-based devices — soon to include Windows 8-based tablets. More broadly, tablets in general do seem to be one of the big factors fueling the Ultrabook hype. They are a legitimately “new thing,” and are drawing attention away from the old thing: laptops, and Intel currently has a much bigger stake in the latter than the former.

Ultrabooks, on the other hand, can only be considered a manufactured “new



Apple MacBook Air


...Meet the new boss,  
same as the old boss.

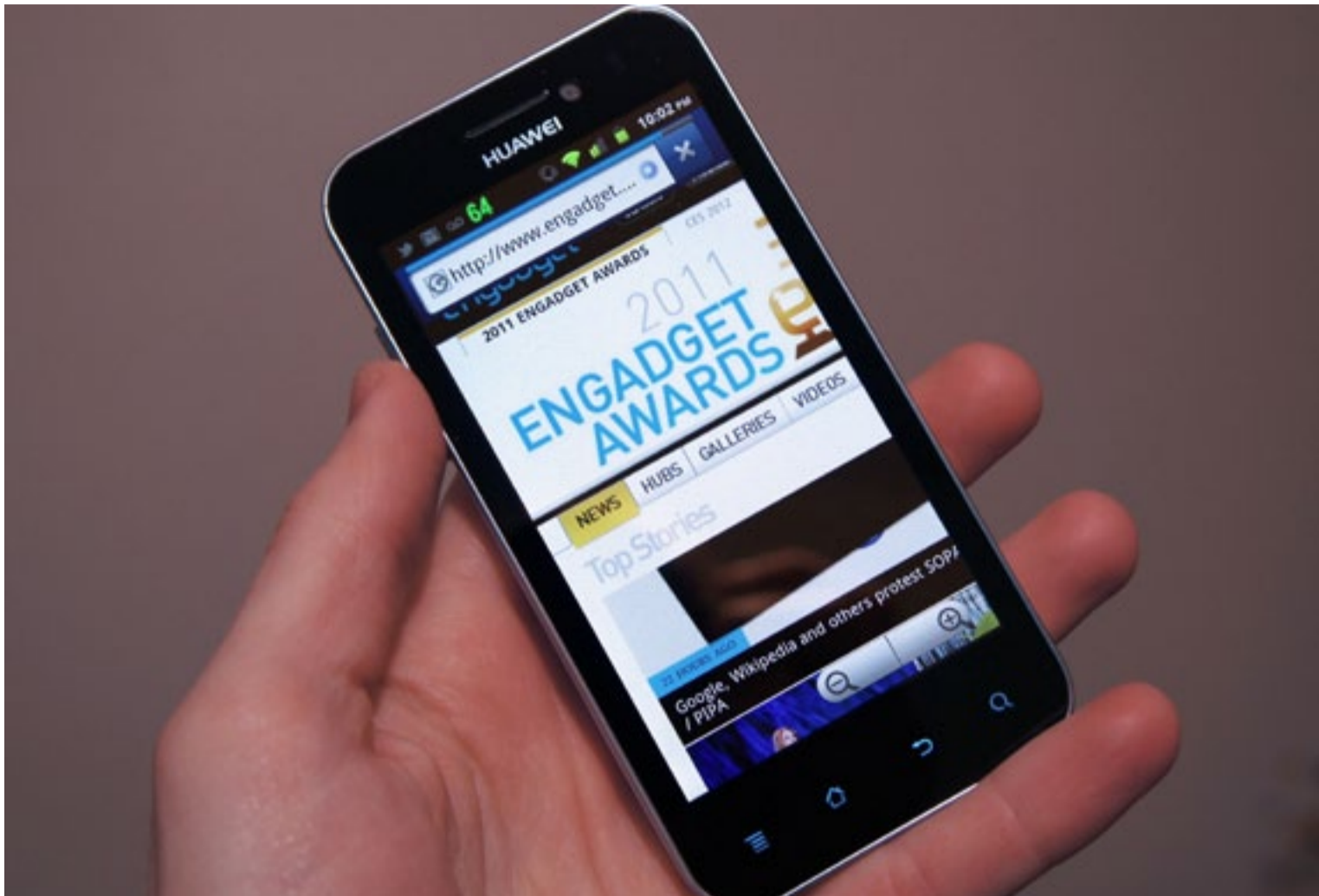


Lenovo IdeaPad Yoga

thing.” Less “laptops are dead, long live the Ultrabook,” more “meet the new boss, same as the old boss.” It’s not just hype, it’s misplaced hype, which may help Intel and computer manufacturers in the short-term, but does little to benefit anyone else. I should note that this is hardly a unique observation on my part — *Gizmodo*’s Sam Biddle beat me to the punch with a similar argument earlier this week, and the general sentiment among many of my colleagues is that the whole notion of Ultrabooks as something new is a little silly.

