

Apple fans snap up new iPad in muted launch

March 16 2012, by Nathalie Auriol

The new iPad went on sale on Friday with Apple fans lining up from Sydney to San Francisco to snap up the latest model of the hot-selling tablet computer.

Buyers in Asia, Europe and the United States praised the eye-poppingly sharp display on the new iPad but a device which is otherwise short on new technology failed to bring out the crowds seen at previous Apple product launches.

A queue of about 300 people wrapped around a corner of the Apple store in downtown San Francisco while close to 1,000 people lined up outside Apple's futuristic flagship location in Manhattan.

Local community college welding instructor Scott Miner staked out the prime first spot outside the San Francisco store, camping out for nearly 24 hours in a cold drizzle.

Asked why, Miner said: "Because I blew it and didn't order online."

Apple's online shop in the United States quickly sold out of iPads for delivery on Friday and began telling buyers they will have to wait several weeks for one.

Anticipated strong demand for the iPad sent Apple shares briefly over \$600 on Thursday. They were up 0.19 percent at \$585.75 in mid-afternoon trading Friday on Wall Street.

The queue in San Francisco lacked the numbers and festive atmosphere of past Apple launches in part because the company has begun to allow new products to be sold at chain outlets such as Best Buy in addition to Apple stores.

Five protesters showed up with a banner and petition calling on Apple to improve the conditions for workers in China who make its products.

"The 255,000 people who signed this petition don't just care about great design and awesome products. They care whether there is blood in those products and about the human cost," said William Winters.

The first person to purchase an iPad in New York was Eric Ladd, 38. Ladd flew to New York from Brazil and waited in line for 30 hours but said it was worth it.

"People in Brazil are going to wait three or four months for it," he said.

Among the iPad buyers camping overnight outside a Los Angeles store was Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, who has made it a tradition to join crowds waiting to purchase the latest innovation from Apple.

While fans waited patiently outside US stores for new iPads, a Florida couple was arrested for allegedly trying to steal them from a Best Buy.

Detective Geoffrey Fahringer told the Orlando Sentinel that Jasmin Roman, 24, who works at the Best Buy, and her boyfriend, Juan Carlos Ortiz Valez, 26, who was fired from the store, planned to hold up the store at gunpoint.

"They watched too many movies," Fahringer said after deputies confiscated two handguns, eight handcuffs, chains, a lock, masks, gloves, binoculars, mace and a knife from the couple.

The new iPad is being released in Australia, the United States, France, Canada, Germany, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland, Britain and Hong Kong on Friday and will go on sale in another two dozen countries on March 23.

The latest version has a more powerful processor and a screen resolution called retina display which Apple says is the sharpest ever on a mobile device.

Despite the anticipation, the excitement surrounding earlier releases was largely absent this time, with the crush seen in Hong Kong for the iPhone 4S reduced to a fraction and Tokyo's long queue all but gone by mid-morning.

Australia was the first place to get the new device -- for which Apple has abandoned its numbering system, calling it the "new iPad" instead of "iPad 3."

Several hundred people gathered outside the company's Sydney store but the hype was not on the scale seen for the iPad 2, when people began camping out up to four days before.

In London, several hundred people waited outside Europe's largest Apple store but the queue was also smaller than for previous launches.

Around 50 people queued in Tokyo, including Ryo Takahashi, 25, arrived at the store wearing a headband saying "I am an iPad samurai!"

At the plush Hong Kong Apple store, which has seen chaotic scenes for previous product releases, around 200 buyers queued outside.

The launch of the iPhone 4S in November saw more than 1,500 fans camping outside the Hong Kong store for days.

Pranabesh Nath, research manager with Frost and Sullivan consultancy, said Apple could expect to sell up to 70 million new iPads.

While the almost cult-like status of Apple shows no signs of waning among consumers, Nath suggested that with Apple co-founder Steve Jobs now dead the momentum could start to taper off.

Jobs, the mind behind the iPod, iPad and iPhone, died in October after battling pancreatic cancer.

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