

Tablets and slates take center stage at trade show

January 9 2010, by Charlotte Raab



Attendees try an interactive display at the Microsoft booth at the 2010 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) has been a coming out party this year for what are being described as tablet and slate computers, successors to the low-cost netbooks which have been a major hit over the past couple of years.

Laptops, notebooks, netbooks, smartbooks and now... tablets and slates? Just when you thought you were familiar with all of the various portable computers on the market new ones appear.

The [Consumer Electronics Show](#) (CES) has been a coming out party this year for what are being described as tablet and slate computers, successors to the low-cost netbooks which have been a major hit over the past couple of years.

Experts differ on the precise definition of a tablet and a slate -- and a [netbook](#) and a smartbook, for that matter -- but a tablet, while touchscreen, tends to have some buttons. A slate is entirely touch-controlled.

Much of the buzz at CES has surrounded a device that is not even on the showroom floor in Las Vegas -- a [tablet computer](#) Apple is expected to unveil at the end of the month believed to resemble a large-screen iPod Touch.

Shawn DuBravac, CEA's chief economist and its director of research, said the new devices are filling a "void" between smartphones and devices with a larger screen.

"We now see a battle for this five- to 15-inch (12.7- to 38.1-centimeter) screen category," he said.

"The real sizzle is the host of devices that transcend the now common standard," said Kevin Dede, an analyst at brokerage Jesup and Lamont. "I'm blown away. It went way beyond my wildest imagination."

"Samsung doesn't have just one tablet but four!" he said.

Among the more interesting models is the hybrid IdeaPad U1 from China's [Lenovo](#), which looks like a classic lightweight netbook when opened up.

But the 12-inch (30-centimeter) screen detaches from the keyboard and becomes an independent slate computer for watching video, reading or even writing with a virtual keyboard.

Microsoft's Brad Brooks said the arrival of new models, many of which run on the software giant's Windows 7 operating system, shows "the PC

business is back in a big way.

"This is all stuff that is exploding again," he said. "We are showing the diversity of the devices that are starting to come out."

Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer unveiled a prototype of a slate computer from Hewlett-Packard in his opening keynote speech at CES along with two others from other manufacturers.

"It's a beautiful little product," Ballmer said, adding that it was "perfect for reading, for surfing the Web and for taking entertainment on the go."

Ballmer said the HP device, which is not being displayed in Las Vegas, and others in what he called an "emerging category" of personal computers would be available later this year.

One of the other models on stage was from China's Pegatron, a slate which allows users to surf the Internet but also features classic Windows programs such as Office.

The other device was the Archos 9, which won praise from Forrester analyst J.P. Gownder, who said Microsoft was unveiling the products even ahead of their availability to get the jump on Apple.

"They need to showcase a lot of new ways that people can use it," he said.

While the slates have captured a lot of attention, many here are ready to be surprised by whatever Apple has up its sleeve.

"Every time they break into a new category it's usually with the help of content," said Dede, citing the success of the iPod music player and its ground-breaking iTunes online music store.

"We suspect that content relationships will be critical," agreed Gownder.

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