There is plenty of potential for some real innovation in the space between laptops and tablets, though. My dream device is a tablet that’s a tablet on its own (with a

simple, touch-centered interface), and a full-fledged laptop with a “real OS” when it’s attached to a keyboard dock (or a desktop dock with an external monitor), much like what our own Darren Murph suggested on a recent podcast. Right now, you can get a tablet that docks with a keyboard, but it doesn’t replace a laptop, and you can get a laptop that converts into a tablet, but it doesn’t replace a tablet. Windows 8 opens the door to just such devices — Lenovo’s IdeaPad Yoga is close but not quite there — and it seems that Apple is moving in a similar direction as well, given the narrowing gap between OS X and iOS. *Those* devices will truly be deserving of some hype, maybe even a new name. 



# Huawei Honor

Huawei has successfully put together a solid mid-range phone that offers great performance for its price.

BY BRAD MOLEN

**Phone makers love** to take pride in the extravagant names they give their products, but it's likely that the Huawei Honor is more to its creator than just a decently-specced handset. After all, the introduction of the Honor — followed by last week's announcement of the super-slim Ascend P1 S — appears to represent a shift in the OEM's overall product placement strategy. Huawei has done a great job finding customers in emerging and prepaid markets, but now it has its sights set on cranking out notewor-

thy phones that will gain the attention of anyone looking for a high-end device.

Based on its laundry list of specs, the Honor isn't a high-end handset compared to some of its LTE and dual-core competitors. And yet, it's still the best device Huawei's offered to date, and it's clear the company's upcoming phones are only going to get better. So we're really eyeing the Honor as a step closer to the OEM finally realizing its ultimate goal. Does it live up to its name? Can the Honor play with the big boys, or is



it nothing more than just an outward indication of the company's future? Read on to find out.

## Hardware

With specs like these, you can tell Huawei, best known for its budget devices, is making a push into higher-end gadgets, but the Honor isn't *quite* there. Nor does it pretend to be. It has some quality components, but there's no way it could be viewed in the same light as the HTC Rezound or Samsung Galaxy Nexus. That said, it easily fits into the upper end of the mid-range tier: it sells at select retailers for roughly \$350, while its Cricket iteration, known as the Mercury, goes for \$250 with no contract involved.

Let's start off with the display. It takes advantage of a 4-inch TFT display, but the Honor uses a thinner and longer screen that helps it become much easier to grasp. Since it offers FWVGA (854 x 480) resolution, the panel's pixel density stands at roughly 245ppi; it's not high-res by any stretch, but we certainly can't call it a lightweight either — to give you an idea of where it sits in

comparison, the Samsung Galaxy S II Skyrocket's WVGA display is 207ppi, whereas the iPhone 4S Retina Display is 326. The colors look good in normal conditions, but they appear distorted in direct sunlight. Viewing angles are about average, meaning you'll have a difficult time reading text or watching movies when looking at it from the side.

We also enjoy the look and feel of the Honor. It doesn't try to be too flashy, though anyone who enjoys something other than basic black will be happy to know the back cover comes in six different choices. Our tester unit was white, and when we tilt it just the right way, we can easily see tiny sparkles all over it, reminding us of something we'd normally see in some types of car paint. It's not a huge surprise, but the battery cover is made of plastic and is a bit slippery. This wasn't ever a concern to us since we never had issues gripping the thing, but we'd still prefer some sort of textured or soft-touch plastic regardless. We're happy to note that the device weighs 4.94 ounces (140g) and, as a result, feels incredibly light. With its rounded corners, slightly tapered bat-

tery cover and minimal array of buttons, the Honor did a fantastic job at offering an elegant appearance without looking too loud or noisy.

