What About Android?

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A few months ago I started this series discussing the impact that tablet computing is likely to have on our lives as Christians. I started by talking about the iPad, and Apple recently announced the iPad 2. But last month I introduced you to my new tablet – the Android-based Samsung Galaxy S Tab. It seems like it's a good time to revisit a topic I first addressed during my series on "The Mobility Revolution."

What about Android?

Way back in 2009, I wrote an article about Android. At the time, Google's operating system was almost unknown. T-Mobile and Sprint each had two Android handsets on the market, but Verizon hadn't yet launched their first Motorola Droid and AT&T wasn't even talking about Android.

Even so, at the time I wrote "That last paragraph speaks volumes to the difference between the Apple approach and the Android approach. Just in the U.S., there will soon be at least five different Android handset models from three different major manufacturers running on three different wireless carriers. Meanwhile there are only two models of iPhones, from one manufacturer running on one wireless carrier."

I went on to compare the mobility revolution to the PC revolution. "For anyone who has been around technology for long, it's not hard to see the parallels to the PC revolution. Apple was the early leader in personal computers with the Apple II… Apple really moved the PC industry forward with the ground breaking Macintosh… However, for the most part, Apple refused to enable other companies to manufacture Macintosh computers, believing that a vertically integrated business model was critical for producing the highest quality product. … However, Microsoft worked with Intel to enable lots of companies to produce DOS and then Windows-based computers. Companies like Dell and Compaq flourished and Windows-based PC sales quickly surpassed Macintosh sales…More importantly, software developers needed to decide whether to [develop for the Mac or Windows] – the more Microsoft-based PCs that sold, the more attractive the PC was for developers."

At the time, I reported that there were over 10,000 applications available for Android compared to over 100,000 for the iPhone. I said "I believe it won't be long before the gap closes and there are more Android apps than iPhone apps. … I also believe that the iPhone's days are numbered as the leader in the smartphone space."

In a post at my blog last October, I continued this theme with a focus on innovation. "Unlike Apple, Google has allowed the Android ecosystem to innovate in all dimensions, and even in the app ecosystem, Google's lack of constraints is winning over developers. … Think about it - Apple makes great handsets. But they introduce one new iPhone handset a year. How much real innovation is represented in that one handset? Only as much as one company can imagine and productize. Now think about all the different Android handsets you've seen and the level of innovation that handset OEMs are bringing to market. … Think about it - here in the U.S. Apple has limited the iPhone to one carrier. How much innovation has that operator delivered to customers since 2007? … The Android ecosystem benefits from [all the innovations introduced by Sprint, Verizon, and T-Mobile], but the iPhone ecosystem doesn't." (Note: Earlier this year, Verizon also began carrying the iPhone, so now Apple is leveraging the innovation of two of the top four mobile operators in the US.)

What Does That Have To Do With Tablets?

This same dynamic is now playing out in the tablet space. At the recent Mobile World Congress conference, Android tablets were all the rage with Acer, Asus, HTC, Huawei, LG, Motorola, Samsung, Toshiba, Viewsonic, and ZTE all introducing new models. (Computerworld provides a good overview of highlights.)

The scope of innovation and choice being delivered by all of these manufacturers is almost overwhelming. It certainly puts to shame the few catch-up improvements introduced by Apple in the new iPad model. That's not to say the iPad isn't a great product – it is. The iPad will continue to benefit from Apple's vertically integrated model and iron grip on the supporting ecosystem. I won't be surprised if 10 years from now Apple's tablets are still the highest quality, classiest, and most stable products on the market. However, for consumers seeking innovative new features and different form factors, Android will be the better choice, and I expect Android sales to surpass iPad sales.

I'm not alone. A financial analyst from RBC recently projected that Android tablets will lead the market by 2014. Raymond James analysts also expect Android to be the long term tablet winner.

Already, many of the trends I anticipated are

playing out. In the smartphone space, Android has taken the market lead. [Nielsen reports](#) that Android has 29% market share to Apple's 27%. Android is also attracting software developers, with nearly [300,000 apps available](#) (growing by 30,000 per month – and accelerating) – but I believe Apple's iPhone still offers more. And when it comes to applications designed specifically for the tablet form factor, [the iPad has a large lead](#) – for the moment.

All that being said, what we really care about here at Christian Computing is how technology can enhance our walk with the Lord. As we make personal investment decisions, what's the best device to help us in our daily walk? Next month we'll take a closer look at Bible software for Android to help answer that question.

Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is Hschooler.net (http://hschooler.net), a social network for Christian families (especially homeschoolers) which is being built and run by three homeschooled students under Russ' direction.