

Reviewing top tech

What you need to know in order to stay up to date with what's happening in the tech environment.



Head of Products at MWEB, Rhana Hoosain, provides a review of today's tech advancements and outlines what's important to know.

There have been rapid advancements in technology over the past few years with constant new developments. We have seen the launch of Apple's smart TV, Microsoft's Windows 8, the Blackberry 10, Samsung Galaxy S4 and a myriad of quirky digital apps. Social networking continues to grow exponentially with Facebook hitting 1.11bn users globally at the end of March 2013 and Twitter at over 550 million users by the end of May 2013. With so much happening in the tech environment, it can be difficult to stay up-to-date.

Smartphones

The fall in smartphone prices has boosted sales and expanded their user profile. According to the 2013 edition of the [TomiAhonen Almanac](#), this year will hold two milestones - the count of mobile handsets will match the count of the human population alive on the planet, as well as reaching the point where half of all new phones sold will be smartphones.

The mobile market is increasingly competitive; which is a huge innovation driver for manufacturers. Earlier this year, an [Internet Trends report](#) shows that Android smartphone adoption is increasing rapidly, and is now nearly six times higher than iPhone adoption. The constant competition amongst players like Samsung, Apple, Blackberry and HTC mean better prices with more value added services included for the consumer. According to Gustav Fachs, Mobility Director, Microsoft Middle East & Africa, Microsoft aims to become the number 1 smartphone provider in South Africa by 2016.

With the launch of the Samsung Galaxy S4 this year, there has been more talk around Near Field Communication (NFC). This Wi-Fi short range technology enables you to transfer data between two devices, meaning you can simply connect your smartphone to a payment terminal and it will pick up your account details and make the payment from your phone. Depending on how much information you want to give the device access to, the NFC chip could prove to be very convenient as your phone becomes your very own e-wallet.

Mobile apps

Mobile app stores are emerging rapidly, with more apps continuing to advance and shape the way we consume media. A report from Analytics Firm Distimo reveals that the most downloaded Apps from the Apple Inc App Store are games, whilst Google Inc's Google Play store is more popular for utility apps such as Google maps and free messaging service WhatsApp. Download the right apps for your needs, and it can make life a little more convenient.

Tablets

The International Data Corporation (IDC) increased its 2013 [forecast](#) for the worldwide tablet market to 190.9 million from its previous forecast of 172.4 million units. Indicating an extreme shift in computing, tablets have changed the way we consume and share media, enabling on-the go convenience and 24/7 connectivity. This high level of mobility empowers businesses to revolutionise the way they communicate and instigate customer engagement with their product offerings.

So how do you know which is the best tablet for you? This all depends on your needs. The Apple iPad is user-friendly as it is all about simplicity with fewer hardware extras. Android tablets offer more advanced tech features with additional hardware options such as HDMI ports that enable you to connect to a TV. Important to consider, is the amount of memory you will need, which will influence the number of apps you can store. Most tablets offer a 16GB memory that is sufficient for the general user. If you want a tablet that has the simplicity of an Apple iPad, but runs on Android, the Samsung Galaxy 10.1 is a good start. If it's the latest buzz you're after, the Google Nexus 7 has been very well received as one of the more popular Android Tablets this year.

E-Reading

Following the launch of the Kindle in 2007, the market for e-reading has gained huge momentum. Research has revealed that many people prefer e-reading to reading paperback or hardcover books simply for the convenience it provides. Online bookstores also offer consumers a wide selection of available books at affordable prices without any check-out queues.

The e-reading market has become a competitive one. In South Africa, the Kobo, made by Japanese Company Rakuten, launched last year as a more affordable option to Amazons highly regarded Kindle. Although the Kobo wins in price, the new Kindle Paperwhite, hailed as the world's most advanced e-reader, with higher definition, higher contrast touchscreen with built in light and 8 weeks battery life, is enjoying great demand.

Exclusive e-readers themselves are, however, in some danger as the tablet market produces smaller, more affordable models that offer e-reading apps along with all their other uses.

Social networking

It's no secret that social networking is growing. What's interesting to see is the growth in the use of Pinterest, which focuses on high quality visuals that users share to their personal "pin boards". In February 2013, Reuters and ComScore stated that Pinterest had [48.7 million users](#). In addition to this, video social networking has risen as the latest medium to create and share videos online, with new additions such as Twitter's Vine but YouTube remains the most popular for now.

Social networking is now focusing on more ways to share content across platforms and continues to replace traditional news sources for information gathering. We are seeing many brands jumping on board with new social networking accounts being opened every day. Consumers are endorsing brands by using their personal social platforms to recommend preferred products to their friend base. Businesses are using social media to create engagement with their

clients and provide and receive real-time feedback.

Telecoms

Cutting spending on voice communication is a key focus for most consumers and small businesses. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), which has been used by call centres and larger companies in South Africa for a while, uses your standard Internet connection and enables you to make cheaper calls over the Internet. This innovative technology is fast on the rise and being introduced into a lot of small or start-up businesses as a substitute for standard telephone usage. There are even VoIP apps available on some smart phones.

Final Word

Most of these technologies require access to reliable, affordable, high speed data services and ISP's continue to develop and provide solutions to meet these needs. In the past few years South Africans have gained access to uncapped Internet, VDSL (Very-High-Bit-Rate Digital Subscriber Line), reliable Wi-Fi, and 4G (4th Generation)/ LTE (Long Term Evolution) Networks.

Be sure to look into all available Internet options available to you through established, reliable providers, in order to maximise your use and enjoyment of these and upcoming tech advancements.

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