

iPad and Apple's world domination

Here's another opportunity to stay connected — to the corporation, writes **Garry Barker**.

A SA PIECE of minimalist, beautifully designed hardware, Apple's iPad is an example to the computing industry but, inevitably, six days into its public life, most attention has focused on it as a device.

Nevertheless, just as the iPhone was much more than a mobile phone, so is the iPad more than just another touch-screen portable computing device.

It is the latest element of a global vision conceived by Steve Jobs and his core management team at Apple. Parts of the vision have been disclosed but, like an iceberg, much more lies hidden.

To understand the extent of the vision, travel to a less-than-prosperous corner of North Carolina, called Catawba County, where the median annual income is about \$US30,000 (\$A34,000) and 7 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

In that unlikely backwater, Apple is building a \$US1 billion data centre, thought to be the biggest in the world.

From that huge distribution centre, Apple will serve music, podcasts, high-definition TV and video, books, news, games, and who knows what else to the 300 million or so people in the world who already own an iPod or an iPhone and to the millions more expected to buy iPads.

It will be the home of MobileMe, Apple's internet "cloud" where millions already store their photographs and documents and synchronise their calendars, contacts and email between their iPhone, laptop and desktop machines.

And the iPad fits into that, too.

US analysts suggest iPad sales in the first year will top 4 million but, they concede — with their eyes on the iPhone's sales history — that is probably just the beginning.

In the first quarter of Apple's 2010 financial year, it sold 8.7 million iPhones — a 100 per cent increase on the corresponding 2009 quarter. Nearly 50 million iPhones have been sold since its launch in June 2007 and the world's iPod population is now more than 250 million and still growing.

All these subscribers use iTunes, the Apple database that is, and always has been, the key to the success of the family of "iP" devices the iPad has just swelled. And iTunes is phenomenal. The iTunes Music Store has sold more than 6 billion songs since it opened in 2003, making it the world's largest music retailer. The App Store is even more remarkable. Independent developers have put more than 140,000 applications up for sale. Downloads to iPhones and iPod touches have exceeded 3 billion in its first 18 months.

And now — only in the US, but bound to be global soon — there is the iBooks store where the great publishing houses will sell digital versions of their titles and the bookselling business will be turned on its head.

To those retail outlets add free resources — millions of podcasts and videocasts, and the immense academic storehouse of iTunesU; then you begin to see the scope of Apple's visionary plan.

So, with millions of iPhones and iPods in the world, where does iPad make a difference?

All iPhone apps will

run on the new device, but iPad's much bigger screen gives developers much greater scope.

As Melbourne developer Jason Castan says: "Having so much more screen area than the iPhone or iPod touch means iPad applications will be able to do so much more." Better gaming, easier reading, but also greater scope for complex numerical data and medical and technical information.

Marc Edwards, of Bjango, a Melbourne iPhone apps developer, agrees. He is already working on three new applications for the iPad.

"I think in 10 years' time, the iPad will be seen as a game-changer," he says. He thinks books and newspapers will be early attractions, "but just having such a huge work space is a great advantage and opens major possibilities for new applications. It means you can have a better view of your email, or play more complex games. The possibilities are limitless just because it is so much bigger."

The demonstration of *The New York Times* iPad app, built in only two weeks, shows how reading the news on the iPad is richer and easier than browsing a conventional website. It allows turning "real" newspaper pages, or flipping from one section to another, as you would in a printed edition. But photographs can also be short video clips, adding a 21st century touch to the printed page.

Despite the enthusiasm, there has been some criticism of the iPad for what it lacks: no camera, no USB ports or HDMI output, limited global positioning system support and very modest solid-state storage. Nor is it capable of multi-tasking, though that is likely to appear in future models.

"It doesn't need a camera," says Daniel Kagan, whose company Lookout Mobile specialises in sports-related iPhone (and soon iPad) applications. "It's for viewing content anywhere you are. It's light, the screen is great and the interface is good. It's very exciting for a content provider."

Alexandra Peters of Melbourne games developer Firemint agrees that the potential of iPad is "fantastic, very exciting." Firemint's Flight Control iPhone app, downloaded more than 2 million times in 10 months, is now being adapted to the iPad, and other games to take advantage of the iPad's big screen and mobility will follow, she says.

"We think it will open a whole new market of people who might not have played games before, and not on a mobile device," she said.

But the essential point about the iPad is

that it is a content consumption device, not a creation device, unlike a laptop or desktop computer. It is about being more conveniently able to play games, read and compose emails, read books and newspapers, and, as Steve Jobs said at the launch, "hold the internet in your hand". And to do it wherever you are.

In short, iPad is the latest move in Apple's plan to allow people to be mobile and yet still connected to almost anywhere and to any information or entertainment that they choose.

As the legendary Colonel Hannibal Smith of TV's *A Team* used to say: "I love it when a plan comes together."



Jason Castan: So much screen area gives so much scope. PICTURE: ERIN SLATTERY