Apple tablet patent reveals Smart Cover's Second Coming

August 3 2012, by Nancy Owano

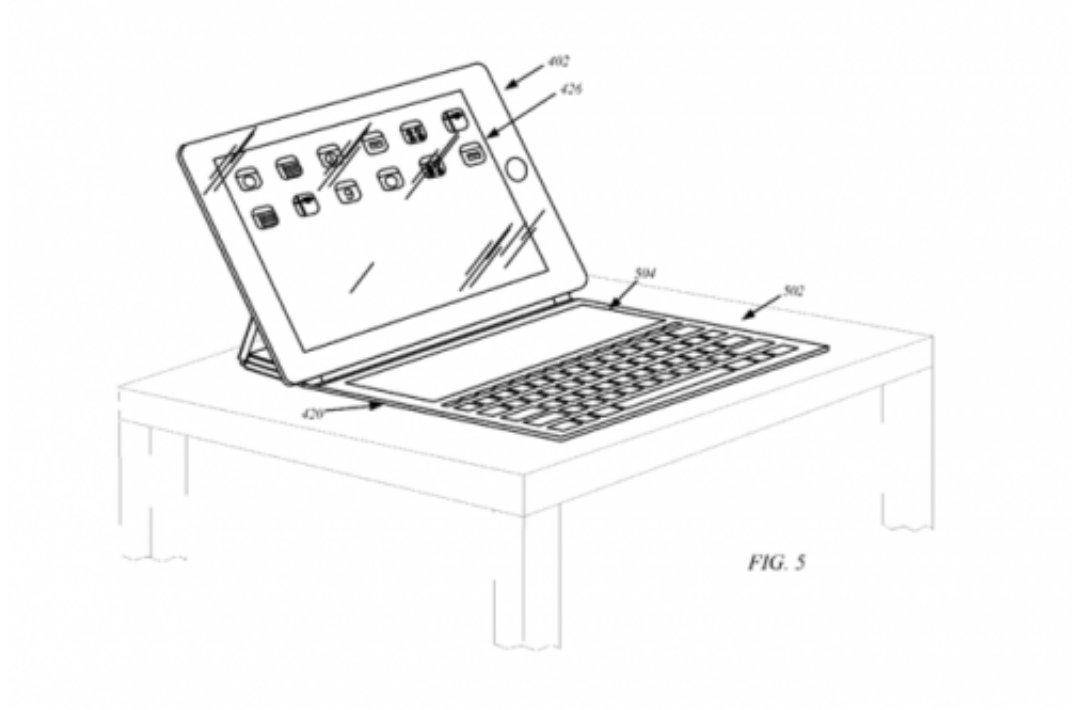

FIG. 5

(Phys.org) -- A patent made public on Thursday shows Apple seeking a patent for something called “Cover attachment with flexible display.” The patent news is sending Apple watchers in one specific direction, all suggesting that the release of Smart Cover for the iPad may be in for a Second Coming that will send it far beyond providing an all in one screen protector and tablet stand. The patent suggests Apple intends to

inject Smart Cover with more functionality.

What kind of plans might Apple have for the product? The patent application, which was filed by Apple a year ago, also in August, discusses adding a flexible display to the inside of a Smart Cover. This would result in Apple's ability to promote next-generation Smart Covers, complete with built-in, flexible AMOLED displays.

Apple designers are thinking in terms of a flexible display made of a durable, flexible material whereby the cover display and cover could bend and flex together. "Thin flexible display technology can be integrated into the flexible cover without affecting the overall form factor of the cover," the application comments. The cover would connect to the tablet through a wireless or wired data connection, or by way of other ports.

The diagrams with the patent indicate that functions could vary depending on configurations. The smart cover might take on the role of an ultra thin touch keyboard. It might be used as a pad with stylus for drawing. It might complement information that runs on the table's main display screen among other uses.

The inventor named on the patent application is Fletcher Rothkopf.

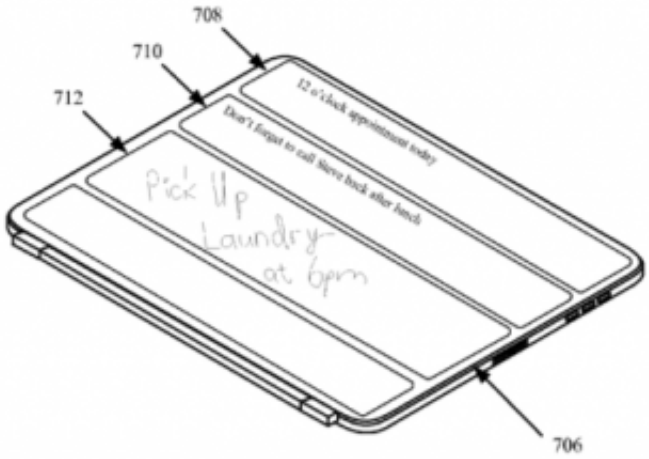

FIG. 7B

While professionals as well as students are finding the right time, place, and applications suitable for tablets, “pinching” and “zooming” just do not cover the spectrum of work needs. Tablet form limitations compel users to stay with other types of computing devices such as laptops and desktops.

The patent application directly confronts some limitations and presents its solution.

Tablet devices, says the application, “can be used for any number of tasks including word processing, social media networking, video conferencing, and gaming. Although this type of device allows an extensive variety of tasks to be performed, the overall functionality of this device type still has room for improvement.”

The patent document says that increasing the display area could lead to a significant expansion in functionality.

“Unfortunately, since displays already dominate a majority of one side of tablet devices, device manufacturers generally choose between making the display and therefore the device itself larger, thereby reducing the portability or making the device and display smaller with the result of a less functional device.”

Apple sees its suggested cover attachment with flexible display as the way to address the problem of size versus function. “A way to extend the usability and functionality of a tablet device without making it any larger is desired." In turn, the patent application describes “many embodiments that relate to a method, apparatus, and, computer readable medium for extending the functionality of a tablet device to an accessory device with a flexible display."

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