

iPad-mania as thousands queue for global roll-out

May 28 2010, by Harumi Ozawa



Rahul Koduri, who was first through the door, smiles as he holds up his new iPads at Apple's flagship store in Sydney. Thousands of fired up and sleep-deprived gadget fans mobbed shops in Australia and Japan as Apple's iPad, touted as a revolution in computer use and publishing, began its international launch.

Thousands of die-hard Apple fans mobbed shops worldwide on Friday as the iPad, called a revolution in personal computing by some and limited and overhyped by others, began its global launch.

Long queues of customers snaked outside Apple shops in Australia and Japan hours before the opening and similar huddled masses turned out at stores in six European countries, including Britain and France.

The iPad -- a flat, 10-inch (25-centimetre) black tablet -- also went on sale in Canada as part of a global roll-out that was pushed back by a month due to huge demand in the United States.

One million iPads were sold in 28 days in the United States after the product's debut in early April despite mixed reviews from consumers.

The product is the latest from Apple, which dethroned software giant Microsoft this week as the largest US technology company in terms of market value, to create a frenzy.

At Apple's flagship store in Paris, set in the prestigious mall beneath the Louvre museum, 24-year-old engineer Audrey Sobgou beamed as she walked away with one of the prized tablets.

Sobgou travelled 205 kilometres (127 miles) from her home town in Lille, northern France, and waited nearly two hours before stepping inside the busy Apple store.

"I'm not a victim of hype," she insisted. "I know Apple products and it's about the quality, the interface, how it's designed and what it can do. With elegance and style."

Hundreds of people queued outside the Paris Apple store hours before it opened at 8:00 am (0600 GMT).

In Britain, a few dozen enthusiasts waited outside the Apple store in central London at 3:00 am to get their hands on the iPad when it opened five hours later.

Staff escorted the first group of customers one by one up to buy their iPad after they opened the doors, whooping, chanting and cheering.

"I queued overnight for about 20 hours since midday yesterday but it was very, very worth it," Jake Lee, a 17-year-old student from Essex, told AFP, clutching his treasured iPad.

The iPad also went on sale in Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland and will be followed in July by a launch in Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Alejandro Barras, manager of the Apple store in downtown Madrid, said his iPad stock sold out one hour after opening.

Apple aficionados in Zurich camped out overnight in front of the store to buy the tablet and download some of the 5,000 available apps -- the name for the media applications that run on the device.

In Montreal, an 82-year-old man with a long white beard and a beret stood in line with about 100 people, some of whom arrived at the Apple store at 6:00 am.

"I'm not a fan of gadgets," Jean-Maurice Demers told AFP. "But I'm involved in several political committees and community groups and I'm tired of dragging around several kilograms (pounds) of files."

Prices in Japan and Australia for the basic 16GB iPad are comparable to US prices, although a significant markup by Apple in Britain and continental Europe has triggered grumbling.

In France, wifi models sell for between 499 and 699 euros (620 and 969 dollars) with the 3G models going for between 599 and 799 euros.

The multi-functional device is tipped by some pundits to revitalise media and publishing, with many major newspapers and broadcasters launching applications.

Several French publishers, including world number two Hachette Livre, announced Friday that they had reached a deal with Apple to make their titles available through the company's iBookstore.

Newspaper mogul Rupert Murdoch has said the iPad has the potential to save the newspaper industry, but in France that enthusiasm is not shared by President Nicolas Sarkozy's minister for the digital economy.

Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet last month dismissed the "marketing frenzy" surrounding the iPad launch and declared that it was "a bit heavy" compared to the Archos tablet, made in France.

As well as the five other European countries, California-based Apple plans to bring the iPad to Hong Kong, Mexico, New Zealand and Singapore in July.

Apple has declined to reveal the number of pre-orders received for the iPad internationally, but Capital Markets analyst Mike Abramsky put it at around 600,000.

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