Industry group: OK for iTunes to block Palm Pre

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(AP) -- Apple Inc. appears to have clearance from an industry group to block rival Palm Inc.'s Pre phone from connecting with iTunes software.

The $200 Pre was launched in June as a direct [competitor](#) to the [iPhone](#), and became the first non-Apple device that could directly connect to iTunes. It did that essentially by pretending to be an iPod or iPhone.

Apple crippled that function by updating its software. To get around it, Palm used a workaround similar to the Pre's original method of connecting to iTunes: It updated the Pre's software so that when it was connected to a computer's [USB port](#) it gave out a hardware vendor code that Apple was assigned by the USB Implementers Forum, an industry standards group. ITunes would then see the Pre as an Apple device and allow users to transfer content to it. The phone does not work with the most recent version of iTunes, however.

Palm complained to the group in July that Apple was improperly using its USB vendor code to block competitors. But the group disagreed in a letter sent to both companies Tuesday.

The letter also warned that if Palm updates the Pre's software to include Apple's vendor code - a move Palm indicated in its complaint that it planned to make in order to restore the iTunes feature - it would violate the group's rules.

The group asked Palm to clarify its intent and respond within a week

about the potential violation.

Palm spokesman Derick Mains said the company contacted the USB group because it believes consumers should be able to decide how they use media they own that is not subject to copy-protection restrictions. He said Palm is reviewing the letter and will respond if it thinks it is appropriate.

Apple spokesman Tom Neumayr said the company had no comment.

The iTunes spat is part of a larger rivalry building between Apple and Palm, whose chairman and CEO, Jon Rubinstein, once was an executive at Apple and oversaw the iPod. The Pre includes a "multi-touch" screen like Apple's iPhone, which lets users do things like pinch the screen to zoom in and out of photos.

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