Apple's tablet: Why you'll want one

January 26 2010, By Brier Dudley

There's one big question remaining about the mythical tablet device that Apple is expected to unveil Wednesday.

We've already learned, from whispers of those in the know, that it's basically a supersized iPod touch with a 10-inch diagonal screen and it may cost about $1,000.

In addition to playing music and video, it's going to display digitized books, newspapers and magazines.

It will have a browser, Wi-Fi, the ability to run Web applications and probably an option to connect through a wireless phone network.

So the unanswered question is, why would you want one? A few possible reasons, if you're so inclined:

• It could be the ultimate remote control for your digital media.

Photo, music and video collections are scattered around home networks, devices and online sites nowadays.

Most people use computers to search and manage these collections. There are some gadgets to search and output this content on different displays in the home, but there isn't a killer, all-in-one remote and playback device.

The original iPod was essentially a nice interface for searching and

playing digital music files.

In the home, where the device doesn't have to fit in your pocket, a big iPod could be ideal for searching and playing all sorts of digital media files.

Televisions are increasingly linked to home networks and the Web, but remote controls haven't caught up. Instead of choosing from a short list of shows on a grid, people with connected TVs are searching and perusing vast online libraries of content.

Apple's tablet could control TV content if the TV is connected to a network directly, through a set-top box, to an AppleTV box or perhaps a new Apple accessory.

But the remote has to be universal. It's appeal would be limited if it requires you to store everything on Apple's platform and funnels you through a single video store -- iTunes.

• It would be a nice device for reading digital magazines, newspapers and perhaps books. People waiting for so-called e-readers to get color screens and better multimedia features may take the plunge, trusting Apple to get it right.

The tablet is unlikely to use the flicker-free, grayscale display technology that's in Amazon.com's Kindle and Sony's Reader. For many, that would be a small price to pay for its additional capabilities. A combination iPod-textbook reader would also be a hit on campuses.

Apple's tablet is also going to be promoted by publishers frantically searching for new ways to sell digital versions of their products.

Media companies are simultaneously erecting pay walls on their Web

sites, which could make it more appealing to get subscriptions on devices like Apple's (or on paper ...).

• Software developers who rushed to build applications for the iPhone may use the larger canvas to build apps that increase the tablet's appeal.

A new and larger platform would be an opportunity for them to sell higher priced apps than the 99-cent jobs that dominate the iPhone market. It's also a steppingstone toward building touch-controlled apps for the Mac.

Game companies are reportedly developing titles for Apple's tablet. The bigger screen would allow for richer games than the iPhone and iPod, but households that can afford a $1,000 tablet can also afford a full-powered, $200 game console.

• It could be a dream come true for wired couch potatoes, including the people who now use a laptop when watching TV.

You should be able to use Apple's device to browse the Web, read news, check e-mail and monitor social network sites without annoying anyone with keyboard clicks.

You would be able to buy and rent TV shows, movies and music on the device, flicking and tapping through iTunes or Netflix, queuing up something better to watch on TV or the device.

The screen's big enough that you won't have to squint and small enough that you can keep it on a coffee table.

• It's ideal for people who love their iPhones but want something a little bigger to browse at home.

People like Jeroen van Goor, a Dutch Web developer.

A year ago van Goor dreamed up such a gadget "to suit my couch Internet-browsing behavior," he said via e-mail.

The rendering he drew and posted on Flickr was borrowed by all sorts of blogs and media outlets to illustrate stories speculating about Apple's tablet in recent months.

It turns out van Goor's image is pretty close to what Apple's unveiling Wednesday in San Francisco, "people familiar with the device" told the AppleInsider blog last week.

Bill Gates wanted the same thing back in 2005, when Microsoft was urging computer makers to start building tablet-style, touchscreen devices with all-day battery life and 3G wireless connections.

A few years later some companies offered "Ultra-Mobile PCs," but it was early days for the components and networks and the $1,200 price didn't fly with consumers.

• Nowadays, prosperous families looking for a small, shared Web kiosk and message station may want Apple's tablet, perhaps mounted on a dock in the kitchen.

This category was staked out in recent years by touchscreen, all-in-one "kitchen PCs." But with screens the size of a microwave door and separate keyboards, they take up a lot of counter space.

Sitting in a charging dock, a tablet could also serve as a digital photo frame, clock, recipe stand or monitor for watching videos away from the TV.

Eventually a device like this -- made by [Apple](#) or another company -- is probably where you'll get the morning newspaper.

You could even take it along for the morning constitutional, but you'll still need paper for some things.

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