

# Apple Picks Another Winner With The iPad

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*Douglas C. Stebbins, C.F.A., Managing Director, Director of the Financial Services Group, Consensus Advisors*

In his book "The Tipping Point," Malcolm Gladwell discussed the Law of the Few, the theory that there is a small subset of the population that has an inordinate influence over setting trends. While the Law of the Few applies to individuals, it also applies to companies.

Some companies have developed in such a way that they are positioned to influence (dictate?) social trends. When Coca-Cola decided to brand a diet soda with its legendary Coke name, it brought credibility and mass appeal to what was until then a niche product. Competitive poker was an unknown concept to the majority of the population when ESPN began televising it. While it is possible that ESPN began broadcasting poker because it had become relevant, it is more likely that it has become relevant because ESPN began broadcasting it.

Today there is no more important corporate influencer than Apple. Over the past decade Apple has positioned itself as the hip "in-the-know" technology company that is able to anticipate consumer needs and sentiments with sleek innovative products. There were plenty of MP3 players in the market before Apple got involved, but it was not until the iPod that the white ear buds became ubiquitous. There were countless smartphones in existence prior to the iPhone, but it was the iPhone that gripped the consumer's imagination and spawned many imitators.

That is why the announcement of the iPad was much more than just a release of new piece of technological hardware. It was a very public acknowledgement that Apple has embraced e-reading. Undoubtedly the transition from paper books to electronic books will be greatly accelerated by the release of the iPad. Depending upon its success, the iPad could also lead to increased proliferation of streaming videos, e-magazines/newspapers and downloadable games. The stakes have been raised and the release of the iPad will certainly drive innovation among manufacturers and application developers as they try to harness Apple's momentum.

The iPad could very well push the adoption of e-readers over, as Malcolm Gladwell would say, the tipping point, and it would be wise for book publishers, newspapers, magazines and movie/TV studios to embrace rather than resist the move to electronic media. It won't be a seamless transition for many; the folks at Macmillan publishing have had a busy week negotiating how they would participate in this quickly evolving market.

It is critical for companies like Macmillan to find a way to coexist in this new technologically driven world or they run the risk of being left behind. The Beatles have been in a well-publicized battle with Apple and are one of the few bands not yet available on iTunes. When iTunes was first introduced, it was hard to imagine any music technology to be considered sustainable without the participation of the greatest band of all time. While the legal jousting has stretched on for years iTunes growth has continued unabated, with more than 6 billion songs downloaded in less than seven years, and the Beatles are at risk of being irrelevant to an entire generation who will never own a record or a CD.