iPad for Business: Problems with and Solutions to Using the iPad with Keyboard Accessories

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iPad™ for Business

The adoption of iPad by enterprise has been phenomenal. The introduction of the iPad provided a profound opportunity for businesses, from small to enterprise level, to streamline productivity and/or better serve customers.   As a result a significant percentage of iPads are being deployed or required by business in order to communicate, fill forms, and input data.

The immediacy of the iPad touchscreen interface accelerates the user's connection to the data being accessed and displayed. A sales representative, service technician or field engineer can stand shoulder to shoulder with a customer to discuss opportunities and solutions while viewing presentations or inputing data. The dynamic of working with the customer becomes more collaborative and friendlier. This new technology decreases the separation between the business and the client.

As a result of the opportunities for both productivity as well as increased customer service levels a wide of array of applications require the support of a physical keyboard congruent with professional-use application requirements.

Discussion of Certain Issues Regarding Keyboard Options:

While a number of manufacturers brought numerous variations of keyboard solutions to market, unfortunately none addressed the requirements for professional utility use.

The virtual keyboard, convenient for light data input tasks, requires a hunt and peck approach to typing and crowds out information and data on the iPad's screen.

One of the small number of accessories available from Apple at the launch of the iPad was the iPad keyboard dock, which combines a hard-wired keyboard with a desk-top charging stand. Limited by operating only with the iPad in portrait orientation, this accessory has not been updated for use with the latest iPads that have the new Lightning connector instead of the original 30 pin connector interface.

Currently available external keyboard solutions for the iPad are nearly all wireless, BlueTooth connected keyboards or keyboard cases. By adding external keyboards to iPads, many IT departments have been able to avoid the cost of laptop or desktop computers and the users have been able to get their job done with one device instead of two, reducing the duplicated effort of carrying and supporting both. This is especially effective when the iPad is deployed in conjunction with an already scheduled refresh cycle.

Given that for many businesses a physical keyboard is required for their application(s) the choice of keyboards will boil down to choosing between a separate, loose keyboard and a keyboard case.

With a separate keyboard, the user will also need a iPad stand and a suitable bag to carry the iPad and both the keyboard and the stand. The keyboard will need to be turned on and off with each use, and the keyboard and stand has to be unpacked, set up and repacked with each use. The fact that the keyboard is completely separate from the iPad does, however, preserve the use of the iPad as it was originally designed, i.e., its use as a tablet computer.

If the user selects a keyboard case, the combination of BlueTooth keyboard case with an iPad approximates the function of a laptop computer. Most keyboard cases are padfolio style, soft-shell designs that preserve some distinction in appearance between the iPad-keyboard case combination and a conventional laptop computer. The difficulty of inserting and removing the iPad from the keyboard case is a downside to this option and hinders the ability of the user to operate the iPad as a tablet computer.

As an alternative to the more common soft padfolio style cases, there are some hardshell keyboard cases available for the iPad. Hardshell cases are more durable and provide greater protection to the iPad than the soft-shell, padfolio style keyboard cases. With the hardshell keyboard cases that we have analyzed, the difficulty of inserting and (particularly) removing the iPad from the case makes it difficult to transition from keyboard use of the iPad to tablet use. If a sales representative must struggle with their keyboard case to remove their iPad to share a presentation with a customer it will not leave a favorable or professional impression.

Another problem encountered by iPad users with their keyboard cases, either soft-shell or hardshell, is that once the iPad is removed from the case, there is now an additional component that can be in the way or left behind. The cost of replacing lost keyboard cases or the embarrassment of locating and retrieving them is a further downside.

What do Users of iPads for Business Need in a Keyboard Case?

A purpose built professional grade keyboard by definition is different from that which is designed for casual use. Via interviews with professional users and corporate IT departments we found that the needs for keyboard cases of most business users of iPads fall into the following categories:

• Keyboard functionality
• Protection
• Utility
• Transition to tablet use

Keyboard functionality: is maximized with a full sized, durable keyboard with great tactile feel. A comprehensive selection of special function keys will aid in productivity. The ability to tilt the keyboard for ergonomic use is desired, as well as automatic transition from low-power standby to active modes.

