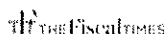


3/23/2012 7:30 PM ET | By Julie Halpert, The Fiscal Times



How Apple is changing kids' brains

Increased use of Apple products is affecting how children develop, learn and interact with others. The jury is out on whether this is a good thing.

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Three years ago, when he was just 2 years old, Max Fuller got his first iPhone. His father, Craig Fuller, the CEO of a banking technology company, said it's been an "enormous tool" for teaching Max the basics about colors, shapes and letters, and most recently the names of all of the dinosaurs and how they lived. But Fuller most appreciates how the device allows him to communicate with his son, since the father is divorced and lives in a different state. They video-chat almost daily.

"It gives me a chance to be in his life, even if I am not around as much as I would desire." He expects to give his 1-year-old, who lives with him, an iPhone, as soon as the toddler is ready. "I think it's one of the most incredible tools ever made for helping kids understand the world."

Max Fuller isn't the only young child hooked on technology. Melanie Rogers' two oldest children, now 9 and 11, got their own cellphones when they were 8 and 9 and both own Nintendo DS's. All her children share an iPad and they each own an iPod touch, including her 4-year-old, who got hers last year. Rogers, who lives in Mesa, Ariz., says it's useful that her children begin to become "exposed to the technology that is in all our lives."



[The effects of technology on children](#)

Though Apple (AAPL +0.27%, news) is actively marketing the iPad as a valuable learning tool for children and teens, many experts are wary about the effects on young, developing minds. They point to studies that show a strong relationship between increased media use and cases of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and worry that children's real-life social skills will be permanently damaged. But in an increasingly technology-focused society and economy -- jobs in science and technology fields are expected to grow twice as fast as jobs in other sectors over the next 10 years -- others argue that exposure to technology, no matter how early, will only help children develop into the tech-savvy adults the country needs.

The Apple doesn't fall far from the tree

According to data gathered from September to December 2011 by global strategic marketing agency Kids Industries, 20% of children ages 3 to 8 own their own iPod touch, while 24% of U.S. children in this age group own their own iPad and 8% own their own iPhone. For teens, the numbers are considerably higher. An April 2011 survey conducted by financial adviser firm Piper Jaffray found that 80% of U.S. teenagers owned a type of mp3 player, with the iPod by far the most common, 17% owned an iPhone (38% expected to buy one in the ensuing six months), and 29% owned or had access at home to a tablet device (and 22% said they expected to buy an iPad in the ensuing six months).

This has led to a booming new market for Apple, which announced on March 19 a dividend plan and stock buyback that once again sent its stock soaring. Apps designed for kids in the Apple store are estimated to be 15% of a \$14 billion industry that includes downloads, advertising and in-app commerce in 2012; this total number is projected to rise to \$37 billion by 2015.

What's driving much of the activity is the fast-growing popularity of the iPad. The latest version was released March 16 and analysts expect sales to exceed the iPad 2. Alan Warms, the executive chairman and founder of Appolicious, said the iPad is appealing as a device that everyone in the family can use. Developers -- big names like Walt Disney (DIS +1.42%, news), Viacom (VIA 0.00%, news) and Nickelodeon -- "have really helped make these experiences incredible for kids," Warms says.

When Warren Buckleitner, the editor of Children's Technology Review, declared the iPad the Toy of the Year in a Jan. 30, 2010, blog post for The New York Times, "people thought I was insane," he said. "They thought, 'Why would you give a sheet of glass to kids?'" Now, he feels vindicated. He says the iPad's durability and its 10-hour battery life are huge pluses to parents looking for a gadget for their child.

The education of iChildren

Many educators are also embracing the technology. This past fall, the Auburn, Maine, school district spent \$200,000 to provide 280 iPads, apps, cases and headphones for all kindergartners. Educators there are relying on iPads to help close the county's achievement gap.

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"The iPad could be the game changer," said Katherine Grondin, superintendent of the Auburn School Department. She said teachers have used it to customize learning for each student, and they've already reported improvements in students' language skills, and higher levels of engagement. However, many parents and experts have voiced skepticism about the program. Larry Cuban, the author of "Oversold and Underused: Computers in Schools," says the benefits of computers for young children have yet to be proved.

But if the country wants to foster a new generation of Mark Zuckerbergs, some argue this technology can only help. One father, Jeff Cohen, says Apple products have turned his son into a budding entrepreneur and philanthropist. His 14-year-old son, Cameron, listened to iTunes university lectures on his iPod to learn programming skills for designing iPhone applications when he was laid up in the hospital three years ago, recovering from surgery for a benign bone tumor. Cameron created the iSketch app, which has been downloaded more than 50,000 times. In 2010, he donated \$20,000, the majority of his proceeds, to the Chase Child Life program at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA. The elder Cohen said that using the technology unleashed his son's creativity, while also increasing the teen's programming, design and problem-solving skills.

Another teenager, 15-year-old Liam Springer, who attended an iPhone app building camp last summer, agrees. "Many people view tech camps as a group of kids being alone in front of computer screens all day, but I found that to be false," he wrote in a recent essay for The Fiscal Times. "The patience and logical thinking required to create a computer program has helped me to better focus and organize my schoolwork," he said.

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