Review: Samsung Tablet Offers PC-Like Multitasking

ANICK JESDANUN, AP Technology Writer

New York (AP) — Remember when people used personal computers — desktops and laptops — to check email, view video and keep tabs on Facebook? Back in that far-away era, I'd have several windows open for Web browsers, a word processor, a photo editor and sometimes a reader for PDF documents.

I miss that capability on mobile devices, particularly on full-size tablets with a decent amount of display space. With iPads and Android tablets, I'm typically limited to one window displayed at a time; other apps run in the background, out of sight.

With Windows 8 tablets, I can run two windows side by side, but I'm constrained in what I can do with them. It gets better with the Windows 8.1 update due out next week, but it's still not the free-for-all I had with PCs.

So I marveled at a pair of multitasking features that come with Samsung's new tablet, formally called Galaxy Note 10.1 [1] — 2014 Edition. Sporting a 10.1-inch display, measured diagonally, the Note tablet goes on sale in the U.S. on Thursday at a starting price of $550.

The first of the multitasking features, called Multi-Window, has been available in Samsung devices for about a year, but it works with many more apps now. You can run two apps side by side, such as Facebook on one side and YouTube video on the other.

Like Windows 8 tablets, you're limited to just two apps. You can change how much

of the screen each one takes, a capability coming with Windows 8.1, but you can't choose to have a window take up just the top left corner, the way you can on PCs.

In addition, Multi-Window isn't a universal feature. Apps for Netflix and Hulu won't work, for instance. You currently have about 18 apps to choose from, including Facebook and a variety of Google and Samsung apps.

With that limitation, it's nice that Samsung Electronics Co. is supplementing Multi-Window with a feature called Pen Window.

With it, simply draw a box on the screen with the included stylus, and choose one of seven apps to open in a new window. Do it again and again until you open all seven apps, if you wish. That's nine in all, counting the two with Multi-Window. Each Pen Window app appears in a window that floats over your main app (or two apps if you use Multi-Window). You can move that window around on your screen and resize it, just as you can on PCs. Need a break from it? Just minimize it into a small dot and move it out of the way.

Like Multi-Window, you're restricted in what apps you can use with Pen Window, though I expect more to get added over time. For now, Pen Window on the tablet works with YouTube, the calculator, the alarm clock, your contacts list, the Web browser and two chat apps — Samsung's ChatOn and Google's Hangouts. I like the fact that you can open all of them and keep them out of the way in a minimized state. That way, it's just one click when you need the calculator and one click when you're done.

The iPad doesn't do that. Amazon's Kindle Fire doesn't do that. Other Android tablets don't do that. Windows 8.1 won't do that — at least not in the tablet-style viewing mode that Microsoft prefers you stick with. You'll have to go to the classic, desktop mode to resize windows, which defeats the purpose of having Windows 8 or 8.1. Windows 8.1 will go further than Multi-Window in letting you run up to four apps side by side, but that works only on larger screens, not portable tablets.

Beyond multitasking, the new Note tablet offers a My Magazine mode giving you personalized highlights, such as news topics of interest, content from your social media feeds and suggestions on things to do and see, based on your current location. It's a good concept, though Facebook isn't available through it yet.

The new tablet also gives you quick access to the tools you can accomplish with its stylus. Pen Window is one. Another feature lets you add notes to a screenshot of what you see. Another lets you clip a section of a Web page and store it with a Web link.

Unfortunately, not everything worked. Text recognition was poor. I'm supposed to be able to jot down an email address or a phone number with the stylus and have that handwriting converted into a contacts entry. But the device constantly confuses the letters "o'' and "l'' with the numerals "0'' and "1."

Pen Window also is more difficult than necessary to set up. You need to take out the

stylus for an Air Command tool to appear on the screen. You choose Pen Window, then draw a box on your screen with your stylus. Then you choose the app you want to open. Do all of that again to get additional apps, after figuring out how to get Air Command again with your stylus already out. It would have been simpler to have a button on the home screen that you can tap with your finger or stylus.

In addition, Samsung could have done more with the apps in minimized state. Google's chat app is reduced to a circular icon. It could have flashed or changed colors to notify me of a new chat message, rather than make me open and close it regularly to check.

The tablet's back is still made of plastic, but it feels like leather — an improvement over previous Samsung devices. The tablet does feel heavy, at 1.2 pounds, but that's still lighter than the 1.4 pounds for the full-size iPad. If you want light, wait until early November for the large-size version of Amazon's Kindle Fire HDX. It weighs just 0.83 pound.

Samsung's tablet is also pricey — the $550 starting price tops the iPad's $499 and the Fire's $379. Of course, neither the iPad nor the Fire includes a stylus.

One more complaint: Although the tablet uses the latest version of Android, 4.3, it doesn't offer that system's feature of letting multiple people share a device with separate profiles.

With the Note, it's clear some of the functionality we've long associated with PCs is coming to devices we're just getting to know. There's more to be done, including support for multiple users, but I'm glad Samsung is leading us in that direction.

___

ABOUT THE GALAXY NOTE TABLET:

The Galaxy Note 10.1 — 2014 Edition is the second version of Samsung's 10.1-inch stylus-based tablet. The base model with 16 gigabytes costs $550, while a 32-gigabyte version costs $600. It goes on sale in the U.S. on Thursday. Versions with cellular access are available only abroad. The Wi-Fi-only models in the U.S. won't work with Samsung's new Galaxy Gear computerized watch.

Anick Jesdanun, deputy technology editor for The Associated Press, can be reached at njesdanun@ap.org [2].

___

Online:

http://www.samsung.com/global/microsite/2014galaxynote10.1 [1]

Source URL (retrieved on *03/12/2014 - 12:14pm*):
http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/news/2013/10/review-samsung-tablet-offers-pc-

multitasking

Links:
[1] http://www.samsung.com/global/microsite/2014galaxynote10.1
[2] mailto:njesdanun@ap.org