

Sharp to join e-reader business war

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A man looks at e-book products on display at a booth of Taiwan's Green Book Inc, during the five-day Computex Taipei in June. Sharp said it would launch an e-reader this year able to handle text as well as video and audio content, in a bid to challenge Apple and other rivals in the lucrative market.

Sharp said Tuesday it would launch an e-reader this year able to handle text as well as video and audio content, in a bid to challenge Apple and other rivals in the lucrative market.

The Japanese electronics giant said it had updated its e-book format with the "next-generation XMDF" platform, an advanced multimedia version of the XMDF format for text and still images that it launched in 2001.

"The next-generation XMDF enables easy viewing of digital content including video and audio and allows automatic adjustment of the layout to match and meet publishers' needs," Sharp said in a statement.

Sharp plans to begin the service and sell two types of e-readers, which resemble Apple's [iPhone](#) and [iPad](#), by the end of the year in Japan and will then also export the gadgets.

"Now there is a lot of attention on the e-publishing business," Masami Obatake, a senior Sharp official, told a news conference. "Launching it by the end of this year will be good timing."

Asked if Sharp can cope with the competition, Obatake said: "Since we have a new system, I think we will be able to compete sufficiently."

Sharp said it had already reached basic accords with major Japanese publishers and newspaper companies on content, adding it would be open to further collaboration to establish an e-book market.

In late May, Sony announced a similar plan jointly with telecoms operator KDDI, the Asahi Shimbun newspaper company and the Toppan printing company, with each company taking a 25 percent stake.

That came just a day before the launch of the iPad in Japan and other countries outside the United States, where print media face a steady decline in advertising and have turned to e-readers as a way to win new revenue.

The Japanese [electronic book](#) market is now estimated to be worth 46 billion yen (about 500 million dollars), with most titles distributed via [mobile telephones](#) and conventional computers.

Japanese news media had until this year taken a wait-and-see approach to the devices, contrary to US peers.

Newspaper circulation has held up better than in the United States, having fallen only six percent between 1999 and 2009 to 50.3 million

sales daily, the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association said. However, magazine circulation in Japan has slumped by a third over the decade.

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