

# Sony and Sharp launch e-readers, tablets in Japan

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A Sony employee displays 'Reader' electronic books in Tokyo on December 10. Sony and Sharp upped the rivalry stakes in the heated e-reader and tablet market with the head-to-head launch on Friday of their latest devices in Japan, along with tens of thousands of e-book titles.

Sony and Sharp upped the rivalry stakes in the heated e-reader and tablet market with the head-to-head launch on Friday of their latest devices in Japan, along with tens of thousands of e-book titles.

Sony, battling Amazon and Apple in the [electronic book reader](#) race, on Friday launched its Reader range in Japan along with a dedicated virtual library, after launching in 13 other countries including the US.

The move marked a return to Japan for the electronic giant's [e-reader](#)

business since it left in 2007 after seeing low demand at a time when Japanese consumers were focused on mobile phone books.

Sharp meanwhile launched its multifunctional Galapagos tablet computer in a bid to rival Apple's iPad. The device allows users to read [e-books](#), as well as major newspapers and popular magazines, delivered at designated times.

The name is a pun on the term "Galapagos Syndrome" -- in reference to the isolated islands that helped Charles Darwin form his theory of evolution -- and its association with Japan's tendency to be less influenced by global trends.

Earlier Japanese mobile phones made by the likes of Sharp or Fujitsu were years ahead of their time in terms of offering Internet access, and provided cameras and mobile payment options before others as well as live television.

But smartphones such as Samsung's Galaxy S and Apple's [iPhone](#) are providing stronger competition with third generation handsets sold in Europe or the United States now working in Japan.

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 software updates, it says.

Sharp will offer about 24,000 e-book titles for the Galapagos, while Sony has around 20,000 titles for the Reader.

While Sharp is taking orders for the Galapagos only via mail or the Internet, Sony is selling its Reader at retail shops.

Sharp will initially deliver only electronic books, magazines and

newspapers for the Galapagos and start online music, video and game services next spring.

Sony said it is also considering distributing newspapers, comics and magazines. But it has made no decision on when they would be launched.

The success of Apple's iPad has sent electronics makers scrambling to gain a slice of the growing tablet computer and e-reader market.

The Galapagos, equipped with wireless telecom functions, comes in two models -- a 10.8-inch screen priced at 54,800 yen (655 dollars) and a 5.5-inch screen for 39,800 yen.

Unlike the colour Galapagos or iPad, the Sony Reader uses black-and-white e-ink technology.

Sony has cut the size and weight of its e-readers while expanding the use of touch technology to all models -- allowing users to turn pages with a swipe of the finger like the iPad.

The Reader Pocket Edition and Reader Touch Edition will initially be available in about 300 Japanese stores, selling for 20,000 yen and 25,000 yen.

The group hopes to sell 300,000 e-readers in Japan in the first year and expects a 50 percent market share by 2012, the company said.

It also recently created a joint venture with Japan's second-largest telecom operator KDDI, the Asahi newspaper group and printing technology firm Toppan to offer services for a variety of devices.

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