

India's Bharti unveils \$220 tablet challenger to iPad

August 18 2011, by Penny MacRae

The logo for Bharti Enterprises, featuring the word "bharti" in a lowercase, bold, sans-serif font. The letter 'h' is highlighted in yellow.

India's communications giant Bharti Enterprises said on Thursday it had launched a \$220 tablet computer as a domestic rival to Apple's iPad.

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Bharti's Beetel Magiq tablet is the latest entry as the so-called "tablet war" heats up in the nascent market where manufacturers are seeking to tap predicted strong demand in the country of 1.2 billion people.

Beetel Teletech, the phone-equipment arm of Bharti Enterprises, whose stable also includes Bharti Airtel, India's top mobile phone firm by users, hailed the 9,999 rupee (\$220) seven-inch (18-centimetre) tablet a "ground-breaking product".

"Our tablet is about affordability," Beetel Teletech chief Vinod Sawhny said in an emailed statement. It offers high-end features not previously "within the reach of the majority of Indian customers," he added.

The Magiq tablet uses Google's Android 2.2 software, has an 8 GB memory expandable to 16 GB, 3G and WiFi, long battery life, a radio and front-and-rear two-megapixel camera.

The device's launch came a week after India's second-biggest mobile company, Reliance Communications, announced a \$290 7-inch Android tablet.

Other Indian companies have also announced tablets that significantly undercut the prices of Apple's iPad and Samsung Galaxy Tab and other big-name competitors.

Apple's iPad 2 in India starts at around \$499 while Research In Motion sells its seven-inch PlayBook in India for over \$600. Samsung has announced a 10.1-inch tablet for around \$800 and an 8.9-inch tablet for \$750 in India.

In price-conscious India, the domestic handset vendors with their cheaper products have grabbed around 18 percent of total domestic handset sales, up from a less than one percent share in 2008, according to industry data.

They have dealt a heavy blow to global players in India such as Nokia whose market share in the country has slumped.

The tablet makers are also hoping customers will leapfrog to cheaper tablets, avoiding costlier personal computers, as they did when they bought mobile phones instead of waiting for land line phones.

But analysts say Indian tablet makers face an uphill battle to attract buyers.

Even though India is the fastest-growing mobile phone market, it has only around 71 million Internet users, according to the Internet and Mobile Association of India and market researcher IMRB.

"Tablets are not a priority for most Indian consumers who have limited pockets and probably prefer to spend on an air conditioner or some other consumer goods item," said Vishal Tripathi, principal research analyst at global consultancy Gartner.

"Until tablets become a priority device, they're not going to create a huge impact."

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