

# The i(Pad)s of March: Apple plans tablet event

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(AP) -- March Madness could take on a whole new meaning if Apple gives the world another iPad next week.

Apple Inc. is expected to unveil the second generation of its wildly successful media tablet, widening its head start against competitors just starting to sell their first tablet computers.

The Cupertino, Calif.-based company e-mailed invitations to a media event in San Francisco Wednesday that show a calendar page with the corner peeling away to reveal an iPad underneath. The large "2" on the calendar page denotes the event's March 2 date, but is also a hint that Apple is about to announce the follow-up to the original iPad.

The iPad, about the size of a large book, has been likened to an overgrown iPhone or iPod Touch, as it is powered by similar software and can run the same applications, or "apps."

But it has a bigger screen that makes reading e-mails, surfing the Web and watching movies easier on the eyes. With a starting price of \$499, it's less expensive than many computers and, at 1.5 pounds, it also weighs less. Unlike small, inexpensive laptops such as netbooks, the iPad turns on instantly, so people don't have to wait through a sluggish boot-up. And the iPad also lasts about 10 hours unplugged, making it ideal for travelers and other people on the go.

Apple sold more than 15 million iPads in its first nine months on sale,

including 7.3 million to holiday shoppers during the October-December quarter - about a million more for the quarter than analysts were expecting.

Since the iPad's launch, other consumer electronics makers have been scrambling to develop tablets of their own. For example, Samsung Electronics Co. began selling the Galaxy Tab last year, and Motorola Mobility Inc.'s Xoom tablet goes on sale this week. Many of these new tablets run Google Inc.'s Android software.

The iPad is the first tablet computer to win over mainstream consumers. A decade earlier, PC makers were selling tablets that ran Windows, the same operating systems found on most full-fledged PCs. While some businesses bought them, they never sold well among consumers. These tablets were heavier and had shorter battery lives. They were also more difficult to use as touch-screen devices, as Windows was meant to be used with a mouse and keyboard. Apple's iPad software, meanwhile, was designed from the start to be touched.

As usual, Apple has not said anything about the highly anticipated next version of the iPad, leaving rumors to swirl unchecked online. Some bloggers have speculated that the new iPad will have a front-facing camera, which would allow people to hold video chats using services such as Skype. If that were the case, its design would more closely match the iPhone 4, which went on sale last June with a front-facing camera and Apple's own video chatting software, called FaceTime.

Others have speculated that the new iPad will be thinner and lighter than the original, and will come with a bigger built-in speaker.

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