## The Honor does a fantastic job at offering an elegant appearance without being too loud or noisy.

Taking a tour of the phone, the top is adorned with the standard 3.5mm headphone jack on the right and a power / screen lock button on the left, which is bad positioning for anyone who holds the phone with their left hand. The buttons, by the way, are raised up high enough from the body of the phone to be easy to press, but not so high that they interfere with our personal enjoyment of the device. A volume rocker sits on the left side and the micro-USB charging port is conveniently located dead-center on the phone's bottom side, next to the microphone just a few millimeters to the right. On the right side you'll find nothing — it's completely smooth, devoid of any camera buttons. A 2MP front-facing cam resides just above the display, while the standard four capacitive navigation keys hang out below.

And let's not forget that back cover of which we've made mention already: you'll see a snazzy 8MP rear camera with an LED flash to the left and speaker to the right. Underneath lies the SIM card and microSD slot, though it doesn't come included with one — since you only have 4GB of internal storage at your disposal, it may not be such a bad idea to grab as much external space as you can.

The Honor uses a quad-band GSM / EDGE radio for worldwide compatibility and 900 / AWS / 2100 UMTS / HSPA with a max speed of 14.4Mbps. This is great for Europe and Asia, but in the US, your only bet for bringing down respectable 3G download speeds is with T-Mobile; if you have AT&T service, you're going to be limited to its turtle-slow EDGE network. Better than nothing, of course, but if you've been thinking of plunking down a few benjamins for the Honor, it's best not to have any cruel surprises when it shows up in the mail. However, there is one other option for US folks: Cricket, a prepaid carrier, offers a variant of the Honor called the Mercury. In addition to taking advantage of a CDMA / EVDO Rev A radio rather than GSM, the Mercury's front-facing camera has been downgraded to VGA resolution.

### Performance

The Honor may not technically be a premium device, but it has some notable company: it's powered by a single-core 1.4GHz Qualcomm MSM8255T S2

BENCHMARK	HUAWEI HONOR	HTC SENSATION XL	HTC REZOUND
Quadrant <sup>1</sup>	2,435	1,963	2,347
Linpack Single-thread <sup>1</sup> (MFLOPS)	52.83	56.2	52
NenaMark1 <sup>1</sup> (fps)	52.2	29.3	53.5
NenaMark2 <sup>1</sup> (fps)	30.3	13.1	35.8
Neocore <sup>1</sup> (fps)	59.9	58.4	59.8
SunSpider 0.9.1 <sup>2</sup> (ms)	2,428	2,140	2,961

<sup>1</sup>Higher is better

<sup>2</sup>Lower is better

Snapdragon and Adreno 205 GPU, the same chipset you'll find in the Sony Xperia arc S and Nokia Lumia 800. It also comes included with 512MB of RAM, which again is simply average for almost every mid-range handset. And it's rather speedy for our needs — we saw a tiny bit of lag when attempting to browse image-heavy sites, but otherwise it performed to our satisfaction. The touchscreen was also very responsive.

In short: the benchmark numbers are pretty darn good for a single-core device, cranking out excellent marks in SunSpider 0.9.1 for the web browser as well as incredibly high Quadrant and NenaMark scores. In terms of raw scores, it kept up with (and sometimes bested) the Rezound, which is powered by a 1.5GHz dual-core CPU and 1GB of RAM, though admittedly Sense UI likely lessens the Rezound's scores somewhat. Regardless, the processor in the Honor is just about as good as you can find on the market without adding an extra core to the mix.

We love the speaker, as it blares louder and clearer than most handsets we've reviewed. Call quality is par for the course, and we rarely experienced any static or tinny voices. Also, we didn't have a single problem finding our location using GPS with WiFi turned off. Lastly, the Honor may look smaller than today's standard Android, but there's a whopping 1,930mAh battery tucked inside. And it performs exactly as you'd expect, as you'll easily get seven to eight hours of intense use — gaming and video playback, for example — and almost a day and a half of moderate usage, which basically consists of frequently checking emails and texts, making a few calls, browsing the web and so on.

