At $499, is Microsoft's Surface Tablet Priced to Move?

Surface tablet [1] pricing will start at $499, Microsoft confirmed today. But is that low enough to entice reams of buyers?

Right off the bat, that price does have at least two things going for it. One, it comes with 32GB of storage not 16GB like the identically priced Apple iPad [2]. Two, it comes with Microsoft Office [3] -- for now that means Microsoft Office Home and Student 2013 RT Preview. (The final Office version "will be installed via Windows Update when available," according to Microsoft.)

However, that price doesn't include the slick 3mm-thick Touch Cover (the combination keyboard/cover). Instead, Microsoft is offering a 32GB version bundled with a black Touch Cover priced at $599 and a 64GB version for $699.

Considering that Microsoft has been promoting the Touch Cover as an integral part of the tablet, that means the price will start at $599 for a lot of people.

I spoke with an IDC analyst last week [4] who believes that Surface RT should be $499 with the keyboard to get traction. I'm sure many consumers would agree.

That said, it seems to be a better deal than the $799 price tag Lenovo has slapped on the Windows RT IdeaPad Yoga convertible [5], which, like Surface, sports an Nvidia Tegra 3 chip.

And it would appear to be priced more reasonably than the Intel Z2670-powered Acer Iconia W510 [6], which jumps to about $750 with a keyboard dock. (The Iconia 510 does use the Intel version of Windows 8, though, which mean it can run older Windows applications.)

And Samsung just announced a tablet for $749 with a keyboard [7], $649 without.

Needless to say, until all of the above products are put their paces and thoroughly reviewed, we won't know if they're worth the price. But Microsoft's Surface does seem to have, if anything, a lower entry point that most of Windows 8 tablet products announced so far.

Throw in the fact that it has a pretty novel design and its release could create lines outside some of the 34 U.S. stores on October 26 -- when Surface will become available.

Here are the rest of the specifications:

- **Software:** Surface with Windows RT comes with Microsoft Office Home and Student 2013 RT Preview (which includes Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and OneNote)
- **Storage:** 32GB or 64GB
- **Display:** 10.6-inch, 1,366x768 pixels, 16:9 (widescreen)*
- **Processor:** Nvidia Tegra 3
- **Memory:** 2GB
- **Wireless:** Wi-Fi, Bluetooth 4.0
- **Cameras:** Two 720p HD cameras, front- and rear-facing
- **Audio:** Two microphones, stereo speakers
- **Ports:** Full-size USB 2.0, microSDXC card slot, headset jack, HD video out port, cover port
- **Sensors:** Ambient light sensor, accelerometer, gyroscope, compass
- **Power Supply:** 24W
- **Exterior:** 10.81 x 6.77 x 0.37 inches, 1.5 pounds, VaporMg casing, dark titanium color, volume and power buttons
- **Warranty:** One-year limited hardware warranty

*$499 iPad has a 2,048x1,536-pixel resolution display.

Note that the Touch Cover isn't your typical keyboard. There is almost no tactile feedback and no button depression. While it may be a more efficient input method than a virtual keyboard, it's not for everybody -- which is why Microsoft is offering a second type of keyboard/cover. That's called the Type Cover. It is available in black for $129 and "adds moving keys for a more traditional typing feel," Microsoft said.

And, finally, Windows RT is not your father's Windows. That is, it is not compatible with the millions of older Windows applications. You'll have to wait for the Intel-based Windows 8 Pro Surface tablet if you need to run those so-called legacy Windows apps. The Intel-based version won't be available until next year.

Read More [8]

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