

# Google challenges Apple with high-end laptop (Update 2)

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The Google Chromebook Pixel laptop computer is shown at an announcement in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 21, 2013. Google is adding a new touch to its line of Chrome laptops in an attempt to outshine personal computers running on software made by rivals Microsoft and Apple. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

Google unveiled a touchscreen notebook computer Thursday designed for high-end users, throwing down the gauntlet to Apple and its MacBooks.

Google said its Chromebook Pixel computers blending tablet and laptop

technology, boasting heavyweight Intel chips and screens tailored for rich graphics, were released in the United States and Britain, starting at \$1,299.

"People will give up a MacBook Air for this," Google Chrome senior vice president Sundar Pichai said.

A Pixel model featuring built-in connectivity to the Verizon mobile Internet service will hit the US market in April at a price of \$1,449.

The newly unveiled version can connect online with wireless hot-spot technology or cables.

"It's a great looking product," Om Malik of technology news website GigaOM said at the Pixel debut in San Francisco.

"But Google is facing a selling problem, they have to compete on price originally and build a developer base for a high-end product."

Google is hoping enthusiasts will forego price comparisons with competitors such as MacBooks or laptops built on Windows 8 software and focus instead on the Pixel's touchscreen feature and the massive terabyte of Google Drive online data storage included.

"It seems like a pretty hard sell," said Forrester analyst James McQuivey. "I hope they are not planning to make a lot of money off it."

While the Pixel seems aimed at the MacBook market, it also faces fierce competition from touchscreen laptops based on Windows 8 software.

"It seems like more of a symbolic product release with Google trying to make a point that it is no longer just a low-end provider of devices," McQuivey said.



A man uses the Google Chromebook Pixel laptop computer after an announcement in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 21, 2013. Google is adding a new touch to its line of Chrome laptops in an attempt to outshine personal computers running on software made by rivals Microsoft and Apple. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

Analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group branded the Pixel move "a train wreck," arguing that notebook computers above \$600 have historically not sold well and that Apple even sells a slick MacBook Air model for \$999.

The booming popularity of tablet computers is also eroding the overall market for laptops.

"It just boggles the mind," Enderle said. "I have no clue what the hell Google was thinking."

The announcement adds a new dimension to the rivalry between the two tech giants, locked in a fierce battle over smartphones and tablets.

"This is for power users we expect to live completely in the cloud," Pichai said. "The Pixel is about pushing the state of the art."

Google custom built Pixel and is producing it with the help of electronics manufacturers in Taiwan.

"It is clear that touch is here to stay and that it is the future," Pichai said.

He described the Pixel screen resolution as superior to that on any laptop shipped today.

Within three months, Google will release Quickoffice software for handling documents and spreadsheets after complaints by Chrome notebook users over difficulties when trying to work with Microsoft's widely used Word or Excel software, according to Pichai.

Google's main intent with the Pixel is to more deeply mesh the California-based Internet giant's money-generating products and services into people's lives.

Google was working with third-party application developers to tailor Pixel programs.

"The goal is to get the Pixel in the hands of all our early adopters as well as developers," Pichai said. "We think our ecosystem will respond well."

Google introduced the first Chromebook in mid-2010 in a challenge to Windows operating software at the heart of Microsoft's empire.

The array of Chromebook makers has grown to include Acer, Lenovo,

Samsung and Hewlett-Packard, with previous models offered at bargain prices when compared to high-end laptops.

Shifting operating software to banks of servers online means that Google updates programs and fends off hackers and malicious software.

The disk drive-free Pixel machines feature a quick startup and can dive into a user's desktop data from anywhere online.

Google remains devoted to its Android software for powering tablets and smartphones, following two paths when it comes to Internet-synched hardware, according to Pichai.

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