

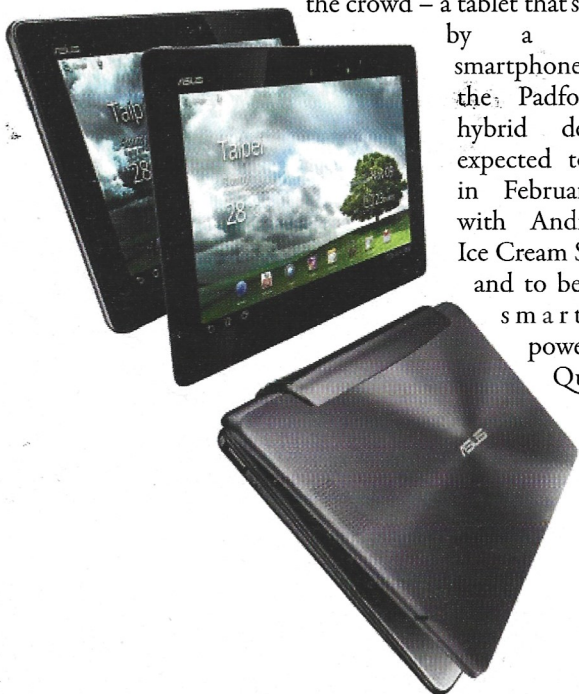
2012: YEAR OF THE HYBRIDS

From the Padfone to Transformer Prime **Shabbir Akhtar** analyses the features of the hybrid devices in the grey area between the different hand held platforms, to pick out the best that pale all others in comparison.

As we headed into 2010, netbooks were deemed to rule the portable computer market with their affordable price and long battery life. But, soon the picture changed and netbook makers were outclassed by tablets. 2010 was marked by the tablet eruption. And, 2011 has been the year the tablets hit mainstream with every – small and big, national and international – company investing to include tablet in their lineup. We've lost count of how many tablets have been announced, displayed, or otherwise unveiled in the past two years. The tablet market is still in its infancy with years of solid growth ahead. 2012 would not be much different as a veritable army of tablet competitors intend on challenging the dominance of the Apple iPad. Yet, there will be a differentiating factor in 2012 – it will be the year of the hybrid products and the tablet will be at its center. Leading the charge here is the Taipei based AsusTek which has added to its lineup two products – Transformer Prime and Padfone – that are more than just another tablet.

Padfone

Through 2011 we have seen so many Android smartphones and tablets that it's now difficult for device makers to come up with something that's truly differentiated. But, Asus has come up with a device that stands out from the crowd – a tablet that's powered by a dockable smartphone – called the Padfone. The hybrid device is expected to launch in February 2012 with Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich and to be the first smartphone powered by a Qualcomm



Snapdragon S4 processor. The phone sports a 4.3-inch screen and both front and rear cameras. The tablet comes with 10.1-inch screen, stereo speakers, battery pack, and docking bay for the phone but, has no processing and data storage units, which are handled by the phone. Once docked, the tablet's larger battery provides additional power to the phone through the micro USB connector and the mini HDMI passes display data from the phone to the tablet's screen. Being able to seamlessly switch between the smartphone and the tablet dock is the idea behind the hybrid device which is perfect for people who prefer the simplicity of maintaining a single device, or for those who don't want to shell out cash for two separate devices, considering none of them come cheap in today's market

Transformer Prime

What does a laptop in the post-PC era look like? The answer to this question has been provided by Asus with the introduction of the Transformer Prime, which might just be the best Android tablet yet. This is the tablet that every Android fan has been waiting for since the launch of the iPad in 2010. Asus launched the original Transformer back in April 2011 which was impressive in its own standards. But, the Transformer Prime takes the benchmark to a whole new level and impresses with its svelte design which makes it as sexy as the iPad 2 or Galaxy Tab 10.1, speedy performance via the Nvidia Tegra 3 quad-core processor, 8-megapixel camera quality that's best on any tablet yet and a brand new SuperIPS+ display. The docking station option, which has a chiclet keyboard, USB and SD card slots, adds that much needed zing, making the Prime a superb choice for power users, giving them a tablet that is equally productive as a MacBook Air. There is another benefit of the dock; as soon as the Transformer falls into place the battery gets recharged through a second battery which is inside the dock. The 10.1 inch tablet comes with Android 3.2 Honeycomb but, is going to get Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich at some point. The Prime features a spun metal aluminum lid and comes in two colors; amethyst gray (gray and purple) and champagne gold (silver and gold). Arriving on December 19, 2011 for \$500 for the 32GB model or \$600 for 64GB storage and \$150 for the docking station, the Prime is a better deal than most of the top-tier tablet contenders.

Galaxy Note

When talking of hybrid devices mention must be made of Samsung's attempt at this niche sector – Galaxy Note. The

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commercial for the device asks, "Phone? Tablet?" If you ask me, I am not sure what to make of the Galaxy Note. No matter what anybody tells you, it's not a phone. Nor is it a tablet. It's a bit of both, yet it's neither. Samsung has devised a new category for a niche market. The first thing that catches the eye is the huge 5.3-inch Gorilla Glass which is packed in with a 1,280 x 800 pixel resolution. Its 82.95mm wide, 146.85mm tall and 9.65mm deep, the girth of it takes a while getting used to, but feels quite comfortable in the hand with some playing around. The Note comes with a rear-mounted 8 megapixel camera, and there's also a 2-megapixel front-facing webcam for video calls. Set aside the undoubted beauty, the huge screen size and the other gamut of unique selling point of the Galaxy Note, and you would still want to own

this device because of the inclusion of the S Pen – a plastic pointed instrument that allows you to draw, scribble, jot or control the device. A galore of apps from Samsung allows you to do a range of tasks using the S Pen, which would otherwise seem unrealistic to have been done on a handheld device. The Note features a 1.4GHz dual-core processor and runs on Android 2.3.5 Gingerbread but, is expected to get Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich in 2012. The Galaxy Note could either be the largest smartphone or the smallest tablet you own, nevertheless it's a great gadget to have.



Website of the month

In this age social media, there are scores of web services that you use – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Google Docs; this list goes on and on. Photos, videos, docs and files are shared on all these services but, they have to be done separately. SocialFolders allows you to manage, sync and even back up any of your social content on the web. For example, the service allows you to have all albums in your Flickr account automatically added to your Facebook or Picasa account. You can download the app on your computer and connect to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr and a host of other social websites to start using the service.

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