

The “i” and “e” Digital Gadgets

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Over the past few years, I have received numerous questions about the meaning of various terms, such as MP3, BlackBerry, etc. These questions have come from FRPCUG members, participants in the computer classes taught by FRPCUG and offered through the Fort Collins, CO Senior Center, and many others.

Those questions led to a Digital Gadgets presentation at a FRPCUG meeting with the presentation material posted on the FRPCUG web site, and to this article. Actually, to a series of articles, because it is not possible to include sufficient information in just one article.

Please note that the company names and product names discussed below are all trademarks of their respective companies.

There exist today (August 2010) a profusion of digital gadgets that have names that begin with the letter “e” or the letter “i.” The “i” gadgets are products from Apple, Inc., such as the iPhone, iPod and iTouch, and iPad. The “e” gadgets are mostly eReaders from many different manufacturers. It takes some work to sort out these gadgets. Are they phones? Computers? Something else? The “e” gadgets are available with many different capabilities, depending on manufacturer. That, of course, makes the “sorting out” more of a challenge.

I have attempted to at least start that sorting process with this article. Please note that I do NOT claim to offer you a comprehensive list and description of products in these two categories. My goal here is to provide background and references on selected products so that you may explore the capabilities of these gadgets in greater detail. Much of the information for this article was extracted from Wikipedia. The Wikipedia links are provided at the appropriate places in this article.

I will start with the “i” gadgets. The Apple iPhone is a smartphone, and the iTouch is, among other things, a portable media player (a version of the iPod). A smartphone is more than just a phone. Wikipedia defines a smartphone (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smartphone>) as:

"...a mobile phone that offers more advanced computing ability and connectivity than a contemporary basic 'feature phone'. Smartphones and feature phones may be thought of as handheld computers integrated within a mobile telephone, but while most feature phones are able to run applications based on platforms such as Java ME or BREW, a smartphone allows the user to install and run more advanced applications based on a specific platform. Smartphones run complete operating system software providing a platform for application developers."

Today's smartphones are part mobile phone and part handheld computer (see "Cell Phone or Hand-Held Computer: That is the Question" at:

http://frpcug.org/presentations/cell_phone_computer_rev1.pdf).

From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ipnone> is this description of the iPhone:

“An iPhone functions as a camera phone, including text messaging and visual voicemail, a portable media player, and an Internet client, with e-mail, web browsing, and Wi-Fi connectivity. The user interface is built around the device's multi-touch screen, including a virtual keyboard rather than a physical one. Third-party applications are available from the App Store, which launched in mid-2008 and now has well over 200,000 "apps" approved by Apple. These apps have diverse functionalities, including games, reference, GPS navigation, social networking, and advertising for television shows, films, and celebrities.”



And from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itouch> is this description of the iPod Touch:

“The iPod Touch (stylized, trademarked, and marketed as iPod touch), is a portable media player, personal digital assistant, and Wi-Fi mobile platform designed and marketed by Apple Inc. ... The iPod Touch adds the multi-touch graphical user interface to the iPod line. It is the first iPod with wireless access to the iTunes Store, and also has access to Apple's App Store, enabling content to be purchased and downloaded directly on the device.”

“The iPod Touch and the iPhone . . . share the same hardware platform and run the same iOS operating system. The iPod Touch lacks some of the iPhone's features and associated apps, such as access to cellular networks, or a built-in microphone and camera (and speaker on older models).”

Selected Apple links for these products are:

iPhone:

iPhone4: <http://www.apple.com/iphone/>

iPhone comparison: <http://www.apple.com/iphone/compare-iphones/>

iTouch:

iTouch: <http://www.apple.com/ipodtouch/>

iTouch Features: <http://www.apple.com/ipodtouch/features/>

The latest “i” product from Apple is the iPad. From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ipad> is this description:

“The iPad is a tablet computer designed and developed by Apple. It is particularly marketed as a platform for audio and visual media such as books, periodicals, movies, music, and games, as well as web content. At about 700 grams (25 ounces), its size and weight are between those of most contemporary smartphones and laptop computers. Apple released the iPad in April 2010, and sold 3 million of the devices in 80 days.

The iPad runs the same operating system as the earlier iPod Touch and iPhone It can run its own applications as well as ones developed for the iPhone. Without modification, it will only run programs approved by Apple and distributed via its online store.

Like iPhone and iPod Touch, the iPad is controlled by a multitouch display The iPad uses Wi-Fi or a 3G mobile data connection to browse the Internet, load and stream media, and install software. The device is managed and synced by iTunes on a personal computer via USB cable.”

You can certainly get tangled up in the language with these gadgets. Wikipedia calls the iPad a “tablet computer,” and it is interesting to note that it does not have phone capability (at least not yet). The Wikipedia definition of a “tablet computer” is “. . . a complete computer contained entirely in a flat touch screen that uses a stylus, digital pen, or fingertip as the primary input device instead of a keyboard or mouse which may or may not be included” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tablet_computer).

