

Apple starts iPhone 6 sales in key China market

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A customer checks out his new iPhone 6 Plus on the first day of sale in California, September 19, 2014. Apple's latest smartphone has gone on sale in China after a delay

Apple began selling its latest iPhone in China Friday, nearly a month after other major territories due to a licence delay by regulators, but it faces a tough battle with rivals led by Samsung in the crucial market.

Staff at an Apple Store in downtown Shanghai clapped and congratulated

iPhone 6 customers as they left the shop, which opened two hours early for those who had pre-ordered.

Fashion industry worker Wang Xue picked out a gold-coloured iPhone 6 Plus, having used an iPhone 4 for the past four years.

"I like the design and everything about it," she said. "It's worth it to me to pay 6,088 yuan (\$998)."

The new gadget hits shelves in China a day after the tech giant unveiled a new line-up of iPads in the United States in a bid to face off tough competition in the cooling tablet market.

Apple's products enjoy a devoted following in China, the world's second-largest economy and the largest smartphone market according to an industry estimate.

It launched the large-screen iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 Plus in 10 countries and regions on September 19, but could not do so in mainland China because it lacked a key network access licence.

Media have reported widespread smuggling of the new phone into China given its initial unavailability.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology granted permission late last month, but said it had pressed Apple to improve personal data security to gain approval and quoted the US firm as saying it would do so.



A young boy uses an iPhone to take photos in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on September 30, 2014. Apple began selling its latest iPhones in China Friday

The government agency said outside parties could obtain information stored on an iPhone by accessing a "trusted" computer or from an iPhone undergoing repair.

Apple has not responded publicly to the claims.

Customer deliveries began Friday in the company's 12 retail stores in mainland China, and through the country's three major telecom providers and other sales channels.

E-commerce firm JD.com said it had taken 9.5 million pre-orders for the iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 Plus as of Thursday.

But Apple is only in sixth place in China's highly fragmented smartphone market, where cheaper phones using the Android operating system are popular.

Apple has a 6.9 percent share, according to consultancy Analysys International, far behind leader Samsung of South Korea, which has 15.4 percent.

Analysts said the new models' larger screen would appeal to Chinese consumers and the launch should help Apple's sales, despite their high prices.

The iPhone 6 with 16 GB of memory is selling for the equivalent of \$867 in China, significantly higher than neighbouring Hong Kong where the same model retails for \$726.

The top-end iPhone 6 Plus with 128 GB sells for \$1,277 in the mainland.

"I think it will sell better than the (iPhone) 5 series," said Xu Hao of Analysys. "This trend of a larger screen will serve better to snatch some users."

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