

# Crowds turn out for iPad's China launch

September 17 2010, by Allison Jackson

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Apple customer Han Ziwen shouts in joy as he holds his iPads outside Apple's flagship store in Beijing, after queuing for 60 hours to be one of the first to buy them, on September 17. Apple officially launches its iPad in China -- a solid business move, analysts say, even though Chinese customers have been able to buy the tablet computer on the grey market for months.

Hundreds queued up Friday for the first official iPads sold in China, the world's biggest Internet market, after months of grey-market action among avid buyers unwilling to wait for the Apple tablet.

Apple stores in Beijing and Shanghai as well as authorised retailers around the country began offering the Wi-Fi model of the touchscreen device, millions of which have already been sold in the United States and a dozen other nations.

Analysts predicted strong demand for the [iPad](#) despite a paucity of

Chinese content and the country's huge unofficial market for [Apple](#) products, which are slipped in from Hong Kong, Singapore and the United States and resold.

At the US tech giant's Beijing store, Han Ziwen, 35, said he had camped out for 60 hours to ensure he was first in line when the flagship outlet's doors opened at 8:00 am.

Wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with "I buy iPad No. 1", the bookstore owner held two of the sleek computers above his head in a victory sign as hundreds of people standing in the rain cheered.

Han bought a 16-gigabyte and 32-gigabyte version of the iPad costing a total of 8,776 yuan (1,305 dollars) -- more than the vast majority of Chinese earn in a month. But he said: "For me, they are not expensive."

In Shanghai, up to 200 people queued outside the underground [Apple store](#) which opened in July. Apple plans to have 25 new stores in [China](#) by the end of next year.



Graphic fact file on Apple's iPad, which is officially launched in China on Friday

The first Shanghai buyer, Ma Ya, a 46-year-old art dealer, said he had been waiting since 1:00 pm on Thursday for his chance to snare a new iPad -- his second.

"I already had a 32GB iPad bought from Japan. I may give the old one to an employee," Ma told AFP.

The 16-gigabyte, Wi-Fi version of the iPad costs 3,988 yuan (593 dollars), compared to 499 dollars in the United States. The most expensive 64GB version is priced at 5,588 yuan.

Customers were limited to two iPads per person.

Apple has not said when the 3G-equipped version will go on sale in

China, which is home to at least 420 million Internet users and already has many cheaper iPad "clones" on offer from domestic manufacturers.

China Unicom, the country's second-largest mobile operator which already offers the iPhone, says it is interested in joining forces for the iPad.

The company will start accepting reservations for iPhone 4 service contracts from Friday, indicating it could soon start offering the latest version of the smartphone, Dow Jones Newswires said.

"There's a growing number of Apple fans in China who have proven their interest in the iPod and the iPhone and based on that demand, the iPad will do well here," said Ted Dean, managing director of technology consultancy BDA China.

China has a booming grey market for Apple products to satisfy pent-up demand. The iPhone only officially went on sale in China last October -- more than two years after its US launch.



The first customer to buy an iPad celebrates outside the Apple store in Shanghai,

on September 17. Apple officially launched its iPad in China -- a sure-fire winner, analysts say, even though Chinese customers have been able to buy the tablet computer on the grey market for months.

The iPad -- which made its US debut in April -- allows users to watch video, listen to music, play games, surf the Web or read electronic books.

However, observers say one hurdle to the iPad is that access to content is difficult for many Chinese users. Apple's App Store is not available in Chinese and users must have dual-currency credit cards to make purchases.

But Shaun Rein, managing director of China Market Research Group in Shanghai, said social kudos, not applications, are what most Chinese want from their iPad.

"People are buying this more for style and fashion. It just looks cool," Rein told AFP.

Charles Zhou, 30, an online transaction operator for a fund management company in Shanghai, said he got up early Friday to buy the device.

"I saw my boss using one and it looks pretty good," he said.

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Citation: Crowds turn out for iPad's China launch (2010, September 17) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-09-crowds-ipad-china.html>

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