

Apple eye Chinese game developer Handseeing

August 6 2010



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"We are indeed in talks," Handseeing's deputy general manager Tian Bo told AFP, adding discussions had been going on for "a certain period of time".

When asked when the negotiations could end, he said he hoped some kind of "incremental" announcement would come in September.

In response to a question about speculation that the US company could pay 150 million dollars for Handseeing, Tian refused to speculate, only

saying jokingly: "The higher, the better."

Tian told the state Xinhua news agency that if successful, it would be Apple's first acquisition in China, but added that other foreign firms had shown interest in investing in Handseeing.

Calls to an Apple spokeswoman in Beijing went unanswered.

The news comes as Apple, based in Cupertino, California, makes a concerted push into China, a huge market where it has struggled to gain a major foothold, with the opening last month of a dazzling flagship store in Shanghai.

The company, which opened its first China store in Beijing in 2008, says it plans to open 25 additional stores on the mainland by the end of next year.

Apple's [iPhone](#) has been legally available only via [China Unicom](#), the country's second-largest mobile operator, but sales were initially sluggish as the price was much higher than for those sold on the grey market.

Unicom has since offered lower-priced package deals.

Another reason has been that previous rules required [Apple](#) to disable the Wi-fi function in phones sold on the mainland, making them less attractive to increasingly Internet-savvy consumers in China.

But Unicom said Friday that it would put Wi-fi-equipped iPhones on the market in China -- the world's largest [mobile market](#) with more than 800 million users -- next week.

Apple's net profit rose 78 percent to 3.25 billion dollars in the fiscal third quarter which ended on June 26, and revenue increased to a record

15.7 billion dollars, from 9.73 billion dollars a year ago.

Those figures were in part due to strong sales of the newly released iPad tablet computer, which is not yet officially available in China.

China Mobile, the world's biggest mobile operator, said in May that it was interested in selling the iPad.

Handseeing, founded in 2005, is based in the southwestern Chinese city of Chengdu. It specialises in online gaming applications.

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Citation: Apple eye Chinese game developer Handseeing (2010, August 6) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-08-apple-eye-chinese-game-handseeing.html>

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