

Tablet-mania at Las Vegas gadget show

January 7 2011, by Chris Lefkow



Visitors browse gadgets at Opening Day of the 2011 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on January 6. Dozens of companies -- from the best known brands in the industry to total unknowns -- are displaying touchscreen tablet computers or prototypes in a bid to take a bite out of a fast-growing market dominated so far by Apple.

Electronic book readers were all the rage at last year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas as companies raced to come out with rivals to Amazon's popular Kindle. This year they're all chasing the iPad. CES, which opened on Thursday, has been hit by tablet-mania.

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Shawn Dubravac, chief economist for the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA), the CES organizer, estimated that more than 100

firms from around the world would be making tablet announcements at this year's show.

But like many of last year's [e-reader](#) hopefuls, quite a few of the devices may never see the light of day, he said.

At last year's CES, organizers for the first time set aside a special section on the sprawling Las Vegas Convention Center just for e-readers.

Not this year. Tablet sales are forecast to eclipse those of e-readers in 2011 despite the head start enjoyed by the Kindle and other e-reader makers such as Sony and US bookstore chain Barnes & Noble.

According to the CEA, tablet computer sales will double this year to 30 million units while e-reader sales will total nearly 20 million units.

Technology research firm Gartner forecasts even higher tablet computer shipments in 2011 -- more than 55 million units worldwide.



The Blackberry PlayBook tablet is on display at the 2011 International Consumer Electronics Show January 6 in Las Vegas. Dozens of companies -- from the best known brands in the industry to total unknowns -- are displaying touchscreen tablet computers or prototypes in a bid to take a bite out of a fast-growing market dominated so far by Apple.

One explanation provided by analysts for the explosive growth of tablets over e-readers is the Web browsing and multi-media entertainment experience they offer in addition to serving as digital book readers.

Amazon, for its part, touts the Kindle as the better device for "serious readers" and announced last month that its latest version had become the Seattle-based company's best-selling product ever.

While the Kindle remains the market leader on the e-reader front, the iPad, which went on sale in April, is the device which rivals quite literally have in their sights.

Many of the tablets unveiled at CES bear a strong physical resemblance to the iPad, although some offer screens that are half the size of the iPad's 9.7-inch (24.6-centimeter display).

Most of the new entrants also boast front- and rear-facing cameras, a feature not included on the first generation of the iPad, and a USB port.

Where they differ more is on the inside, with most of the new [tablet computer](#) entrants opting to power their machines on Google's free Android software and a few with Microsoft's Windows operating system.

US telecom maker Motorola Mobility announced Wednesday that it will be the first to market with a tablet, [the Xoom](#), featuring Android 3.0, or Honeycomb, software designed specifically for tablets by Google.

Motorola Mobility chief executive Sanjay Jha said the Xoom will go on sale by the end of March and he expects it to be "the most competitive product in the marketplace."

For the moment, Apple's stiffest competition has come from Samsung's

Galaxy Tab, which hit stores in November and sold 1.5 million units during its first quarter of availability, according to the South Korean company.



Panasonic's prototype Viera Tablet that runs on Android 2.2 is displayed at the 2011 International Consumer Electronics Show on January 6 in Las Vegas. Dozens of companies -- from the best known brands in the industry to total unknowns -- are displaying touchscreen tablet computers or prototypes in a bid to take a bite out of a fast-growing market dominated so far by Apple.

Apple has not yet released sales figures for its latest quarter but it sold eight million iPads between April and September and it is expected to reap the lion's share of the estimated 30 million to 55 million tablets sold this year.

In a bid to gain an edge, Motorola Mobility's Jha and other tablet makers are playing up the ability of their devices to run Adobe Flash video software, which is widely used on websites but is banned from the iPad.

Bill Monroe, a spokesman for Toshiba, which plans to market an Android-based tablet this spring, said the upcoming device from the Japanese company will not be as "limited."

"One of the great things is being able to run those Flash-based applications that are out there," Monroe said as he stood next to a prototype of the unnamed Toshiba tablet mounted in a rotating glass case.

Motorola Mobility and US computer giant Dell, which unveiled a seven-inch (17.8 centimeter) tablet, the Streak 7, here on Thursday, are also touting the faster 4G networks of their wireless partners compared with the 3G speeds of Apple's partner AT&T.

Taiwan's Asus is seeking to differentiate its tablets from the iPad with hybrid models that marry a touchscreen tablet with a laptop by including a slide-out keyboard like on some mobile phones.

Other tablets, like the Qooq from France's Unowhy, are seeking to carve out a niche.

Described as the "cookbook of the 21st century" or "Kindle for the kitchen," the Qooq offers recipes, tutorials and, its inventor Jean-Yves Hepp said, "it is able to withstand the assaults of butter, flour, milk and honey."

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