

Tech Talk

The Apple Watch – Part 2 ©

by John McCarthy



Hello and welcome to the second part of this Tech Talk special on the Apple Watch. Last time we had a look at some of the specs and features of the company's first venture into the world of wearables and fashion, and today we'll be examining what the pros and cons really are. Whether you love them or hate them, Apple have always enjoyed a reputation for innovation and have acquired a cult-like status, originally in the West but now perhaps more importantly in the emerging markets. They are the living proof that technological determinism shapes society, by creating markets where none meaningfully existed. Think of the mouse, iPods, smartphones, iPads and also the brave decisions to dispense with the floppy disks and optical devices before it had dawned on anyone else to do so.

The launch appears to have been an enormous success; we now know that the Watch sold almost a million copies in the US alone on the first day of pre-orders, and that if you set your heart on one now, there's a waiting list of months. Nonetheless, Apple's new models are sometimes "supply constrained", as they say in the marketing vernacular, and this refers to a well-known ploy designed to increase perceived exclusivity among customers and ensure more constant future sales. Whether they can sustain this initial momentum remains to be seen.

There's certainly a lot to like - exceptional craftsmanship, a pleasing aesthetic and the same premium level of design you get from their smartphone range... naturally, with a price to match. The general consensus of opinion among the lucky few to have tested it, is that it is beautiful and impressive. But what exactly sets it apart from its competitors? More features is one of the answers: along with e-mail, texts and of course phone calls, this device has also been marketed on the health-tracking benefits it offers to fitness fanatics and weight-watchers combined, providing readings and other notifications that can be absorbed at a mere glance. Siri and Apple Pay come as standard, and needless to say they're working with other companies to create a host of apps which will enable the wearer to use the watch as a key for hotel doors, cars and perhaps even for your house. Are all these functions absolutely necessary for the average person? According to the specialist press, not really, but they will supposedly make millions of lives simpler.

Apple is known to release devices with game-changing features. You'll certainly adore the Apple watch if you're a fan of anything futuristic, and the product certainly looks it: all the bells and whistles are present - superior metal alloys, a choice of watch faces and sleek design will ensure that many will fall irrevocably in lust. Never miss a phone call, e-mail or text message again, even in the crowded tube and RER - phone notification will be sent directly to your wrist, without having to pull out your i-phone and risk attracting the unwelcome attention of a potential pickpocket and his covetous sticky fingers.

One of several downsides, for me at any rate, is that if you don't have a model iPhone 5 or later you should forget buying the Apple Watch, unless of course you're willing to splash out even more extra cash. I have all sorts of Apple paraphernalia at home, some dating back to 1984, but I've yet to succumb to the irresistible charms of the iPhone. I suppose I could conceivably use the Watch at home, manacled,

as it were, to the old wi-fi, but even then the apps designed to work with an iPhone would be absolutely useless. And here lies the rub: will potential customers see a reason for buying one if they already own a less expensive fitness-band or a recent, full-featured smartphone, Android, Windows, Blackberry or whatever? However, one should never underestimate Apple's pulling power and indeed its deep, billion-dollar lined pockets to spend money on advertising and convert the heathen: it recently showcased the watch with a sleek 12-page spread in Vogue magazine, and marketing experts have generally lauded the strategy of positioning the watch as a fashion accessory.

Battery life is also a problem. Like your smartphone, your new Watch will invariably require daily trips to the power adapter to recharge. Just before it runs out, it'll switch to Power Reserve, which will enable you to see the time for another two or three days. In the future, with the progress of technology, perhaps battery life will improve, and herein lies the conundrum for buying an Apple Watch: obsolescence. This is very much a first generation product, and as such one shouldn't expect it to remain cutting edge for very long. Perhaps it's better to wait for the second or even third-generation model which will undoubtedly sport more features. Apple has gone to great lengths to convince the public that the Watch's case has been built to last, demonstrating the virtues of anodized aluminium and 'cold-forged' stainless steel. But while the exterior may not age, the insides certainly will, and Apple's present and future challenge will be to convince potential customers that this product really is worth buying, and that it won't be a technological dinosaur after a few months.

If it were cheap, that would be less of an issue, but even the cheaper versions are considerably more expensive than some had hoped. The high-fashion "Edition" model costs thousands of Euros, and even if it's made of gold and affluent customers have no qualms about buying expensive watches which they can wear and then perhaps hand down to their children, let's face it it's never going to be an heirloom and represents a lot of money for something that will quickly become outdated. Having said that, it took less than an hour for the most luxurious version to get completely snapped up in China.

Ultimately, we all have our own definition of the word "expensive" and products with quote "fantastic value for money" unquote. Many have been criticising Apple products over the years because they're perceived as too expensive especially when compared to the competition, and that purchasing them just isn't logical. Well, this might be particularly true of the Watch... but there again, as somebody once said before marketing had even been invented: 'The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.'