

At a glitzy Los Angeles event Microsoft unveils its next big step as a hardware maker-- Microsoft Surface, a family of 2 Microsoft-branded Windows tablets complete with clever keyboard covers.



The purpose of the Surface tablets is to "prime the pump" for the imminent Windows 8 release, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer says.

The Surface comes in 2 varieties-- one running Windows 8 on Intel 22nm Ivy Bridge chips, and the other running Windows RT using an ARM chipset.

Microsoft is selling the x86 version as a "full PC" ideal even for enterprise use.

The Windows 8 Surface is 13.5mm thick, weighs 860g has a 10.6-inch "ClearType HD" display of unknown resolution and comes inside vapor-deposited (PVD) magnesium case. It carries USB 3.0 and DisplayPort ports and supports stylus input.

The Windows RT version nearly identical in size, only slightly thinner (9.3mm) and lighter (6.6g). It has microSD, USB 2.0 and Micro HD ports and also comes with either 32 or 64GB of storage.

Both tablets carry front- and back-mounted cameras, an integrated kickstand (also made in PVD magnesium), full-size USB ports and dual wifi antennas.

Microsoft also offers 2 varieties of keyboard-equipped magnetic cover-- the Touch Cover (3mm with integrated pressure-sensitive keyboard) and the Type Cover (5mm thick with physical keys and multi-touch trackpad).

Readers with longer memories should remember Microsoft using the Surface name for its table-sized multitouch surfaces... now the Samsung-made "big-ass tables" get quietly rebranded with the name ["PixelSense"](#) .

No details on pricing are yet available, and Microsoft says the Surface for Windows RT should launch when Windows 8 does (around Q3 2012), with the Windows 8 Pro version to follow after 3 months. Will Microsoft manage to become more Apple than Apple?

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