

Asus bets on variety of forms to win tablet fans

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This product image provided by AsusTek Computer Inc. shows the Eee Pad Slider, a tablet computer with a keyboard that slides out of its left side. (AP Photo/AsusTek Computer Inc.) NO SALES

(AP) -- Taiwan's AsusTek Computer Inc. plans to start selling an array of tablet computers - including hybrids that sit somewhere between a laptop and a tablet - with the hope that variety is the best weapon against Apple Inc.'s iPad and other similar gadgets.

Asus chairman Jonney Shih unveiled the new devices Tuesday ahead of the International [Consumer Electronics Show](#) in Las Vegas. They included the Eee Pad Transformer, which is a laptop that splits in two to function as a tablet, and the Eee Pad Slider, a tablet with a keyboard that

slides out of its left side.

"We admire companies like Apple that offer great innovation, but they provide very limited choices for the customers," Shih said. "Different kinds of customers have different kinds of needs, and the best way to better serve them is to provide choice."

Asus, which essentially created the market for low-price netbooks with the 2007 launch of the Eee PC line, will need this strategy to pan out if consumers gravitate toward [tablets](#) as quickly as analysts expect. And Asus won't just be contending with the iPad: The company is just one of many big names expected to unveil tablets at CES.

Analysts believe the [iPad](#) will still account for the bulk of the 55 million tablets that Gartner Inc. expects will be shipped this year, but there's still room for rivals to vie for sales of the remaining 10 million to 15 million devices.

Asus hopes the Transformer and its other tablets will be among the winners. When using a full-sized keyboard docking station, the Transformer appears to be a black laptop, but once opened its screen detaches by sliding out of a slot on the keyboard's edge. The device's touch-screen will measure 10.1 inches diagonally and is half an inch thick.

Shih said the Transformer will run the upcoming Honeycomb version of [Google](#) Inc.'s [Android](#) software, which will be more geared toward tablets than the current version for smart phones. It will get up to 16 hours of [battery life](#) and include an Nvidia Tegra 2 dual-core processor. The Transformer is set to begin selling in April for \$399 to \$699, depending on its configuration. Asus has not said how much memory it will include.

The Slider will have the same hardware features as the Transformer - including the same processor, 10.1-inch screen, and Android operating software - but its keyboard won't be detachable. The Slider, which will be 0.7 inches thick, is scheduled to be sold starting in May for between \$499 and \$799. Shih did not say how much built-in memory it will have.

Shih presented two other tablets as well: The Eee Slate, which appeared to be the same tablet he showed at the Computex Show in Taiwan last year, and the Eee Pad MeMO.

The Slate, which will run Microsoft Corp.'s regular PC operating software, Windows 7, will come with a 12.1-inch touch screen that has 1280-by-800-pixel resolution. It will include a 34-gigabyte or 64-gigabyte hard drive and a more powerful Intel Core i5 dual-core processor.

The MeMO will have a 7-inch touch screen and a Qualcomm Snapdragon processor. It will run the Honeycomb version of Android.

The Slate will cost \$999 to \$1,099 and be available this month, while the MeMO is set to be sold for \$499 to \$699 in June.

All the upcoming tablets will include the ability to play high-definition video. All but the Slate will have cameras on the front and back for taking photos and video chatting; the Slate will have one camera on its face.

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