

Apple expected to improve iPad line

SAN FRANCISCO, USA: Apple is expected to improve its range of iPads with the expected announcement of new gadgets as the tablet market heats up with competition from Google and Microsoft.



Apple's existing range of iPads. Image: Apple

Analysts agree that iPads will star at an invitation-only event being held in San Francisco on Tuesday (22 October) and on the cusp of the prime year-end holiday shopping season.

"Job One for Apple is to get something out there on the large-size iPad that gets people excited. Then, from a specification focus, the Mini needs to catch up with what everybody else has done," NPD analyst Stephen Baker told AFP.

"There are a lot of other things happening in that large-size tablet market and there is a huge amount of choice for smaller devices," he said.

Tablets face mounting competition from touch-screen notebook computers powered by Microsoft Windows software and priced between US\$350 and US\$500, according to the analyst.

"Apple will be number one in large-size tablets probably for a long time, but the definition of competition will change," Baker said.

New models expected

Apple is also under pressure to adapt to the popularity of premium tablets with high-quality screens in the seven- to eight-inch (18cm to 20cm) range where the Mini competes.

Online retail company Amazon.com last week began shipping its new seven-inch Kindle Fire HDX tablets with boosted display quality and computing power at the starting price of US\$229.

"We can't wait to get this tablet into our customers' hands," said Amazon Kindle vice president Peter Larsen. Google's latest Nexus 7 tablet powered by its Android software has been a hot seller at a similarly tempting price.

Emailed invitations to the Apple event revealed little other than the time and place, and bore the message: "We still have a lot to cover." A graphic in the shape of an iPad showed Apple's iconic logo under a shower of colorful leaves. Unconfirmed reports are that Apple will show off a new version of its full-size iPad that will be thinner than its predecessor and boast improved camera capabilities.

Scrutiny of Apple's supply chain indicates the new iPad will get narrower, thinner, and lighter and possibly be built with processors at least as powerful as those used in the freshly-launched iPhone 5S, according to Gartner analyst Van Baker.

Increased processing power

"New processors have the potential to make tablets much more compelling devices in terms of content creation. These devices are getting more sophisticated to run new applications that are being developed all the time," the analyst said.

"It will increase the likelihood that tablets will displace PCs (personal computers)," in the future.

Analysts agreed that top-end, full-size iPads may get a fingerprint recognition security feature that has been a hit in the

iPhone 5S.



iPhone 5S processors coming to iPads? Image: Apple

Such upgrades would promise to entice buyers to pay a bit more for full-size tablets from Apple instead of choosing lower-priced Mini models, boding well for the company's profits.

The iPad remains the largest-selling tablet, according to surveys, but its market share is being eroded by rivals using the Google Android operating system.

"Mobile connectivity continues to grow and its impact is much broader than business stories about which computer makers are selling the most units," said Kristen Purcell, associate director for research at the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project.

"We see mobile connectivity affecting everything from the way people get news and learn to the way they take care of their health and the way they share their lives through social media," Purcell said.

Apple was also expected to discuss its computer operating system and its MacBook laptop line at the event.

The company is coming off a wildly successful launch of two new iPhone models last month. It estimates selling a record nine million iPhones in the three days after launching two new versions of the smartphone.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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