

Kindle loves *M&G*; iPad loves less



By Gill Moodie: @grubstreetSA

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Adopting a new technology is a funny thing. No matter how you tell yourself to put old habits and expectations aside, you fall back on what you know - which is what is so odd about tablet computers such as Apple's iPad. They are like nothing we've used before: it's not a laptop with which you associate work or a phone with which you use to communicate. It's not even a Kindle that is so close to a book in form, it requires very few adjustments from you.

Which is how I came this weekend to devour the [Mail & Guardian](#), on my Kindle with more pleasure than I have got from the printed newspaper in years.

As a newspaper, I find the *Mail & Guardian* too long-winded for a Friday. Saturdays are busy family days and then, by Sunday, the *Sunday Times* and others such as *City Press* and *The Sunday Independent* are demanding my attention so I just don't get back to the *M&G* again.

Fit my book-reading habit

But, in bed on Sunday night with my Kindle, I read most of the paper because its in-depth, meaty stories fit with my habit of reading books every night before I go to bed.

There were a few teething problems with this first *M&G* Kindle edition, released Friday, 11 February 2011. I had to search all 144 newspapers offered on the Kindle to find it as there is no listing for Africa at all in the directory and the paper's "what's on" listings were for Joburg and not Cape Town. (The *M&G*'s physical newspaper remakes these pages for Cape Town and KZN).

However, these are small potatoes compared with how wonderfully well-suited the *M&G* is to the Kindle format - in both content and form. It cost US\$2.99 (about R21) to download one edition compared with R21.50 for the print product and I shall certainly be investigating getting a long-term Kindle subscription (US\$5.99 a month).

I also spent the weekend noodling around on my husband's iPad, which I am the last in the family to do so - even my Grade 1 daughter is an iPad vet, with all its fun games apps such as *Barbie Fashionistas*, with which you can design glam outfits for the icon, and a game with which you can create your own zombie. (Very empowering that last one, if you're six.)

New way of interacting

The iPad is such a curious device as it is more of a toy than a workstation but it is also so much more. It really is a whole new way of interacting with media.

It fires up in two seconds and you can happily use it in bed or on the couch. You can use it immediately to satisfy your thirst for answers to any little thing you were wondering about - for example, what was the name of that giant spider we saw on our walk up Table Mountain on Saturday morning. I wouldn't fire up my laptop to check that on a Saturday afternoon.

Your kids can play fantastic games on it and you can do things such as play the top 100 popular-music hits from any given year or use the *Epicurious* app to search for recipes while standing in front of the pantry cupboard.

You can use it to look at the night sky and learn about the constellations and planets or teach yourself to speak isiXhosa and then there're the beguiling apps for the big foreign news publications such as *The New York Times*. You get about two minutes at *The New York Times* app before the paywall kicks in and, boy, does it look cool: all its weighty articles with

video, photo galleries and even its slick interactive advertising was compelling.

Available South African apps

But this weekend the idea was to investigate what South African apps are available in the store (it's definitely tinkered with to suit your geographic region, otherwise the News24 app wouldn't have come up in the "Top Charts").



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Considering iPads have been in this country (though not launched officially) since at least mid-year last year, I was very surprised to see how few there were. The forward-thinking Media24 is there with well-designed free apps for [News24](#) and [Supersport](#) but there was nothing for [IOL](#) or [TimesLive](#). I can bet, though, that by now most of SA's media executive have laid their hands on one of these babies (Media24 bought a stack for its top people), and the order is going out to IT and online departments: "Get me one of these thingummies!"

It is a little hard to judge the News24 and SuperSport apps as there is little on the local front with which to compare it but both seem very solid, although they ain't going to shoot the lights out. Both offer different ways to navigate the information so, for example, at SuperSport you can view the news via different sports categories and also specific events such as the Absa Premiership and Cricket World Cup.

There are also sports fixtures, logs and live scores that will keep the punters very happy. Uniquely among the SA apps, News24 and SuperSport are aware of the visual element and the News24 picture gallery is a pleasing mix of wire agency, Media24 pics and even those sent in by users.

