

Amazon Fire Max 11 review: nice-looking tablet but poor software

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The Fire Max 11 is Amazon's first premium tablet and is designed to look and feel more like an iPad at half the cost. But while the appearance of the new machine is a step up, it falls far short of expectations when it is turned on. The new tablet starts at £249.99, undercutting Apple's cheapest iPad by more than £100 and just half of the price of the 10.9in model. While every other Fire tablet has been made of plastic, the Max 11 has an aluminium body. It is thin, feels well made and is relatively light for the size. The larger 11in LCD screen is also crisper and higher quality compared with the Fire HD 10, with good viewing angles. Films and video look great, while a set of stereo speakers in the top are loud and clear. The screen isn't overly bright, being fine indoors away from direct light but struggling outdoors. The screen is wide and short, which fits films and TV shows perfectly. But it is not as well suited to using apps and the browser than the squarer ratio used by an iPad and others. This is a problem for Amazon as it is pitching the Max 11 as a productivity machine offering keyboard and stylus accessories to turn it into a laptop surrogate. Here is where things really start to fall apart. The accessories are generally fine for the money. The £90 (\$90) keyboard is solid but the trackpad is a bit too sticky, meaning your finger skips when trying to scroll or point. You also can't click and drag like you might on a desktop to select text, which is annoying. The kickstand struggles to hold it steady while typing on your lap but is fine on a desk. The £35 (\$35) stylus is likewise solid. It is responsive on-screen and magnetically attaches to the side of the tablet when not in use. The big issue is the software. The Max 11 runs the same Fire OS 8 based on Android 11 as other recent Fire tablets. You can do basic split-screen multitasking using the recent apps menu but it has no ability to have free-floating windows and there's no app dock or taskbar, or any of the now-standard things on competitors aimed at productivity. The home screen doesn't support widgets or gesture navigation, relying on rather retro touchscreen buttons to get around. But it is Amazon's app store that really lets the Max 11 down. As is the case with all Fire tablets, it has no official access to the Google Play Store or the firm's apps. While Amazon's store has most of the video streaming services you would want apart from Paramount+, it simply isn't the case for productivity apps. Fire OS has solid support from Microsoft with Office, Teams, Outlook and a few others available but if you don't work within Microsoft's ecosystem things get tricky. The included mail app is extremely basic and doesn't support business Gmail accounts. There's no Amazon note-taking or drawing app for the stylus and few options in the store. Almost every app I use for work or personal productivity is not available, including Evernote and similar tools. Chat apps are few on the ground, with no Slack or WhatsApp. There aren't any banking apps, two-factor apps or password managers, which makes logging in to things a faff. You can use web apps instead but Amazon's Silk browser is the only option on the tablet. Most web apps

worked fine but more complex tools had bits that just didn't work. A bigger problem is Silk isn't supported by some, which refuse to run and demand you install Chrome, Firefox or Safari, such as Google Chat or Meet. You also can't have two Silk windows open side by side, which means if you are working in two web apps you can't have them split-screen. Chrome on Android and Safari on an iPad offer this, so there's no excuse for Amazon. The app store is also fairly weak for games. There are a few high-quality, big-name titles available, such as Minecraft, Stardew Valley and Asphalt 9. But there are also mountains of poor quality clones or rubbish packed with ads and in-app purchases.

Specifications
Screen: 11in (2,000 x 1,200) LCD (213ppi) Processor: Mediatek MT8188J RAM: 4GB of RAM Storage: 64 or 128GB + microSD card Operating system: Fire OS 8 based on Android 11 Camera: 8MP rear and front cameras Connectivity: Wifi 6, Bluetooth 5.3, USB-C Dimensions: 259.1 x 163.7 x 7.5mm Weight: 490g

If you can find the right app combination, the low-power MediaTek chip manages quite well. The Max 11 feels noticeably snappier than other Fire tablets and didn't get bogged down too much with two apps on-screen. Battery life is reasonable, lasting about seven hours of productivity or more than 12 hours of video streaming.

Sustainability The Fire Max 11 will receive software and security updates for at least four years after it is last available new from Amazon. The battery is rated for at least 500 full charge cycles. However, consumers can't get the device repaired by Amazon out of warranty. The company will provide a 15% discount on replacement units for returned devices, which are then repaired, refurbished, reused or recycled depending on their condition. The device contains 55% recycled aluminium and 34% recycled plastic. The company offers trade-in and recycling schemes and publishes information on its various sustainability efforts.

Price The Fire Max 11 costs £249.99 (\$229.99) with 64GB of storage with ads on the lockscreen, which cost £10 (\$15) to remove. For comparison, the Fire HD 10 starts at £149.99, the Samsung Galaxy Tab A8 costs £199, the ninth-gen Apple iPad costs £369 and the 10th-gen iPad starts at £499.

Verdict The Fire Max 11 is the best tablet Amazon has made. It looks and feels nicer, sounds better and has a good fingerprint scanner in the power button – a first for an Amazon tablet. But with those improvements comes greater cost and greater expectations. Pitched as a productivity tablet, it falls flat because the software just isn't good enough. Amazon's app store is also useless for productivity apps outside Microsoft's office suite. There are no good password managers or two-factor apps either, and the Silk browser isn't great. Amazon has a lot of work to do to solve these problems. The Max 11 wants to compete with an iPad but is miles behind. If you want an Amazon tablet for media consumption, save the £100 and buy the Fire HD 10.

Pros: good screen, good speakers, good battery life, microSD card slot, USB-C charging, aluminium body, fingerprint scanner. **Cons:** poor software for multitasking, lack of key productivity apps with no access to Google Play, very slow charging, other Amazon tablets far better value.