

US Apple iPad launch slightly delayed to April 3

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The Apple iPad.

(AP) -- The much-anticipated iPad tablet computer from Apple Inc. will start hitting U.S. store shelves on April 3, slightly later than originally planned.

When Apple unveiled the touch-screen device Jan. 27, the company said the first iPads would reach the market in "late March" worldwide, not just in the U.S. Now international releases are planned for later in April.

Investors shrugged off the delay and instead seemed reassured that the tablet wouldn't slip even later. On a day with a broader stock market rally, Apple shares jumped \$7.44, or 3.5 percent, to \$218.15 in midday trading, a record high.

The company did not specify Friday why the tablet is not coming out until April, and Apple spokeswoman Natalie Harrison would not elaborate.

However, Canaccord Adams analyst Peter Misek had said this week that Apple might have to delay or limit the size of the launch because of an "unspecified production problem." Misek said Apple's Taiwan-based supplier, Hon Hai Precision, could be facing a production bottleneck or a shortage of components.

Misek said Friday he couldn't elaborate on the production problem. He said Apple was taking "a very intelligent approach" by allocating more units to the U.S., Apple's biggest market, while delaying overseas availability for the iPad.

The analyst doesn't expect the delay to affect sales of the iPad during Apple's fiscal third quarter, which ends in June. He estimates Apple will sell 550,000 iPads during the period and 1.2 million in fiscal 2010. For fiscal 2011, he expects Apple to sell 3.5 million iPads.

In comparison, Apple sold 8.7 million iPhones in its last quarter alone. The iPad isn't expected to be even close for a while because Apple will have to persuade mainstream consumers to embrace a new category - a device smaller than a laptop but larger than a phone.

Michael Gartenberg, analyst and partner at Altimeter Group, expects the tablet to "resonate well" partly because people already familiar with the iPhone will know what to expect from the iPad.

"Apple has invested not just 10 years of research and development but 10 years of consumer education too," he said. "They've taught consumers about digital music, multi-touch (screens) and video. It would surprise me if it didn't sell 3 to 4 million units (this year)."

The first iPads to go on sale will connect to Wi-Fi networks only and cost \$499, \$599 or \$699, depending on the data storage capacity. Versions that also can connect to "3G" cellular networks are expected to go on sale in late April for \$629, \$729 or \$829. Apple has not yet disclosed international pricing.

U.S. customers will be able to begin placing orders for both models from Apple's Web site beginning on March 12.

All models will be available in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, Switzerland and the U.K. by late April, Apple said. Other countries are expected to get the device later in the year.

Apple says the iPad will include 12 new applications designed especially for the computer. It will also run "almost all" of the more than 140,000 apps already available for the iPhone and iPod Touch, Apple said. Users will be able to access the applications they bought for those devices through the iPad.

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