

Giant tablets aimed at families

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Costing a little more than an iPad but standing more than twice as tall, a new pair of giant tablets wants families to share cozier group experiences with technology.

The idea is to prop up Fuhu's 20-inch or 24-inch Nabi Big Tab HD on the floor or lay it flat on a table or a bed. From there, a mix of children and adults can read interactive books, play well-known board games and paint across a digital canvas.

For Fuhu, which specializes in educational apps and tablets for children, the latest gadgets have grown isolating. Like many parents, Fuhu executives had seen it in their own households: each family member engrossed in his or her own personal screen.

What amounts to a portable smart TV, they hope, could change that.

"We're trying to find a product that enhances collaboration and socialization," said Fuhu founder and President Robb Fujioka.

The California company announced Tuesday that the Nabi Big Tab HD tablets will go on sale this fall online and at Costco and Toys R Us for \$449 for the smaller version and \$549 for the larger size. Apple's iPads cost about \$399 or \$499, depending on the version. Gaming consoles such as the Xbox One or PlayStation 4 cost about \$400.

Jim Mitchell, Fuhu's chief executive, said the "world's biggest Android tablets made for sharing" would be more portable than consoles and

better for families than competing tablets. A special enclosure allows the Big Tab, which weighs at least 10 { pounds, to be carried from one room to the next.

About 50 percent of U.S. adults own a tablet. Analysts don't expect that figure to get much higher, leaving them skeptical about whether the Big Tab will interest a significant batch of consumers.

In North America, only 2 million 11-inch-plus tablets are expected to be shipped this year compared with nearly 40 million shipments of 7- to 8-inch tablets, according to research firm NPD DisplaySearch. Weight and poor battery life cripple large tablets, analysts said, which is why almost anything the size of the Big Tab is built as an "all-in-one" computer.

"With a giant tablet, you're talking about a lie-flat television with touch, and there hasn't been much demand for that," said NPD analyst Stephen Baker. "It's really the antithesis of what people expect for a tablet."

Fuhu, with about 300 employees, has risen to fame in recent years through its focus on creating educational apps for its Nabi tablets, including the Nabi DreamTab, created in partnership with DreamWorks Animation.

Fuhu sold 1.5 million of the Android-powered devices last year, generating \$200 million in sales and a recent rumor that the company might soon make an initial public offering of its stock. The company, which declined to comment on the rumor, aims to sell 300,000 to 500,000 of the Big Tabs in coming months.

Petering tablet sales industrywide don't worry Fuhu executives, who said that major manufacturers such as Samsung, Google and Apple have focused too much on making their devices faster, lighter and thinner.

"That isn't what parents care about or buy based on," Fujioka said.

There's a market for the Big Tab, he said, because about 20 percent to 25 percent of the nearly 200 million tablets sold worldwide in 2013 were bought by parents who wanted a "family tablet" but ended up with a device that didn't live up to its billing.

They want technology to foster bonding and learning, Fujioka said. With the Big Tab, Fuhu envisions five scenarios in which the bigger screens promote more interaction than existing options.

The tablet will come with about a dozen board-style games, including Candyland, for "family game night" as well as about 20 games, such as chess and air hockey, that are designed for two players. Videos and books drive "family movie night" and "story time" experiences. Some of the content will come from Disney and Cartoon Network. Drawing, animation and movie-making apps are among "creative" uses.

Jim Mainard, head of digital strategy and new business development at DreamWorks, said one of the first conversations he had with Fuhu's executives was about technology getting in the way of families.

"We really want to connect families, not separate them," he said.

The second goal was ensuring children have opportunities to express creativity, and drawing apps on the Big Tab feature characters from DreamWorks films.

"Our goal is to see kids learning to cooperate to achieve a higher goal," Mainard said. "The more casual, fun educational games are rarely collaborative, but now you have screen real estate for 20 fingers or 10 hands. That's a big win."

The effort to bring more family-time staples into the digital world will continue the meteoric rise in the use of electronics by children, said Seeta Pai, vice president at Common Sense Media, which advocates for a reasonable mix of tech in children's lives.

"The screen is a utility and it has a place, so what we like to tell parents is model good usage of technology and teach kids the etiquette around using it," she said. "On the face of it, a big tablet sounds like a good idea in terms of fostering collaboration."

But not everyone is ready for leaving physical games behind, said Sofia Dickens, a former "Jeopardy!" correspondent who recently launched a successful Kickstarter fundraising effort to build a new board game. "Q's Race to the Top" aims to help children with emotional intelligence and social skills. She said a "good, old-fashioned board game" was "a good hook" to get parents captivated.

"I wanted to create something tangible that parents could play with their kids," she said. "Once they fall in love, we can take it to more interactive platforms."

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