

# A blank slate for techies' dreams; the impending release of the 'Apple tablet' has fueled all manner of speculation

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It's the most eagerly awaited tablet since Moses. As with the tablets handed down from on high, no one knows what's on it. Or even what it is. They know only that it's coming.

Loud is the hype surrounding what's popularly called the "Apple tablet." Many observers, including Ken Doctor, news-industry analyst for Outsell Inc., expects it to be "a 10-inch tablet with features like an iPhone, big enough so I can actually read easily."

Bloggers and media snoops claim it will, in unprecedented, cosmos-rocking ways, combine popular applications (Web? TV? Books? Phone? Gaming? Dog whistle? Paint scraper?) into one light, portable, intellectual suitcase A-bomb.

The paralytic excitement has only escalated during a blistering week last week of big tech announcements. On Monday, [Google](#) joined the smartphone wars with its Nexus One. On Wednesday, the eve of the [Consumer Electronics Show](#) in Las Vegas, Microsoft presented its Courier tablet. The same day, LG announced a TV screen of revolutionary thinness -- 7 millimeters, or 0.28 inches.

But all languish in the shadow of the iObject.

Its official name is said to be the iSlate. Apple may introduce it Jan. 26.

Or 27. Or not.

Why such fever for what might be just an iPhone on steroids?

Mac user and self-described technogeek David Toub of Newark, N.J., writes via Facebook: "Apple is exceptionally gifted at stimulating interest in its unannounced hardware releases, even leaking information selectively and strategically."

Apple user Joy Stocke of Stockton, N.J., e-mails that she looks "forward to the tablet and its capabilities and will absolutely welcome the advent of touch keyboards."

Brooke Crothers of CNET.com describes what it might do: "The Apple tablet would engender a new computing paradigm. ... Think of how an iPhone is used now ([e-mail](#), Web surfing, YouTube, gaming, Facebook/[social networking](#)) and take that to the next level that a bigger screen ... would allow: books, multimedia-rich media browsing, touchscreen-based shopping" -- and things users themselves cook up.

What would it change? Mark Potts, chief executive officer of GrowthSpur, enthuses in his tech blog: "I believe the [Apple tablet](#) has the potential to strikingly transform large swaths of the media business, from newspapers to television to movies, pretty much all at once. . . . Apple's tablet has the potential to change the way we consume and pay for media."

David Carr, the New York Times media columnist, writes: "I haven't been this excited about buying something since I was 8 years old and sent away for the tiny seahorses I saw advertised in the back of a comic book."

Leaks, rumor and surmise say the iSlate will be a light, slim touchscreen

with a virtual keyboard and iPod-like control wheel. What will be on this screen? Here's the world's wish list:

Internet access, natch.

A super-text-reader that offers page-size, full-color newspapers, magazines, and books.

An iPhone, with all the apps and stuff now on iPhones -- and, yes, you can call people.

Streaming video, movies, audio, and games.

TV everywhere, anytime.

Great battery life, ridiculous speed, endless storage.

Even a couple of these would mark a breakthrough; all would change the media world for good. And, say some, the advertising world. And maybe save newspapers, magazines and books, or at least escort them gently to the next chapter.

The spectacular 2007 introduction of the iPhone did change mobile computing. So "people are fairly right," Doctor says, "to sense something new. ... The iPhone has trained people to what the tablet can be, especially if it turns out to be a bigger iPhone big enough to read with."

That bigger screen packs more than just size. It could enable a reading experience much closer to the age-old, still-superior one of page-turning, flipping back and forth, perusing illustrations, looking in the index.

That could make publishers smile: It at least suggests a kind of future for books and newspapers. Publishers could create products that only you,

the user, owned. And that might reverse (a little?) what's known as "disaggregation."

What used to be all in one place -- news articles, essays, etc. -- have been teased apart and flung out onto the Internet all alone. People read or buy single articles, not whole papers or magazines. Disaggregation: That's what it's called, and it looms large in the decline of publishing.

So could gadgets like iSlate reaggregate? At least in theory -- and many are skeptical -- a mobile e-reader could spur publishers to create new collections of content and draw in new generations of readers, and advertisers.

"I think aggregating products, and licensing those aggregations to users, I think that's going to be a big future business," Doctor says.

Randy Bennett, senior vice president of the Newspaper Association of America, says, "It's good news for the newspaper industry to have an additional platform for reading consumers, more likelihood that people will pay for content. Over time, as that new market grows, so will the attraction for advertisers."

If the i- and other slates allow publishers to reaggregate, advertisers may smile. TV is shattered in a thousand shards; viewers TiVo their shows and fast-forward past ads. In the Web world, few look at ads, especially in the mobile universe. The question getting ever louder is: Where will advertisers go?

They may go to the bigger screen of the iGuess. What if you could design interactive ads, what Doctor calls "games for moms to sell Procter & Gamble"?

Dan Gillmor, a mass-communications professor at Arizona State

University and an influential blogger on new media, says, "When the advertising can come to life in new and interesting and conversational ways, not just the editorial part of the publication, that's potentially pretty interesting."

Michael Learmonth, a reporter for Advertising Age, writes that the iSlate's biggest draw "will be the paid-content models it could enable for newspapers, magazines, TV, and film. . . . Apple is reported to be negotiating a subscription service for TV which could change everything."

Vast reservations remain. Gillmor says, "I'm not at all sure this will save anybody."

Perhaps the biggest question is that of Apple's intentions. "If the model is the [iPhone](#), where you need their permission for any publication and they take a cut of everything they sell," says Gillmor, "that's really different than if it's the more open model of the Mac computer."

There's already widespread irritation in publishing at the Amazon Kindle, a popular e-reader. Amazon has demanded 70 percent of newspaper subscription revenue -- way too much, critics say.

If Apple, a company Gillmor calls "control freaks," tries to lock down everything for itself, that's "very dangerous and antithetical to open computing and open content with free access."

Then again, who knows? Right now, the iSlate is what techies like to call "vaporware." Even a Mac fan like Toub would have "to see what the tablet does and doesn't do before even considering purchasing one."

But one what? The tablet, please.

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