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GEEEKS, GAMERS AND GADGET FANS - THIS IS THE PAGE FOR YOU...

TECH TALK 7DAYS

Put it on my tab

By Mark Summers

So... you've got an iPad. Well, good for you. Tell the truth, though, it still smarted a little when you had to fork out Dhs3,000 for the privilege, didn't it? And despite the fact that you insist on waving it around at work, on the metro, on planes, and in other public places... you and your Apple-loving chums are still in the minority. Yep, even though more than 70 million iPads have been sold globally in the last two years, that still leaves seven billion people who think an angry bird is something best avoided. But fear not. If your budget doesn't quite stretch to Tim Cook & Co's much-discussed device, you don't need to forego the exciting promise of tablet computing altogether. At least that's the message of one Indian tech entrepreneur who was in Dubai this week wielding what his firm has dubbed "the world's most affordable tablet".

Indrajit Sabharwal started his computing component firm Simtronics when he was in his mid-twenties. Two decades on, reports this week in the Indian press valued the firm at about \$100 million. So while that makes his claims to 7DAYS that he "can't afford an iPad" somewhat dubious, it means he's worth listening to on all matters technology.

Sabharwal was in Dubai to launch the 'XPad' - a seven-inch tablet computer that boasts a camera, wi-fi

But at Dhs300 you can probably afford this device outright

capability, a video and music player and the latest Android operating system - all for Dhs300 (about \$80).

While the name isn't the most original, the price of the device is sure to turn heads. "Let's look at Apple," says Sabharwal. "I cannot afford to buy an Dhs1,800 tablet. I want to buy a Dhs300 tablet. So what do I do? Just lose the opportunity? No. That's the market we're looking at."

The tech guru sees big potential for the tablet's prospects in the UAE market, particularly among students. In fact Sabharwal expects to shift 10,000 units of the device a month in the Middle East.

Simtronics had humble origins - primarily concerning itself with building memory, motherboards and other bits you'll be blissfully unaware of unless you've taken a soldering iron to your computer.

The move into manufacturing its own tablet devices came after Sabharwal realised the firm was making all the bits for one anyway. The XPad is the result. The seven-inch version has 4GB of memory for data storage, though a USB port means an external source can greatly increase that figure. It also means users can access the

internet wherever they are, with the help of that ubiquitous UAE device the 'dongle'. The tablet looked perfectly good to 7DAYS as Sabharwal put it through its paces by playing a Shakira video among other clips.

And after a few hours of playing around with it ourselves we can report that we are cautiously impressed. I accessed my emails on the tab's wi-fi connection far more easily than I can on my more expensive smartphone. The camera works fine, and the video playback was decent, if not quite in the same league as this retina-display stuff Apple is banging on about these days. But that's hardly the point. Let's face it, if you have the cash to splash on an iPad, you've probably already screwed your nose up at the idea of a Dhs300 tablet. Tough, this isn't for you Apple aficionados. In fact we're sure the word 'dongle' has never even passed Tim Cook's lips.

But devices like the XPad may put the simplicity of tablet computing within reach for millions put off by the more prohibitively priced iPad.

That said, we can't help but notice the Apple MacBook on Sabharwal's desk.

"Ah," he says. "We don't make laptops."



Bad Date rescue

Most people have been there, trapped on an awkward date that is going nowhere. But relief could be on the way with a new app that provides an incoming rescue call. The Bad Date Rescue app, from dating site eHarmony.com, lets users arrange for a call to appear on their iPhone to allow them to bow out if a date isn't going well. Users can pick a number from their address book for the call, for example from their mother or a friend. That person's picture will then appear on the screen when the call comes through and you can escape.

HOW MUCH?!?

Apple boss Tim Cook might not believe you can sell a tablet for Dhs300 (\$80), but Simtronics boss Indrajit Sabharwal (pictured, far left) sees demand for his affordable device