

Heavy demand expected as iPad goes on sale Friday

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In this March 7, 2012 file photo, Apple CEO Tim Cook clasp his hands during an new iPad announcement during an Apple event in San Francisco. Apple's latest iPad goes on sale at 8 a.m. Friday, March 16, and looks set to be greeted by heavy demand and the customary lines of buyers. The new model comes with a much sharper screen, cramming four times as many pixels into the same space. It also boasts an improved camera, similar to that of the iPhone 4S. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma, File)

Let the wild rumpus start. The customary storefront crowds are expected to gather as Apple's latest iPad goes on sale Friday. Long lines are likely even though customers could have ordered the new tablet computer ahead of time for first-day home delivery.

The third version of Apple's [iPad](#) will be available in the U.S. and nine other countries beginning at 8 a.m. local time. The new model comes

with a faster processor and a much sharper screen. It also boasts an improved camera, similar to that of the latest [iPhone](#).

For many customers, visiting a store in person - instead of having one shipped - offers consumers a chance to mingle with die-hard [Apple](#) fans.

Two years after the debut of the first iPad, the device's launch has become the second-biggest "gadget event" of the year, after the annual iPhone release. A year ago, thousands lined up outside the flagship [Apple store](#) on New York's Fifth Avenue. The device sold out on launch day, even though it didn't go on sale until 5 p.m.

Apple does its part to encourage a party atmosphere. In past years, the company's retail employees have provided bottled water, coffee, bagels and even cupcakes to people in line. They've cheered and clapped as customers entered and left. Some customers bring lawn chairs and sleeping bags. Others dress as iPhones and iPads.

Although Apple's product releases have become a cultural phenomenon, the cult-like crowds that line up outside of its stores have made the company vulnerable to gentle ribbing from its competitors.

[Television ads](#) for Samsung's Galaxy line of phones routinely poke fun at people who are camped out in line for what appears to be an Apple product release.

The spots, in heavy rotation since December, portray Apple fans as clueless drones who think they're too cool to buy gadgets made by companies other than Apple. In one of the commercials, a bearded hipster says he could never buy a Samsung phone because he's "creative." A bystander observes: "Dude, you're a barista."

For some customers, standing in line will offer the only chance to get a

new iPad on Friday. Apple quickly ran out of supplies it set aside for advance orders. The company was telling customers Thursday to expect a two- to three-week wait for orders placed through its online stores.

The new iPad is called just that: "the new iPad." Apple declined to give it a name like "iPad 3" or "iPad HD." That is consistent with its naming practice for iPods, MacBooks and iMacs, but a break with the way iPhone models are named.

In the U.S., the new iPad starts at \$499, the same as the previous model, the iPad 2, when it debuted a year ago. The iPad 2 remains in stock, for \$100 less.

Despite competition from cheaper tablet computers such as Amazon.com Inc.'s Kindle Fire, the iPad remains the most popular [tablet computer](#). Apple has sold more than 55 million iPads since its debut in 2010, including some 40 million last year. Researchers estimate that the iPad has more than 60 percent of the market for tablets.

The iPad's accomplishments have contributed to the company's success on Wall Street. Apple's stock touched \$600 briefly for the first time on Thursday. Apple is the world's most valuable company, with a market capitalization of nearly \$555 billion. It topped \$500 billion for the first time in late February, a market value peak where few companies have ventured.

Apple's retail stores are likely to draw the biggest crowds because they usually have the largest launch-day supplies, but the tablet will also be sold at Best Buy, Radio Shack, Sam's Club, Target and Walmart.

AT&T and Verizon Wireless will also sell iPads, but only models with built-in cellular broadband modems. Those models use the companies' latest high-speed wireless networks, based on so-called "4G LTE"

technology. They'll be the first Apple devices with that capability built in.

The cellular-capable models cost \$130 more than Wi-Fi-only versions. There's a separate monthly data fee, but none of the long-term contract requirements typical with phones. The priciest iPad goes for \$829; it comes with cellular access and four times the storage capacity of the basic, \$499 model.

Apart from the U.S., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the device goes on sale the same day in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

A week later, another 25 countries will get the device, altogether making for an unusually fast product roll-out for Apple.

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