

iPad imitators hope to bite into Apple's lead

June 6 2010, by Adrian Addison



Staff members prepare for the Australian launch of the iPad inside Apple's flagship store in Sydney on May 28, 2010. When Apple announced the arrival of the iPad, it said it would create and define a brand-new sector in the market for computer devices, somewhere between the smartphone and the notebook laptop.

When Apple announced the arrival of the iPad, it said it would create and define a brand-new sector in the market for computer devices, somewhere between the smartphone and the notebook laptop.

Two months and over two million iPad sales later a string of Asian manufacturers have shown they agree -- by unveiling their own tablets which they hope will take a bite out of Apple's lead.

Over a dozen new iPad-style gadgets have now entered the fray, and more are sure to follow.

At the Computex computer trade fair in Taipei this week, beautiful

models posed with shiny black slabs of clever glass -- most of which looked pretty much the same as Apple's iPad.

First out of the box was the catchily named ASUS Eee Pad 101TC. It's similar in size to the iPad, runs on Windows and will sell for 399 US dollars -- around 100 US dollars less than the US price of a basic iPad.

The MSI WindPad 100, which at 499 US dollars costs the same as the iPad, also runs on Windows and boasts a webcam -- which is conspicuously absent in the first iPad models. LG's new UX10 device also has a webcam.

Many newcomers will also use Adobe's Flash video technology, another perceived flaw in the iPad. Apple refused to allow Flash on its new gadget.

Taiwan-based chipmaker VIA believes the way forward in the tablet market is to go smaller and cheaper.

Its VIA Slate prototype has a seven-inch screen, runs on an old version of Google's Android operating system and will retail for between 100 and 200 US dollars. Several other tablet devices will also run on Android.

Right at the bottom of the market is the iPed -- which seems to be a direct copy of the iPad, even down to the packaging. It is on sale only over the Taiwan Strait in China, selling in a Shenzhen computer mall for 105 dollars.

Nancy Liu of Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute told AFP that companies launching their tablets at Computex wanted to prove "they have the capability to catch the trend set by Apple."

"I don't think the followers are capable of dethroning Apple's leadership at least in the short term," Liu said.

But it's not the gadget, it's what you can do with it that counts. And this is where Apple is also streets ahead of the pack. As Jenny Lai, a Taipei-based technology analyst for brokerage firm CLSA, says: content is king.

"Content remains a critical part of the success story for [iPad](#)," she said.

"Currently, there are seven major app stores including new entrants Lenovo and Asustek.

"What's more important for Apple and existing vendors is building up a more user-friendly interface and more choices for online-store users."

Apple has more than 100,000 downloadable applications compared to the 500 it offered for the iPhone when it first opened online less than two years ago. [Google](#) has more than 30,000 apps available for [Android](#).

Lenovo's application download store for Lephone and other products has around 250 applications. Asustek say it is cooperating with Intel and Microsoft to launch an app store in 2010 on a Windows platform.

And it's not just computer makers watching each other's reaction to this "new" market -- the struggling old school publishing industries are also looking on in hope.

The tablet computer plus its slightly less glamorous cousin, the e-reader, have been hailed as the saviour of the book and newspaper industries.

Sony, which has an e-reader but does not have a tablet computer on the market -- yet -- predicts big changes for the publishing industry on the back of the launch of all these devices.

Steve Haber, president of Sony's digital reading business division, believes the printed book will soon be overtaken by its electronic sister, the same pattern seen with music and photography.

"Within five years there will be more digital content sold than physical content," he told the Daily Telegraph newspaper.

"I have multiple meetings with publishers and tell them paradigm shifts happen. You can say fortunately or unfortunately you haven't had a paradigm shift in, what, hundreds of years.

"We in the consumer electronics area have a paradigm shift every year or two."

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