

Microsoft music player due by Christmas

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Microsoft's planned unveiling of a handheld music-and-video player to rival Apple's iPod has raised interest among entertainment and technology analysts.

News reports Thursday said the device would be available in U.S. stores in time for the Christmas shopping season and would feature the capability for wireless downloads.

Some analysts said the project could irk major MP3 player manufacturers that use Microsoft software. At the same time, they see it as an indication that Microsoft doesn't want to wait for another company to come up with a serious challenger to the iPod.

"If this is true, then this is them trying to take more control over the situation," Mike McGuire, vice president for research at Gartner, told The New York Times. "In effect, they're basically saying, 'We think we can do something better.'"

Microsoft has not officially commented on the reports; however, The Times said entertainment-industry executives have been briefed and appear receptive to eventual deals on content.

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