Protection: of the iPad is best provided by a hardshell case. Secure retention of the iPad and positive latching of the case is also beneficial to protection. When traveling, the user will appreciate having a keyboard case that makes them comfortable with carrying, holding and transporting their iPad as they travel by car, taxi, plane, train or walking. The keyboard case having a professional appearance is also a big plus.

Utility: needs of the user include the ability to access charging and headphone connections easily and quickly. The center of gravity and balance of the keyboard case when operating in laptop mode is a key consideration, too. Automatic transition of the iPad from standby to active mode as the keyboard case is opened and closed provides significant convenience and utility. Another requirement for utility is that the speaker and microphone functions of the iPad work as well or better when in the keyboard case as they do when the iPad is operated without the keyboard case.

The transition: of the iPad from laptop use to tablet use is a common failing of keyboard cases. If the iPad is easily removed, then it is not securely held. If securely held, it is not easily removed. When you do remove the iPad from the case, the user must be careful not to leave the keyboard case behind in the conference room or with the customer. The best solution is a keyboard case which easily transforms to a tablet-style case and also allows easy and secure insertion and removal of the iPad in either laptop or tablet mode.
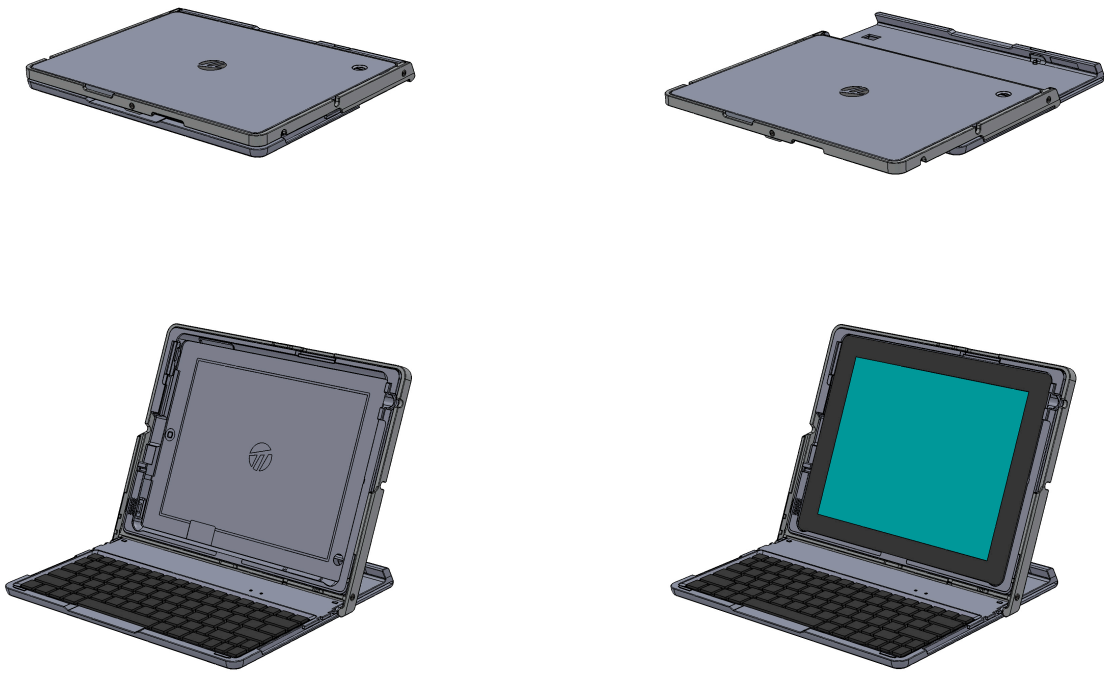
The Optimal Solution: Pi Dock-It Pro