## Camera

Huawei threw together a decent pair of cameras for the Honor. It features an eight megapixel rear cam with an LED flash and a two megapixel front-facing shooter for video chat (and decent narcissistic Facebook profile pics). It's not



comparable to a juggernaut like the Galaxy S II's sensor, as it struggles with white balance and washed-out colors in direct sunlight. However, the Honor does well in low-light and is enhanced by HDR. The feature works well in any situation in which you need to capture a high dynamic range or add in as much extra light as possible. Though, to be expected, our HDR test photos are also the victim of additional noise, which lends to shots being not as sharp as normal. But it works in a pinch when you're in a dark area and need as much backlight as possible. Close-up shots also turned out more detailed than we'd originally anticipated, especially given the lack of a dedicated macro mode.



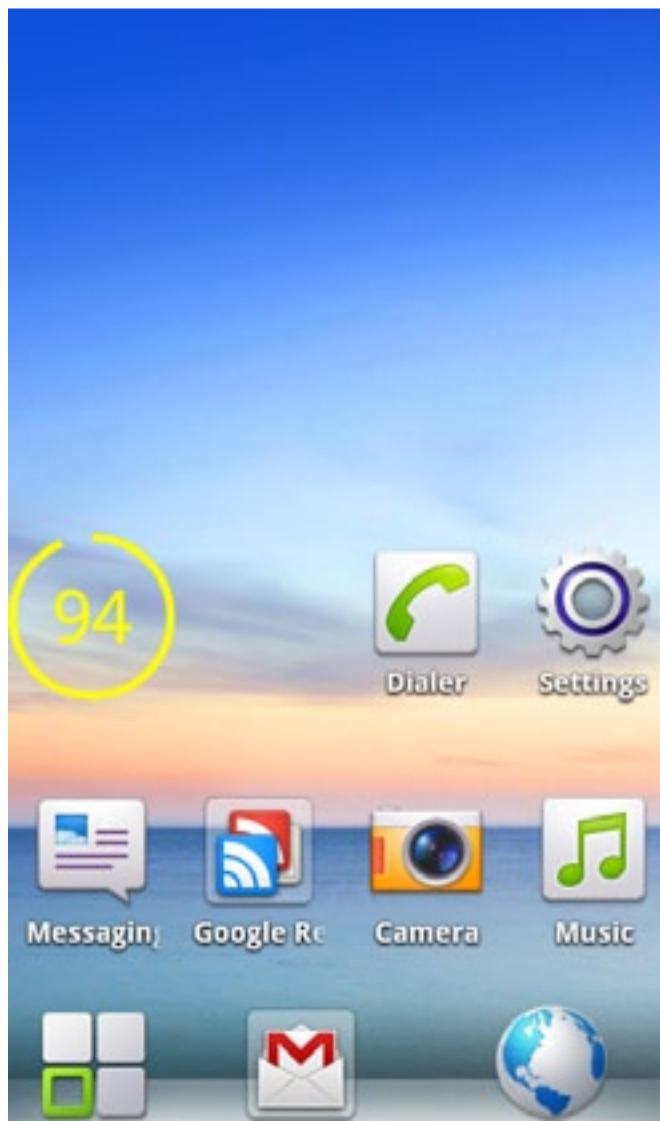
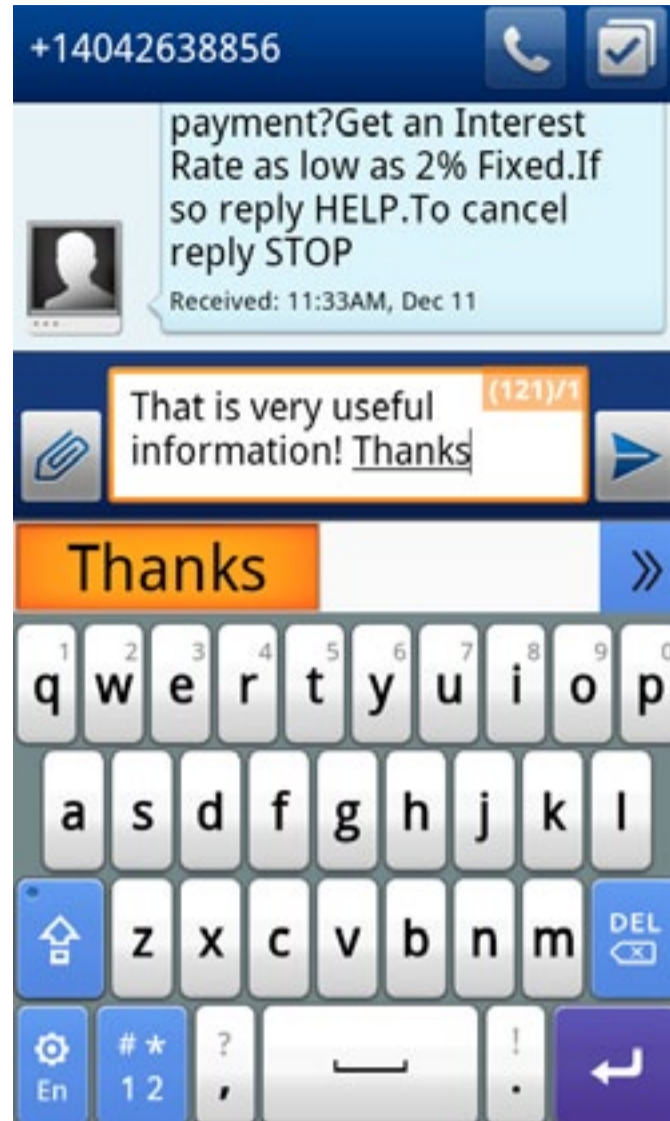
The Honor's camera app sticks with the stock UI but makes some changes to the option list on the right side of the viewfinder. They're mainly the same settings with different icons, but the most glaring difference is an added menu option for HDR. The sensor offers continuous autofocus, but the UI lacks the ability to tap to focus. As always, we would have also preferred a dedicated shutter button.

