

# German tablet PC sets out to rival Apple's iPad (Update)

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The new 'WePad' tablet PC is photographed during a news conference in Berlin, Germany, Monday April 12, 2010. The German maker of a new tablet computer is setting out to rival Apple's iPad with the promise of even more sophisticated technology. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

(AP) -- The German maker of a new tablet PC is setting out to rival Apple's iPad with the promise of even more technology such as a bigger screen, a webcam and USB ports.

But the touchscreen WePad will rival Apple's latest gadget with even more technology such as a bigger screen, a webcam and USB ports, Neofonie GmbH's founder and managing director Helmut Hoffer von Ankershoffen told reporters on Monday in Berlin.

It is not, however, an "iPad killer" as it has been dubbed by some blogs

but an alternative to its bigger rival, Neofonie GmbH's founder and managing director Helmut Hoffer von Ankershoffen told reporters on Monday in Berlin.

Ankershoffen stressed the system's openness: Two USB ports allow users to connect all kinds of devices with the WePad, from external keyboards to data sticks.

People who want to put music on their WePad do not have to have any particular software, Ankershoffen said - a blow at Apple's devices that require particular Apple software like iTunes.

The WePad's basic version, which comes with Wi-Fi and 16-gigabyte storage, is set to cost euro449 (\$600), the larger 32-gigabyte version with a fast 3G modem is euro569.

Ankershoffen claimed that given its technological superiority and greater openness, "that's a bargain compared with the iPad."

The iPad - which hit stores in the U.S. less than a month ago - is on sale there starting at \$499 for the smallest version, coming with Wi-Fi and a 16 GB storage.

The WePad, with its 11.6-inch screen, is powered by an Intel chip and relies on a Linux software basis which is compatible with Google's Android and all Flash applications, Ankershoffen said.

When it hits stores starting late July, it will also boast a complete open source office package, he said.

Reporters could not test the device at the press conference.

Berlin-based Neofonie - a small company of some 180 employees -

claims it already has some 20,000 people interested in signing up for a pre-order, even though orders won't be formally accepted before April 27.

Ankershoffen declined to give a sales estimate. "Not thousands, not tens of thousands but many more will be sold before the end of the year," he said.

The WePad is to be assembled by a manufacturer in Asia - which Ankershoffen refused to name - that can ramp up production capacity according to demand, he said

Neofonie casts the WePad as helping the media industry find a way to market paid content and hopes to appeal to publishers, some of whom are disgruntled with Apple's pricing policy and restrictions.

The device would allow publishers to sell their content on its platform without monopolizing the customer relationship, as Apple's iTunes or Amazon's Kindle do, the company said.

Gruner + Jahr, one of Europe's largest magazine publishers, already has a partnership with Neofonie, offering the company's flagship magazine, Stern, on the platform.

"It will be the first magazine, but others will certainly follow," Stern's deputy chief Tobias Seikel said at the press conference.

Germany's biggest publisher, Berlin-based Axel Springer AG, is in talks with Neofonie, but no cooperation is planned yet, spokesman Christian Garrels said.

"We want to offer our company's brands on several platforms with a high range," Garrels told The Associated Press.

The company's flagship daily, Bild previously had trouble with its iPhone application as Apple censors sexually explicit content, such as the paper's daily nude photo.

Apple's iPad will go on sale in Germany at the end of April, according to the company's Web site. This would give the iPad roughly a three month lead on its German competitor.

Neofonie seems determined to face its big California rival: The company distributed tasty red apples boasting the WePad's logo at the press conference.

However, both companies have to prove that the touch screen device will not only amaze the tech-savvy early users, but will also appeal to mainstream consumers at a time when people have already a lot of Internet-connected gadgets - smart phones, laptops, e-book readers, set-top boxes and home broadband connections.

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