



Why does a rugged tablet cost more than an iPad?

Part 3: Configurability

Three main areas that drive up costs: manufacturing volume, engineering, and configurability.

Configurability: Consumer-grade tablets offer very few optional features. You may have a choice of color and aftermarket peripherals, but for the most part, standard tablet configuration choices are severely limited. You need the tablet to quickly boot up and get to your browser. You have a camera, maybe on the front and the back, but you aren't focused on mission critical data capture. You can check your email and maybe even edit work documents, but unless your applications are on the Cloud, you won't be accessing them from your tablet. How many options are really available when purchasing a consumer-grade tablet, 8G, 16G or 32G?

Field service professionals work across a broad range of applications. Some will require data collection such as barcode scanning, RFID, and signature capture. Why should an insurance adjuster who is only doing screen based data entry and digital photos pay for a tablet that has barcode scanning and RFID? Different applications will have very different configuration needs. Data transmission is a must for many field technicians and Wifi and telecommunications modules are must-haves. Other technicians just need to input one or two data fields and scan a barcode. Balancing needs, requirements, price and service are even more complicated in the new world of rugged tablets. Designing a computer to be highly configurable adds cost.

It is really tempting to compare apples (*consumer-*

grade tablets) to oranges (*rugged tablets*) and work out a Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) scenario that justifies the break/fix rate that will inevitably happen when using consumer tablets for commercial applications. Thinking a tablet PC only costs me \$499 per unit vs. \$2000 for a rugged tablet, I can buy four tablet PCs before I pay for one rugged tablet. That argument looks good on paper, until a device is broken causing unplanned downtime. As you might expect, unplanned downtime has a variety of associated and unpredictable costs. Unless you have a well stocked pool of spares, TCO begins to increase. Does each tablet need to be configured with custom software or security controls? How long do your techies need to do that? Again, the TCO starts to go up. Can you use the industry standard device management software to update and secure your devices in the field? Do you need aftermarket add-ons like Bluetooth or GPS. These are all issues to consider when comparing consumer priced tablets to ruggedized versions.

Tablet PCs are a great form factor for field service technicians. Larger display sizes, vehicle docks, better power management, all make them easy to use and add real productivity gains. Buying smart means working with a trusted vendor, taking the time to ask lots of questions, doing a pilot program and making sure you are getting the right device for the job. Savings doesn't always come with the lowest MSRP!



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