

# An iPad for Boardwork?

BoardVantage CEO puts the iPad through its paces

**A**s an iPhone user I really appreciate its slick UI and how easy it is to use. But it has a big limitation. Because of its tiny screen it's onerous if you have to read anything over a few paragraphs. Of course reading is something you do a lot of if you sit on a board. So when I first heard about the iPad, I was intrigued. If it fixed the screen size issue without giving something significant up in the bargain, it might be a tool made to order for the boardroom. When you think about it most board work is review focused, so a device explicitly engineered for content consumption would suit that purpose well. To many directors laptops are unnecessarily complicated, so a more minimalist approach, one that eliminates inessentials, holds enormous appeal. Leery of all the pre-launch hype I approached my purchase with a healthy dose of skepticism. Nevertheless within a few days of its launch I had the latest Steve Job's creation in hand. Here are my impressions on how it plays for board work.

The first thing that strikes you about the iPad is its form factor. It's about the same size as a composition notebook, but with a reassuring solidity. You can slip it into a slim leather portfolio along with a legal notepad without breaking the stitching. Once you power it up, the clarity and brightness of the screen immediately impresses. For people who find reading conventional computer screens a chore, the iPad is a game changer. With its fully adjustable contrast you can even use it outdoors. If you're a Kindle owner I would argue that it's better at delivering a paper experience and not just because of its color screen.



Unlike Microsoft Windows® the iPad has no time-consuming boot sequences or laptop fold-up screens. Just “slide to unlock”, enter your password and you're in. The BoardVantage application is so fast to start that access is basically instantaneous. This always-on character coupled with its flyweight nimbleness makes it so you can fire off a secure email or respond to a written consent, even if you have only a few minutes for the task. Once you're in the app, you have the run of all your board materials, including documents, calendar events, written consents, and surveys — even attend a Web conference for the audit committee. The iPad's built-in WiFi lets you flip pages and jump between modules at unprecedented speed. Because of these factors I found myself taking the iPad places where I would never have taken my laptop. There are of course many reasons why the iPad is so popular but one is that it makes good on the long-held promise of anywhere, anytime communication. By making better use of this “dead” time, you can pick up a surprising amount of extra productivity. To accomplish all this portability the iPad does sacrifice a conventional keyboard. However its virtual keyboard works surprisingly well. Don't get me wrong. I would not recommend it to write your memoirs, but it is more than adequate for doing board work.



There are some limitations. Most obvious, you cannot view board materials offline, so you always have to be in range of either a wireless or Telco network. Also, the optimization for content consumption, while near

perfect for directors, results in a device which is too limiting for the corporate secretary, who as a natural power user still needs the full capabilities of a conventional laptop. Of course board book prep is a different use case entirely but it's important to be clear on the point.

For board members whose job is focused on review of materials the iPad is a genuine alternative to the laptop especially for traditional directors who have concerns about the complexity and readability of laptops. For progressive directors, who are already comfortable with technology, I would add that the iPad is a technological marvel that will likely unleash a wave of innovation. It's easy to see how it will quickly become a companion to that other omnipresent device — your cell phone. ■