An evaluation of the iPad keyboard cases that are currently available on the market will show that the vast majority of available solutions are oriented towards the casual user and specifically to date none combine all of the desired features discussed above.
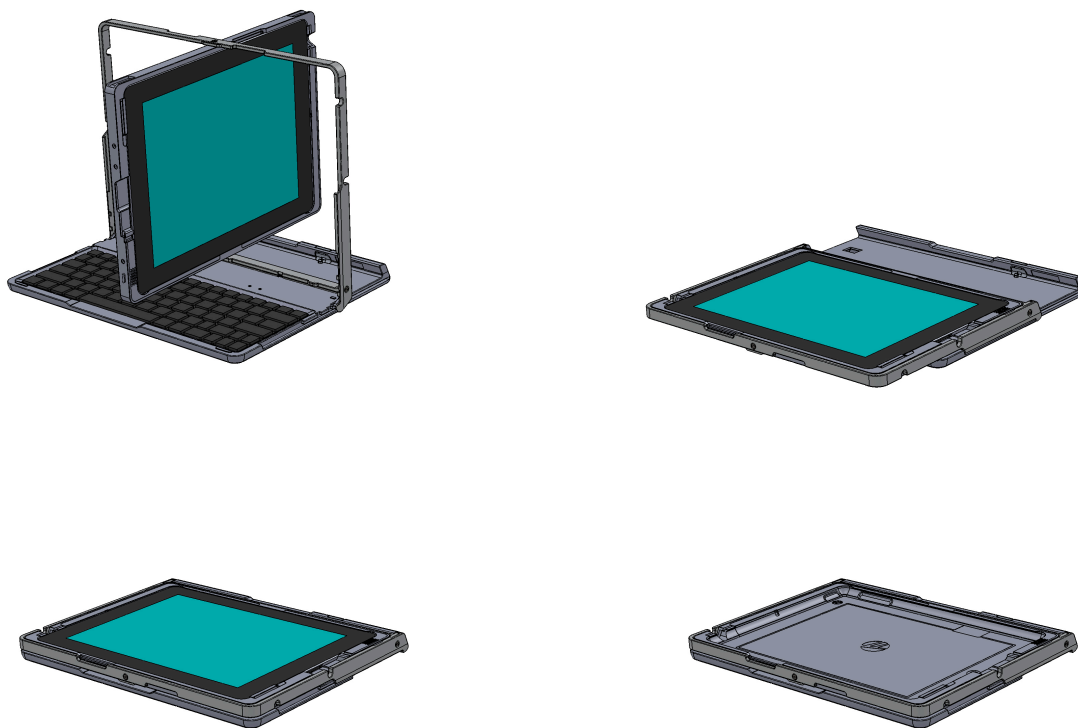
Introduction of the Pi Dock-It Pro: The first iPad keyboard solution purpose designed and built for the professional user (patent pending).   The design of the Pi Dock-It Pro successfully addresses the business user needs as discussed above for a professional grade integrated keyboard and case for the iPad Further, the Pi Dock-It Pro is readily converts from laptop mode to tablet mode without removing the iPad from its secure attachment.

Why the Pi Dock-It Pro is the Best Keyboard Case for Business Users of iPads.

• High quality, full size keyboard with great tactile feel
• Rugged hard-shell case with aluminum bezel
• Compact and lightweight at 1.4 lbs
• Easy insertion and removal of the iPad
• Compatible with iPad 2, through iPad 4
• Rapid charging and long battery life
• FCC and RoHS certified
• Superior stability in laptop mode due to forward center of gravity
• Easily deployed kickstand to adjust the tilt of the keyboard
• Great selection of special function keys
• Sound redirection for speaker and microphone
• Simple and quick transition from laptop mode to tablet mode
• Access to iPad charging and headphone cable connections
• Automatic standby and wake-up for both BlueTooth keyboard and iPad
• Ability to use camera in tablet mode
• Positively latched when closed
• Supports iPad in portrait orientation for use with keyboard

Opening the Pi Dock-It Pro and inserting your iPad

Transition to tablet mode, and Pi Dock-It Pro in tablet mode with iPad removed

Pi Dock-It Pro with iPad shown with kickstand closed and extended

Pi Dock-It Pro in tablet mode with iPad, showing use of iPad camera

Pi Dock-It Pro with iPad in portrait orientation