24.com GM Geoff Cohen says the News24 app has about 8000 active users (16 000 downloads since its launch in August last year) - which are excellent stats for South Africa at this time. He also plans to build tablet applications for all the Media24 newspapers in the very near future across at least three different operating systems so watch that space.

No-one has actually tested it

Interestingly, the only other dinkum local news organisation with an App is TNA Media's [The New Age](#), the government-friendly paper launched late last year. This puts it way ahead of the curve but, heavens to Betsy, no one within *The New Age* or TNA has actually tested it.



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The apps is, quite frankly, a balls-up. You can view each page in its physical print format but, for the rest, the coding is so up the pole that quotation marks have been left out of copy and headline are cut off or missing completely. The different elements of sky boxes (those colourful things at the top of a front page) and nibs (news in brief) are all mixed up so they make no sense and captions are completely detached from pictures. Sies!

On the local front, I also ran into:

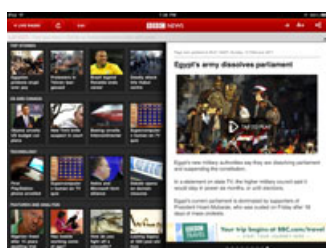
1. MWeb's simple, practical news offering as a front for its products (MWeb is owned by News24's granddaddy company, Naspers).

2. iPhone apps for *Creamer Media's Mining Weekly*, *Platter's Wines of South Africa* and *Wining & Dining* (restaurant guide) - all of which would be well worth remaking for the iPad, especially the restaurant and wine guides.
3. I also paid IS\$1.99 for the rather cool "South Africa Radio FM", with which you can listen to pretty much any local FM radio station - very useful if, like me, you don't have a ghetto blaster in the kitchen.

Top free apps



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In case you're wondering about the top free apps listed in the apps store, they are (in order): iBooks, a calculator app, Kindle, News24, a Facebook app, an app for a game that promotes Volkswagen Toureg, a dictionary and a weather guide. The top paid-for apps include a business-documents template app, a movie player and a dinosaur game.

As a tool for comparison, the international news apps I looked at included:

1. The punchy visual app for *The Sun* tabloid in the UK - the only odd thing is pictures seem to be without captions so a wee picture gallery of Bafta fashion, for instance, was useless.
2. The perfectly serviceable but slightly lack-lustre BBC app and the video-heavy CNN site, which seemed a bit short on the wealth of news they have to hand.
3. Just as with *The New York Times*, *Time* magazine's app was very compelling, though you get a bit more for free. It puts a selection of top news and analysis stories up free of charge but, for more, you must pay to buy a subscriptions or specific issues from its archive.

First iPad newspaper

Much has been made of the recent launch of News Corp's [The Daily](#) app, which is the first newspaper done solely for the iPad. It has only been launched for the US market but South African writer Gus Silber has been test-driving it and gives it the thumbs up as a stunningly presented, visual news digest. He says it doesn't feel anything like reading a newspaper - and, in fact, it only takes about 10 minutes to read an issue with its very short stories - but then it's not supposed to.

"My first reaction was that is very slick and pretty but also very shallow," Silber told Bizcommunity. "But [over a week] it's become quite a habit. I quite look forward to getting it every day. I think it's quite revolutionary... Paradoxically, less is more. I think it's great to have a newspaper that gives you less."

The big question for the media houses, of course, is what people will be prepared to pay for on these new devices. Silber is quite right about tablets such as the iPad demanding a completely way of presenting news.

Whereas we are inundated with information overload on the web, maybe less is more on a tablet.

Cohen says: "Developing content for the iPad is tricky. One's instinct is to find a way to use every single feature that the hardware-software combo allows. What one ends up with down that path is messy and one of the reasons that I think iPad and tablet content consumption appears to trend downwards over time. The reality is that at least at this early stage of developing consumer expectations, users want simplicity. Light downloads, easy navigation, deep rich visuals, fast responsiveness, offline reading and ultimately the opportunity to comment and share their thoughts on the content."

Meanwhile, *Mail & Guardian* editor Nic Dawes says they are working on an iPad app. It will be very interesting to see what they come up with: less or more or something completely different?

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