

Dying news media looks to Apple tablet for hope

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Workers apply the Apple logo to a building in San Francisco. Struggling US newspapers and magazines may seek Internet Age resurrection in a so-called "Jesus tablet" -- a computer expected to grab the spotlight at a much anticipated Apple event in San Francisco.

Struggling US newspapers and magazines may seek Internet Age resurrection in a so-called "Jesus tablet" -- a computer expected to grab the spotlight Wednesday at a much anticipated Apple event in San Francisco.

A notebook-sized version of an iPod Touch that Apple chief executive [Steve Jobs](#) is expected to show the world could try to do for newspapers what iTunes did for music and what the App Store did for mini-programs for smartphones.

"It will be notable," said Jim Gaines, a former corporate editor at Time Inc. who is now editor-in-chief of FLYPmedia. "I don't think this device is the messiah for print, but it is very possible that its descendents will be."

Apple's winning tactic of tying content delivery to devices could be more significant than the hardware rolled out as the California firm's latest creation.

Newspapers and magazines that have gone digital to stay relevant in an Internet-obsessed culture have seen print advertising revenue evaporate as stories and images are freely indexed and shared online.

Apple has led the way in conditioning people to pay for applications, games, and other content for the [iPhone](#) and the [iPod Touch](#).

Apple has reportedly been in talks with online news, magazine and book publishers and Wednesday's event could include the launch of a version of iTunes for content generated by those outlets.

Digitally frustrated newspapers or magazines may choose to focus on "fee-for-service" electronic readers, according to Dan Kennedy, assistant professor of journalism at Northeastern University in Boston.

"It could be there are some publishers feeling as though they have been buying into the new media ecosystem, the blogosphere, for 10 years and haven't gotten one thing out of it," Kennedy told AFP.

Kennedy had in mind media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who advocates reining in how websites and search engines use stories crafted by professional news organizations.

The [News Corp.](#) chairman has also been openly critical of the experience

of reading a newspaper on the black-and-white Kindle e-reader from Amazon.

Publishers are placing bets on smartphone and e-reader platforms, according to a recent survey by the US Audit Bureau of Circulations, which is entrusted to track paid readership of publications.

More than half of the respondents said they believe that smartphones will be a vital way to distribute their publications within three years.

Nearly 42 percent said the same about e-reader devices.

News publishers are looking to Apple for a tablet that lets people browse and buy content in ways that expand on simply reading by adding interactive multimedia and reference features, said DigitalTrends.com analyst Scott Steinberg.

"There's a real opportunity for Apple to raise the bar here," Steinberg said.

"Not only by making digital publications accessible to the mainstream reader, but also seamlessly interweaving online features, apps and streaming audio/video content to enhance the general reading experience," he added.

Reviving traditional news operations will take more than an Apple miracle device, according to Gaines, whose FLYP magazine incorporates video, animation and other "dynamic" content to adapt to techno-tastes.

"It is not going to be a simple matter of just re-purposing the content of the New York Times or anyone else for this new device," Gaines said.

"It is re-imagining what people want in this new media. We are early in a stage of transformation of what it means to publish or to read," he said.

An [Apple tablet](#) will be hampered at the start by "unsatisfying" 3G broadband networks, short battery life, and people's yen for a flexible device that can be rolled up and stuffed in a pocket, according to Gaines.

"I just don't think this will be the killer device just yet," Gaines said of what Apple has in store. "It will certainly point the way. It's all coming."

Efforts to lure people into paying for content on an Apple tablet could be thwarted if the hardware comes with a high price and is coupled with monthly telecom service provider charges.

"I'm minimally excited about it, plus I know I can't afford one," Kennedy said of an Apple tablet. "It seems some publishers are hoping it is an attempt to do the Web all over again and this time make it a closed system."

Such an effort in an Internet world of unfettered content would have very limited success, he said.

"I think the biggest problem with the tablet is that it doesn't replace anything," Kennedy said. "It is just one more thing you have to carry around."

"It is not going to save the world, not by any stretch."

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