The Honor is capable of taking 720p HD video, but as is often the case with mid-range or budget devices, it falls short of being a worthy camcorder replacement. Motion was slightly choppy, the microphone was incredibly muffled (even without wind affecting our video), we noticed the same issue with colors washing out and the camera took extra time to compensate for changes in brightness and exposure.

## Software

When it comes to firmware, the Honor is a bit of an oddity — and we kind of like it that way. It's running a custom skin and launcher on top of Android 2.3.6, but it's actually quite customizable and doesn't seem to bog down the phone's performance as a side effect. The closest it can be related to visually is TouchWiz, in which the app menu panels are oriented left / right and most icons have a rather boxy look (much like TouchWiz 3.0). The Honor's UI, however, doesn't appear to be as cartoonish.

The app menu offers the standard 4x4 grid of icons, all of which can be moved around to your heart's content



by pressing the menu settings button at the bottom of the screen. Apps can even be tucked away into folders — again, a feature we’ve seen in TouchWiz 4.0 and welcome with open arms — and can even be uninstalled directly from the app menu, without the need to go deep into the task manager to do so.

Speaking of which, the Honor comes with several pre-loaded apps that cannot be uninstalled. Most of them are the standard set of programs that you’ll find on any Android device — you know, the calendar, calculator, alarm clock, messaging, Latitude and so on — but there are a few Huawei-specific icons scattered about, such as Streams, Cloud+ Drive, All Backup, Security Guard, TouchPal Input and Traffic Manager. Many of these apps may well be of benefit to users, and we’re happy that we can at least tuck them away into folders as a small compromise, but we continue to argue that apps not native to stock Android should be optional rather than mandatory.

Huawei employs the use of so-called aHome launchers, which means that you can customize them with various themes. It comes with two by default: one that looks awfully similar to the stock Gingerbread launcher — complete with the standard shortcuts on the bottom, though you can swap the phone and browser icons with contacts, SMS and settings — and one called Beyond the Sky which offers a bottom bar with your own choice of shortcut icons. Aside from the bottom bar, there are few dif-

ferences between the two. The home screen also allows you to choose different types of transition animations when navigating between panels: the panels can slide back and forth, they can take the form of a cube and you can opt to have the screens do a 180-degree flip. And there’s one more customization option for the home screen: the number of panels you’re able to feature. Sadly, you’re not allowed to offer more than five at a time, but minimalists will love

**The Honor’s lockscreen offers several quick jumps, but there’s no way to customize the apps.**

the ability to delete unused panels.

