

Yesterday, Microsoft took the plunge into the tablet market, unveiling its Microsoft Surface tablet. The Surface is positioned to go head-to-head with Apple's iPad.

There are two Surface models, the Surface for Windows 8 Pro and the Surface for Windows RT. As its name implies, the Surface Windows 8 Pro is the "professional" version aimed at content creators.

Microsoft has taken aim at arguably the two biggest 'shortcomings' of the iPad.

Lack of keyboard – Both Surface models will come with a lightweight cover that has a keyboard built in. The iPad has a virtual keyboard although there are many third-party iPad covers with an integral keyboard.

Ports – The iPad only has the 30-pin dock Apple connector port. The Surface for Windows RT will sport two USB 2.0 ports as well as a microSD port. Likewise, the Surface for Windows 8 Pro will have two USB 3.0 ports as well as a microSDXC port.

Below is a comparison the Surface models as compared to the iPad and the MacBook Air. It may seem a little strange to include the Air specs but, at various times throughout the Microsoft presentation, the Surface was called a tablet, PC and ultrabook. Arguably, the Surface for Windows RT model is poised to go up against the iPad while the more robust Surface for Windows 8 Pro is geared more to compete with an ultrabook such as the Air.

It is unclear at this time (at least to me) which is the better tablet. There are many unknowns with the Surface tablets, such as battery life and, most importantly, pricing. The release date is expected to be later this year.

And, seriously, I hope they come up with a shorter name for these, like Surface RT and Surface Pro.

Feature	Surface for Windows 8 Pro	Surface for Windows RT	iPad (3rd generation)	MacBook Air
Operating System	Windows 8 Pro	Windows RT	iOS 5 (iOS 6 in Fall 2012)	OS X Lion (OS X Mountain Lion in July 2012)
Aspect ratio	16:9	16:9	4:3	16:9
Depth	0.53"	0.36"	0.37"	0.68"
Weight	1.99 lbs.	1.49 lbs.	1.44 lbs. (cellular 1.46 lbs.)	2.38"
Storage	64 GB or 128 GB	32 GB or 64 GB	16 GB, 32 GB or 64 GB	Flash storage - 64 GB. Configurable to 128 GB, 256 GB, 512 GB
Diagonal	10.6"	10.6"	9.7"	11.6"
Pixels	1920 x 1080 pixels	1280 x 720 pixels	2048x1536 pixels	1366x768 pixels
Pixel density	139 ppi	139 ppi	256 ppi	135 ppi
CPU	Intel Ivy Bridge	Nvidia Tegra		1.7GHz dual-core Intel Core i5
Chip	Intel Ivy Bridge Chipset	ARM Chipset	Dual-core Apple A5X	Intel HM77
Wifi	Expected (though not official)	Expected (though not official)	Yes + cellular	Yes
Carriers	No reference to cellular	No reference to cellular	Verizon, AT&T	Not applicable
Camera	Front and rear	Front and rear	Front and rear	Front
Battery	42 watt-hour	31.5 watt-hour	42.5 watt-hour	35 watt-hour
Ports	Two USB 3.0 ports, microSDXC	Two USB 2.0 ports, microSD	30-pin dock Apple connector port	Two USB 3.0 ports, Thunderbolt port, MagSafe 2 power port
Covers	Magnetic cover that doubles as a keyboard; built-in kickstand	Magnetic cover that doubles as a keyboard; built-in kickstand	Magnetic cover (\$39) that doubles as a kickstand	Clam shell
Keyboards	Touch Cover and Type Cover	Touch Cover and Type Cover	Virtual	Integral
Pricing	TBD	TBD	\$499 (16 GB wi-fi) to \$829 (64 GB wi-fi + cellular)	Starting at \$999

