

Quiet Release of New iPad Signals Change in Apple Marketing Approach

By: [Wayne Rash](#) | March 27, 2017

NEWS ANALYSIS: The only mention of the new version of the iPad and the updated version of iOS were press releases. There was no over-the-top announcement or parade of Apple executives.



For what may be the first time ever, Apple has released an updated device, and did it quietly. The new Apple iPad was announced in press release on March 21, but the company didn't hold the usual massive on-state media briefing. For most Apple customers it just showed up on the company's website as a new version that was available to order.

Equally unusual, the new iPad doesn't have an iterative name. It's not the iPad 7, or the iPad Air 3. It's just the iPad. But that lack of a serial

name may very well be more important than it appears; it may mark a change in the way Apple markets its tablets.

First, the details. The new 9.7-inch iPad is an upgrade from the now long-of-tooth iPad Air 2 that's now discontinued. It has a faster A9 processor, a brighter screen and is available in WiFi and WiFi plus cellular versions. There are 32GB or 128GB versions of these models. The biggest difference over the iPad Air 2 is the price. When the iPad Air 2 was announced in 2014, the WiFi-only 16 GB version was \$499. The new iPad with 32 GB and a number of upgrades is \$329 and it's already being offered at a slight discount by some dealers.

Apple states that the iPad delivers 10 hours of battery life, which is the same for all other iPads since the beginning. But it has a larger battery, which should actually mean more life. Of course that depends on what else the iPad is doing that might eat battery power. The new iPad will support multi-tasking and split screens.

But I think that something else is afoot here. The lack of an announcement, the relatively limited upgrades from the predecessor and the lower price may signal a new way of approaching the iPad for Apple. In fact, this may be the last iPad in terms of the models outside of the iPad Pro line.

By last iPad, I mean is that it looks as if Apple is going to have a single 9.7-inch iPad outside of the Pro line and updates may simply be running changes when they make sense. This also helps draw a clear line between basic iPads and the iPad Pros, which deliver much higher performance, more capabilities and costs a lot more. With the new pricing structure, the cost difference is even greater.

Apple is already using a similar tactic with the iPad Mini 4, which was also updated on March 21. The iPad Mini 4 now comes in only a 128 GB version for \$399, which is the same price as it was previously, but with more memory. This was handled as a running change, with no major announcement beyond a mention in a press release.

The iPad Pro, meanwhile, was not included in the update. That tablet should arrive in the next month or so and should have the much-anticipated 10.5-inch screen. This is the version mentioned earlier with much thinner bezels, which in turn allows a larger screen in a 9.7-inch form factor.

The 12.9-inch iPad Pro, which has remained unchanged since its introduction in October 2015, should also get some updates, but whether that will be a new version (such as an iPad Pro 2) or simply an inline update remains to be seen.

When Apple releases a new phone or tablet, the company also releases a new version of iOS, usually a day or two before the new model will start arriving in stores. This time, it's an update to iOS 10.3. New features in iOS 10.3 include improvements to the new Apple File System (APFS). While users won't see any obvious differences, since users can't actually see the file system under iOS, there will be some changes worth noting. First, APFS seems to be more efficient in its use of storage, so you may notice having more space available than you did previously.

After installation of iOS 10.3, users should notice some performance improvements. But a lot depends on what you're using your iPad (or iPhone) for. You probably won't notice any change on most apps, because they already open fairly fast. But you may notice better response with some apps that didn't perform well with earlier versions.

On the other hand, if those slow apps happened to be 32-bit apps, then they won't run at all. Apple has removed support for 32-bit apps and when you try to run one, you'll get a message telling you that the app will need to be updated. This part shouldn't be a surprise, since Apple has been requiring 64-bit support for the past couple of years. Finally, the new file system reportedly performs data encryption better than its predecessor.

It's worth noting that the new file system is part of the iOS 10.3 update, so when you install it, you install the new file system. When I did the update, I noticed that it took a little longer than updates usually do, but otherwise there were no problems. But if have important and irreplaceable data on your iPad, you should probably back it up, just in case.

This is one of those times when what's most important about Apple's new release may be what wasn't in the press release. There's the suggestion of a new direction in iPad model updates, a lower price to stimulate sales and improvements to APFS. There may have been a lack of drama in the introduction of this new update. But that doesn't affect the price or the performance of the tablets.

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