It’s apparent that Huawei wanted to keep its UI as simple as possible. For instance, the app menu only has two large buttons at the bottom of the screen — home and settings — and doesn’t offer anything when you push the capacitive menu key. A few app icons, rather than going overly fancy and trying to out-do themselves, only show a basic representation of its overall purpose. The phone dialer, for example, is just a white box



with a green phone; the call logs app has the same background and a similar-looking phone, but it adds arrows pointing to the left and right. The most extravagant UI elements appear to be the animations, which can be a good or bad thing, depending on which way you look at it: when switching from portrait to landscape mode (or vice versa), the screen acts as if the laws of physics apply to it. It adjusts to the new orientation, but not before swaying back and forth a couple times as it attempts to reconcile the inertia caused by the transition. Thus, it appears to rock back and forth for a couple seconds, as if you're on a boat, waiting for the seas to settle down.

We also like the Honor's lockscreen, even if there may be room for improvement. It offers shortcuts to the camera, phone and messaging, which arguably are three of the most widely-used apps (with the exception of email, of course) on the device. Our concern here is that unlike HTC's Sense UI, there's no way to change the quick jumps to anything that fits your fancy; you're stuck with this trio.

A side effect of having a narrow screen is the negative impact it has on the virtual keyboard. While we love the fact that the Honor comes with four different types of keyboards pre-loaded, every single one of them looks squished, as if



the screen's two side walls are getting even closer and pushing each individual key in a vertical direction. We had a rough time trying to type on the keys, though we found ourselves intrigued by the included TouchPal board; instead of pressing an extra button to capitalize a letter or holding the key down to get a symbol, we discovered that all we had to do was swipe up or down on that key in order to get the intended result. In other words, swiping our finger up capitalizes the letter, and swiping down converts it into the corresponding number or symbol.

One additional note about the Honor's firmware: Huawei made headlines when it offered a demo build of Android 4.0 (Ice Cream Sandwich) on the Honor's official support page. By doing so, the device became one of the first phones — outside of the Galaxy Nexus, of course — to run an official version of ICS, even if it was simply a trial beta version that was mainly intended for the Chinese market. The download is available for everyone to try out, and even comes with instructions on how to revert back to Gingerbread if need be.

## Wrap-Up

The Huawei Honor has been flying under the radar, which is a shame since it's quite the underrated device. Sure, it doesn't have the best chipset available on the market, nor the fanciest components otherwise, but it's one of the best phones we've seen Huawei make to date (let's talk again after the Ascend P1

# BOTTOMLINE

## Huawei Huawei Honor

**\$350** *off contract*


### PROS

- Incredible battery life
- Great performance for a mid-range device
- Above-average display
- HDR camera captures a large amount of light

### CONS

- Video capture could be better
- Not compatible with all major UMTS / HSPA networks

» Huawei has successfully put together a solid mid-range phone that offers great performance for its price.

S comes out). It's obvious the company put a lot of tender lovin' care into the Honor, and if this phone is any indication, we suspect Huawei has even better devices left to share this year. 

*Edgar Alvarez contributed to this review*

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*Brad is a mobile editor at Engadget, an outdoorsy guy, and a lover of eccentric New Wave and electro. Singer and beatboxer.*



# IN REAL LIFE

Welcome to IRL, an ongoing feature where we talk about the gadgets, apps and toys we're using in real life and take a second look at products that already got the formal review treatment.

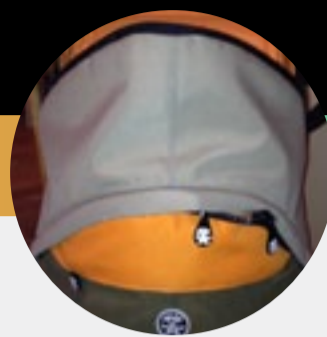
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# The CES 2012 Edition, Featuring AirDrop, a New MBP and Crumpler

BY ENGADGET STAFF

**We came, we saw,** we collapsed. After seven days in Vegas and 700-plus posts, we'd love nothing more than to catch up on *The Daily Show*, eat something other than In-N-Out Burger and bask in what we *hope* will be a slow news week. Alas, though, the show must go on, and so must our gadget ramblings. And what better place to start than with the gear we schlepped to CES? You'd think, like marathoners prepping for a race, that we'd stick with the high-tech equivalent of broken-in sneakers, red Gatorade and other safe bets. But in fact, the week saw a few of

us taking a chance on unfamiliar tech — everything from the Elgato Turbo H.264 to the Sony NEX-C3. For Darren, the transition from thumb drives to AirDrop was benign, though largely ineffectual. In Terrence's case, an impulsive foray into the world of Macs left him without functioning USB ports. Good times, right? Read on for a few tales of what went right (or dreadfully wrong) in Vegas.

