

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

THE GLASS IS HALF-FULL

On Jan. 27, Steve Jobs introduced Apple's latest technological leap: the iPad. An Apple version of the Amazon Kindle, Sony Reader and Barnes & Noble nook, it had been anticipated for several months — a PC tablet bejeweled with many of the iPhone and iPod Touch features and popular Mac-like user interface. Industry pundits expected a price tag upwards of \$1,000. After Jobs and his support staff presented their descriptions of the new and reworked Apple features, fans were pleased to discover the basic model would cost \$499.

I was at the Wi-Fi-equipped YMCA the next morning when it dawned on me how much I was already using some of the iPad's features. On my Touch, I was surfing Facebook, catching up on e-mail and listening to some tunes in advance of the night's rehearsal, all while pumping away on an elliptical trainer. I was already contemplating the larger 9.7-inch display in an e-reader purchase. With the ability to read sheet music and do many of these Apple applications, I quickly resolved an iPad would be in my



'An elitist attitude could be the death of the music store model.'

future. Jobs promised the new technology would revolutionize the way we do many of these activities, and I, for one, agree.

My enthusiasm was soon challenged by many of the techno-elite Internet bloggers bagging on features that were left off: a multitasking USB port and a camera. They also bemoaned the high app prices. I couldn't grasp the negativity.

The miracle machine was to be released in 60 days, and all I could think was I needed to get my hands on one. All the critics could do was whine.

There's a human response here we need to be aware of in our own product appeal. It's easy to dwell on what something won't do, rather than try to appreciate what it will do. I think the iPad is going to offer some incredible benefits in portable word processing, e-reading, art and presentation software (dig the new iWork Keynote), let alone mobile video and music. The price is reasonable and within my budget. This is an answer to every traveler's prayers.

CUT THE I-BASHING ATTITUDE

In our stores, we sell things with many features that please and benefit, but often we dwell more on what they don't do than what they can do. Take the entry-level guitar, for example. We criticize the \$79 guitar because it will fret out and buzz up the neck, but the overwhelming majority of beginners aren't interested in anything above the fifth fret. We fear a case isn't flight-ready, but few of our customers check

their instruments at the airport. We pan the unnatural feel of a cheap digital keyboard, but most beginning pianists are more likely to play an electric piano in a rock band than a grand piano in a concert hall.

It's not wrong to have high expectations of our products, to think long-term about the customer's future needs, but what about "the now"? Does an i-bashing attitude prevent our customers from getting started in the wonderful, life-long activity of music because we've prejudged their standards to be too low?

Far be it from me to endorse "junk" or pawn-renegade instruments, but there comes a time when we have to recognize the economic reality of "good enough to get by." An elitist attitude could be the death of the music store model because our customers will find this product on the Internet with or without our help. We need to start thinking about what these things *will* do, rather than obsessing about what they won't. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 30-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.