

Japan's Sharp to start e-book business in December

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A model displays a "Galapagos" electronic tablet from Japanese electronics maker Sharp in Tokyo. The new e-book player, based on Google's Android OS, can display rich content such as video images. Sharp will start the e-book service from December.

Japan's Sharp Corp. said Monday it will launch an e-bookstore service in December with two new "Galapagos" tablet readers, with the service set to expand to movies, games and music early next year.

Sharp's new brand represents a shift for the company from conventional one-off sales of stand-alone products to devices that will continue to "evolve" through periodic software updates, it said.

It will offer a mobile device with a 5.5-inch LCD screen and a trackball for one-handed operation, as well as a device aimed at the home user with a 10.8-inch screen on which magazines can be read across a two-page spread.

In doing so, Sharp will enter an increasingly crowded market looking to exploit the popularity of gadgets such as Apple's [iPad](#) and the iBooks store and Amazon's Kindle range of e-readers.

Rival Sony has announced a similar e-book plan jointly with telecoms operator KDDI, the Asahi Shimbun newspaper company and the Toppan printing company. Top mobile carrier [NTT DoCoMo](#) has teamed up with Dai Nippon Printing.

Sharp said its devices will automatically download fee-based updates of different newspapers and magazines and will serve as a "concierge" for users by recommending books they might like using their purchasing history.

The company said it had used the name "Galapagos" in reference to the islands that inspired 19th Century British biologist Charles Darwin to formulate his theory of evolution.

Sharp said it aimed to launch the system in the United States and Europe "as soon as possible."

"We want to launch the second batch (of services) around spring, expanding to the distribution of videos, movies, games and music," said senior company official Keiko Okada.

Okada added that the service menu would be broadened to include e-commerce and advertising services. Officials also said digital textbooks for use in schools is "a very promising market in developing countries".

Sharp will announce the price of the machines and other details later this year. The company is targeting one million subscriptions in Japan.

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