## AirDrop

Anyone who knows me would know that I prefer to arrange things *just so*,





# 1

and then keep them that way for as long as feasible. Thus, my primary laptop had Snow Leopard on it up until about a month ago, when I upgraded to Lion (mumbling all the while, mind you). Not that I wasn't familiar with Lion, but there's a difference between "using" something and "relying" on it as your daily driver. At any rate, I'd never been in a position to take advantage of AirDrop, mostly because my Snow Leopard machine wasn't equipped to handle it.

Countless times during CES, there arose a need to share this file or that with someone else in the Engadget trailer, and every time I'd end up asking: "Do you have AirDrop?!" At first, I was in love. The drag-and-drop nature of it all seemed so much simpler than handing someone a flash drive. But

then, reality hit. First off, the transfers were painfully sluggish — compared to a flash drive transfer, yes, but still. Secondly, there's no way to AirDrop files to two people at once; again, bummer.

I ended up seeing a transfer through via AirDrop only once, and relied on USB sticks for the rest, but I truly love how simple it is to use. If speed didn't matter and the feature wasn't limited to one transfer at a time, I'd be in love. As it stands, I won't be tossing my small stash of USB sticks just yet. — *Darren Murph*

## 2011 MacBook Pro

Back in September, AOL issued me my very first Apple computer — a late 2011 13-inch MacBook Pro. When it came time to ship out for CES, my instincts

told me to take my personal laptop, a ThinkPad X200, as a backup, but ultimately my desire to travel light won out. It's a decision I quickly regretted: as we were gearing up for Acer's big press event, my Mac's USB ports decided to stop functioning. All of a sudden, my LTE dongle, which I had tested the evening before without issue, refused to connect. So, I quickly pulled out my spare connectivity option — a Sprint EVDO dongle that hasn't failed me once in four years.

Well, turns out my MacBook didn't like that one either. To make it through the event I was forced to suck it up and pay for WiFi access at the hotel (twice, at the absolutely absurd price of \$20 for 40 minutes). Eventually, I discovered there must be either a firmware or driver issue (I'm still trying to track down the root of the problem), as almost anything I plugged into those ports simply refused to work. Even more bizarre: unless I booted OS X with headphones already plugged in, the jack didn't operate and, once unplugged, wouldn't work again without a reboot. I'm sure my fellow trailer prisoners appreciated listening in on my unfiltered, awkward ramblings as I edited my hands-on videos. Thankfully, there was one surefire way to get my CDMA access and headphone support back: boot into Ubuntu. It just works. — *Terrence O'Brien*

### **Crumpler Customary Barge**

I spend a lot of time tearing around trade shows and running to meetings to check




out all the gadgets I'm lucky enough to get to see. What I never talk about are the tools I use to get my job done. The unsung hero of much of my work is my camera / laptop bag: the Crumpler Customary Barge. I used to carry two bags: one for my camera and a messenger for my laptop, cables, USB sticks, modems, extra batteries and all the other detritus you need to work in my world. I shifted to one for a couple reasons: my shoulders and back were getting worn down, toting a lot of gear. Also, an edict from some transportation authority that I



could only bring one bag onto the plane. The nerve.

So how does the Crumpler win? Well, it's tough, seriously tough. On top of that, this guy has space for a 15-inch notebook, a DSLR, two or three lenses, chargers and cables, with all the various compartments conveniently arranged and dead-easy to get at. The pocket at the bottom of the bag, where all the camera stuff gets stowed, has its own zippers along with Velcro dividers to help keep things from clanking. The top section has a padded sleeve for the laptop, a pouch for cables and a cavernous space where I dump everything else. Sure, the weight hasn't lessened, but schlepping all that across two shoulders and behind me makes it an easier pill to swallow — or carry.