Well . . . OK, the iPad is a “tablet computer;” that is, a complete computer (except that it does not include multitasking). It is “marketed as a platform for audio and visual media.” So how is this different from a smartphone, which has many of the same (or at least similar) capabilities? Size is one distinction. “The iPad’s touchscreen display is a 25 cm (9.7 in) liquid crystal display (1024 × 768 pixels) with fingerprint-resistant and scratch-resistant glass.” One model has both Wi-Fi and 3G (a mobile phone standard) connectivity, but not for phone use. It is used for mobile internet access.



Selected Apple iPad product links are:

<http://www.apple.com/ipad/>
<http://www.apple.com/ipad/guided-tours/>

For a list and comparison of the Apple “i” gadgets, connect to:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_iOS_devices.

So, the iPad is to be used as “a platform for audio and visual media.” That leads us to the second set of Digital Gadgets, the “e” gadgets. Until the release of the iPad, the “e” gadgets were all eReaders.

A very short vocabulary lesson is needed here. An eReader (again, from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_e-book_readers) is “. . . is an electronic device that is designed primarily for the purpose of reading digital books and periodicals . . . to display content to readers.” And, of course, a digital book is now called an eBook.



The iPad provides access to eBooks, but it includes capability for other digital media as well. All the other eReaders (at the moment) are dedicated to eBooks. There are many eReaders available today. That Wikipedia “eBook Comparison” article mentioned a moment ago lists over 40 different products (August 2010) from many different manufacturers (those based on the “electronic paper” technology—see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_paper). You probably have heard of at least a few of them:

- Amazon: Kindle
- Barnes and Noble: Nook
- Sony: Reader
- Foxit Software: eSlick

It is important to note that an eReader is a device dedicated to reading eBooks, although computers and even some mobile phones can read eBooks (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-book>). Another important fact about some eReaders is that they do not have the capability to transfer eBooks from the eReader to a computer.



Most of the eReaders have, by today’s standards, small amounts of internal memory (up to 4 GB). However, some devices include SD memory card capability. Selected devices, for example, the “(e)-books purchased from vendors like Amazon or Barnes & Noble.com are stored ‘in the cloud’ on servers and ‘digital lockers’ and have the benefit of being easily retrieved if an e-reading device is lost. Not all e-booksellers are cloud based; if an e-book is stolen, accidentally lost, or deleted, in the absence of a backup it may have to be repurchased.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-book>)

There are also many different eBook formats. The Wikipedia “Comparison” article lists 16 different formats. None of the devices are compatible with all formats.

The electronic publishing phenomenon is not without controversy. The Wikipedia “E-book” article lists a number of advantages and disadvantages. One issue of concern is privacy (from the Wikipedia “E-book” article):

“E books and software can easily track data, times, usage, pages, and details about what one is reading and how often. Similar to this is the growing amount of data available through Google search engines, Facebook, and through data mining. For the first time in history it is now far more easy to track and record what specific people might be reading. The notions of privacy, private writing, solitude, and personal reading are changing.”

There is also what Wikipedia calls (also from that Wikipedia “E-book” article):

“Artistry and Author's Vision - An author who publishes a book often puts more into the work than simply the words on the pages. E-books may cause people ‘to do the grazing and quick reading that screens enable, rather than be by themselves with the author's ideas.’ They may use the e-books simply for reference purposes rather than reading for pleasure and leisure.”

One of the major advantages of electronic publishing is that eBooks are less expensive than printed books. There are, at the very least, hundreds of thousands of eBooks available today, and the number is growing rapidly every day. All major book publishers offer eBooks.

True, new e-books from commercial publishers must be purchased. However, there are a considerable number of e-books available for free. For example, visit the Digital Book Index (<http://www.digitalbookindex.org/about.htm>). This site claims to:

“. . . provide links to more than 155,000 full-text digital books from more than 1800 commercial and non-commercial publishers, universities, and various private sites. More than 135,000 of these books, texts, and documents are available free, while many others are available at very modest cost.”

Another source of eBooks is the Google Books project; see:

<http://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en&tab=wp>
<http://books.google.com/googlebooks/agreement/>
<http://books.google.com/googlebooks/agreement/#3>

There is even a website called Scribd (<http://www.scribd.com>), which describes itself as “the largest social publishing and reading site in the world.” Scribd claims that “. . . you can easily turn any file—such as PDF, Word and PowerPoint—into a web document and immediately connect with . . . readers and information-seekers Scribd users have shared tens of millions of free and for-purchase documents and books ranging from vampire fan fiction to research reports and business presentations.”

My objective with collecting this information on the “i” and “e” gadgets was to get you started on your way to becoming an informed consumer. If you examine the information in the websites listed in this article, and carefully read the information in the websites of the products you are interested in, you will, indeed, reach that goal.

Here are some product websites that will help you with your “homework”:

Amazon Kindle:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_Kindle
<http://astore.amazon.com/Kindle.-20/about>

Barnes and Noble Nook:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnes_%26_Noble_Nook
<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/nook/features/index.asp>

Sony Reader:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sony_Reader
<http://ebookstore.sony.com/reader/>

Foxit Software eSlick:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ESlick>
<http://www.foxitsoftware.com/ebook/overview.html>