

Multimedia INTERNET@SCHOOLS

The Media and Technology Specialists' Guide to Electronic Tools and Resources for K-12

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MultiMedia &
Internet@Schools

HARDWARE

Nova5000EX

Company: Fourier Systems, Inc., 211 RR 620 South, Suite 112, Austin, Texas 78734; Phone: 877/266-4066; E-mail: info@fourier-sys.com; Internet: <http://www.fourier-sys.com>.

Description: The Nova5000EX is a full-featured tablet computer or electronic learning slate that can be categorized somewhere between a hand-held unit and a laptop computer. The top-end model—the Nova5000EX—is white, weighs 2.4 pounds, and measures 9.33 x 7.32 x 1.7 inches. The unit, 9.33 inches in horizontal width, is held by two yellow handgrips and features a matching yellow stylus that is stored in the tablet.

Specifications: The EX model includes a 400 MHz processor, 64 MB RAM, and 128 MB flash memory. The 7-inch liquid crystal display (LCD) screen (850 x 480 with 65,000 colors) includes a touch screen feature.

The Nova5000 EX also has an Ethernet port 10/100; Wi-Fi; 2 USB 1-1 host ports; a USB slave port (for ActiveSync connection); a Compact Flash Card Slot; keyboard, ear-phone, microphone ports; eight 12-bit input sensor interfaces for data logging; and a standard VGA display port.

Price: The suggested retail price for

the Nova5000EX is \$599, with quantity discounts available. The Nova5000BX, an entry-level machine with considerably fewer features and less software, retails for \$399. The Nova5000SX, with high-end data logger features, retails for \$499. A number of accessories are available, including more than 65 sensors or probes.

★★★★★ | REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

Warranty: The Nova5000EX has a 1-year warranty against defects. An additional 3-year warranty extension may be purchased.

Reviewer Comments:

Installation: The excellent Quick-Start guide made installation and getting started very easy. To begin, the user plugs in the unit to charge the battery. The computer came on and could be used as soon as it was plugged in.

The battery charge takes about 4 hours. In addition, a few minor adjustments were needed, such as calibrating the touch screen.

The unit can operate using either a rechargeable battery or an AC power

cord. **Installation Rating:** A

Features: Fourier describes the Nova5000EX as a full 1-1 curriculum machine. The “1-1” means that it is geared toward schools trying to establish a 1-1 student to computer ratio. To that end, it is a very affordable tablet computer. By “full curriculum,” the company is identifying the unit as both a fully functional computer and a data logger.

The Nova5000EX is indeed a fully functional tablet computer—and an excellent unit—with a wonderful clear screen that is just big enough. The Windows CE 5.0 operating system makes its operation very familiar to anyone who works with Windows systems.

The Nova5000 EX includes a Soft-Maker Software Suite that provides TextMaker, a full-featured word processor compatible with Microsoft Word, and PlanMaker, a full-featured spreadsheet program generally compatible with Excel. Both programs are close enough to the Microsoft Windows applications that a transition to them should be almost seamless.

Additional standard software includes a PDF file reader, a PowerPoint engine for the use of PowerPoint presentations, a CalcCE scientific and statistical calculator, utility software, and even a couple

of simple games. The unit also provides full Internet connectivity (via Ethernet or Wi-Fi) for Web browsing and e-mail support.

The instant on/instant off function works nicely. The ability to use the unit with a normal keyboard and mouse—or a standard printer or data projector—greatly adds to its usefulness. Transferring files to other computers is easy using ActiveSync or wireless connections.

If an external keyboard isn't used, the Nova5000's on-screen small or large keyboards are fine and the touch screen function is excellent. Microsoft's Transcriber with character recognition software is included.

Using the stylus, notes can be placed



Nova5000EX

in a word processing document (or other types of documents) with remarkable accuracy by writing on the screen. I found I had to form a few letters carefully but, in general, this feature worked very well.

Of course, Fourier's MultiLab CE data collection and analysis software is included with the Nova5000 in support of its excellent data logging function. I conducted a couple of simple experiments with the light and sensor probes that came with the computer. It took a few minutes to learn to use MultiLab CE but, basically, all that had to be done was start the program, plug in the sensor, and decide what I wanted done

with the collected data.

As the data was collected, a real-time graph was drawn. Samples can be collected manually or automatically; the process stops at a predefined point or when told. When finished, both a graph and an equation are displayed.

Experiments can be recorded for later playback. A video can be taken of the experiment, imported to the Nova5000 unit, and a visual with synchronized graph and video can be created for students or as part of a report.

Narration can be recorded by plugging in a microphone. The voice over can be played back with the experiment. The Nova5000EX speaker offers very clear sound. All in all, the Nova5000EX is outstanding, especially in view of the number of sensors available.

My only concern was the battery. A fully charged battery is supposed to last through 4 hours of continuous use. As I worked with the unit, it didn't seem to last that long and seemed to lose its charge altogether when the battery was low. Fortunately, however, the power cord insures that the unit can be used at anytime, regardless of battery charge. **Features Rating: A**

Ease of Use: The Nova5000EX is made easy to use by excellent support material and the intuitive interface in Windows CE 5.0 and other software. In addition, a good online user tour is available.

It is still a complicated mechanism, however, and some of the software does have many features that take time to learn. The learning curve can be quite high, especially for beginners and younger students. Even advanced teachers will need to take some time with MultiLab

CE, especially before using it with students. **Ease of Use Rating: A**

Product Support: The specific product support in the form of manuals, QuickStart guides, and online help is excellent.

Toll-free telephone technical support is available at 866/771-NOVA. E-mail support is offered at support@fourier-sys.com. Online support can be found at http://www.fourier-sys.com/support_support.html. **Product Support Rating: A**

Recommendation: The Nova5000EX is a viable, reasonably priced 1-1 computing solution and I recommended it to middle and high schools for that purpose. The unit is also an excellent data logger with many uses in math and science classes.

I especially recommend the EX model. It isn't that much more expensive than the other two models and its many additional features make it well worth the extra cost. Even schools with budget problems could afford a class set or two of these that could travel around the building.

Elementary teachers will find limited uses for the Nova5000—mostly in science or math demonstrations or in carefully supervised student activities. However, the Nova5000 could be very useful for middle and high school students in science and math classes. And perhaps a traveling set could be used in language arts classes for word processing as well. **Highly recommended.**

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