Of course, Crumpler bags aren't inexpensive, and the Customary Barge rang in somewhere around \$250 when I picked it up in late 2010. It may not be the prettiest of bags, but I've yet to find a worthy replacement. Though, with Crumpler's 'Til death do us part' warranty, I shouldn't ever have to, because if it breaks they'll make it right. — *Sean Cooper* 



THE NEW YORK TIMES NAMED HER ONE OF 'NINE TO FOLLOW AMONG MILLIONS' FOR HER WITTY TWEETS, NOW BLOGGER AND APP DEVELOPER **GINA TRAPANI** OPENS UP ABOUT HER DISTASTE FOR THE NAME 'IPAD' AND A FONDNESS FOR A LITTLE PROFESSOR.

# GINA TRAPANI

Q&A

**What gadget do you depend on most?** My MacBook Pro.

**Which do you look back upon most fondly?** My IBM PCjr. Also, The Little Professor.

**What is your operating system of choice?** Anything that can run a good web browser.

**What are your favorite gadget names?** Fitbit, Xbox.

**What are your least favorite?** iPad (because iMenstruate) and all the indistinguishable Android handset names like the Sony Ericsson Mesmerize Vibrant or Samsung Fascinate Epic Prime XT.

**Which app do you depend on most?** Gmail.

**What traits do you most deplore in a smartphone?** The spinning circle of "Loading."

**Which do you most admire?** Speed.

**What is your idea of the perfect device?** Does something useful, looks beautiful doing it, gets the hell out of my way, doesn't require batteries, charging, any wires or moving parts.

**What is your earliest gadget memory?** Unwrapping my Lite-Brite Christmas morning and freaking out.

**Which company does the most to push the industry?** Apple

**What technological advancement do you most admire?** The web.

**Which do you most despise?** Email.

**What fault are you most tolerant of in a gadget?** Being too early for its time.

**Which are you most intolerant of?** Thoughtless design.


**When has your smartphone been of the most help?** Every time I have to find my way anywhere.

**What device do you covet most?** The MakerBot.

**If you could change one thing about your phone what would it be?** I'd bring back the busy signal.

**What does being connected mean to you?** Distraction or inspiration, depending on the day.

**When are you least likely to reply to an email?** When it's from a stranger sharing his opinion of my physical appearance.

**When did you last disconnect?** This past 3-day weekend. Actually read a book made of paper. 

THOSE WERE THE DAYS



“Sometimes I’ll look up and I’ve wasted an **hour** on the telegraph just putzin’ around!”

*The Last Word - Box Brown*

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1 HOUR AGO iPhone 5 to have 21Mbps HSPA+ data? China Unicom says so

**Dell confirms XPS 14z will go on sale in the US in the 'coming weeks'**

Remember that XPS 14z Dell teased at IFA? Yeah, well, it's arriving soon. As in, "the coming weeks" soon. The company just confirmed it's on the cusp of shipping here in the states, and while the outfit stopped short of giving a starting price, it's good and ready to talk specs. As we reported last month, it has the same industri...

By Dana Wollman September 29, 2011 12:35PM

30 MINS AGO

**iPhone 5 cases and realistic unibody dummy show off incredible slimness**

While we're only five days away from finding out the true appearance of the next-generation iPhone, our good friends over at BENM.AT went ahead and crafted their very own unibody dummy using CAD drawings, CNC tools and a block of aluminum -- seriously, that's how they roll! Granted, this work's only based on...

By Richard Lai September 29, 2011 12:13PM

54 MINS AGO

**Kobo's Vox Android tablet appears online briefly, gets Canadian release date and pricing**

A day after another little-known e-reader manufacturer announced a tablet, a new Android slate from Kobo made a brief online appearance on Future Shop's site, only to be quickly taken down. According to the Canadian retailer, the FCC-approved tablet will offer up a 7-inch display with a 1024 x 600 resolution, WiF...

By Brian Heater September 29, 2011 11:53AM

1 HOUR AGO

**Iceland gets a data center to call its own, still believes in fairies**

You say Iceland, we immediately think Eyjafjallajökull -- and no, we haven't had a narcoleptic collapse upon these very keys. It's been over a year since that volcano swept the headlines and interrupted air travel, providing outsiders with a skewed

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