

Apple fans line up to buy first batch of iPad 2s

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Customer Josh Lehman, is the first in line waiting to purchase an Apple iPad 2 scheduled to go on sale later today, in Philadelphia, Friday, March 11, 2011. Apple Inc.'s updated version of its iPad tablet computer will be available in stores Friday afternoon but those who can't wait to say they own the gadget were able to beat the crowds by ordering one online before the sun rises.(AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

(AP) -- The updated version of Apple Inc.'s iPad tablet computer went on sale Friday afternoon, and was greeted by the now-familiar lines of buyers outside Apple stores.

The Cupertino company opened online sales of the [iPad 2](#) at 4 a.m. Eastern time, well before they became available in East Coast stores at 5 p.m. They were set to go on sale nationwide at the same hour, local time.

[Apple](#) fans, as usual, were eager to get their hands on the device as they waited at the company's Apple's Fifth Avenue store in New York. The line of customers, including some who traveled from Japan and Russia, snaked through the street-level plaza above the subterranean store while bystanders gawked at the crowd.

Employees cheered from inside the store as iPad buyers entered. Alex Shumilov, a customer who traveled from Moscow to snag two iPads, emerged first, beaming while holding one tablet in each hand. The trendy device won't go on sale outside the U.S. for another two weeks.

When the original version of the iPad debuted 11 months ago, Apple said it sold more than 300,000 in the first day. It ended up selling more than 15 million in the first nine months, including 7.3 million to holiday shoppers in the October-December quarter.

The new iPad model comes with several improvements over the original version but the same price tag - \$499 to \$829, depending on storage space and whether they can connect to the Internet over a [cellular network](#). Analysts believe the improvement would make it more difficult for rivals to break Apple's hold on the emerging market for tablet computers.

The iPad 2 looks much like the first iPad, only with a sleeker, lighter body and a curved back. Among changes is the inclusion of cameras for [videoconferencing](#), one on the front and one on the back.

With the original iPad, Apple proved there is a large market for a tablet that's less than a laptop and more than a smart phone, yet performs many of the same tasks. Competitors including Dell Inc. and Samsung Electronics Co. have been trying to lure consumers with smaller tablets, without much success. In February, Motorola Mobility Inc.'s Xoom went on sale with a new version of Google Inc.'s Android software designed

especially for tablets.

Underscoring the importance of the iPad to the world's most valuable technology company, Apple CEO Steve Jobs emerged from a medical leave earlier this month to unveil the new version to bloggers and Apple enthusiasts. Jobs, 56, announced in January that he would take his third leave of absence in seven years to focus on his health. During that time, he has survived a rare but curable form of pancreatic cancer and undergone a liver transplant.

After its U.S. launch Friday, the [iPad](#) 2 goes on sale March 25 in 26 other markets, including Mexico, New Zealand, Spain and other European countries.

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