

Report: Apple tablet device coming in January

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Speculation intensified Monday that Apple Inc. will soon unveil a tablet-style gadget for consuming music, movies, books and other media.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Apple is planning to take the wraps off such a device this month and begin shipping it in March.

That jibes with several online reports that the company has scheduled an event for Jan. 26 or 27 at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, one of Apple's customary spaces for product launches.

The gadget, which online pundits have at different times christened the iTablet and the iSlate, is to have a 10-inch to 11-inch touch screen, said the Journal, citing unnamed people briefed on the matter.

Apple spokesman Steve Dowling said the company does not comment on rumors and speculation.

Apple, which is based in Cupertino, Calif., has so far stayed out of the "netbook" category of small laptops with relatively weak processors and sub-\$500 price tags. The company has said it doesn't know how to make a good computer for less than \$500, but has indicated it has been considering alternative ideas for that space.

Analysts have predicted Apple's new gadget could cost anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000, with or without a cellular data plan included.

Also on Monday, Sprint Nextel Corp. said it has made a multiyear deal with a startup called Skiff for a thin electronic-book reader that operates over Sprint's high-speed 3G network as well as Wi-Fi.

The Skiff Reader will have an 11.5-inch screen, larger than those on competing devices including Amazon.com Inc.'s Kindle, Sony Corp.'s Reader and Barnes & Noble Inc.'s Nook.

Sprint and Skiff tout the device as the thinnest to date, at just over a quarter of an inch thick. The reader's entire page will be a touch screen, unlike the Kindle, which uses physical buttons for navigation, or the Nook, which has a small built-in touch screen separate from the book page.

The Skiff Reader will connect to its own online content store. Skiff said it is also working with other electronics manufacturers to put its technology into a variety of devices.

The companies are planning to demonstrate the device at this week's International

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Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Its price and availability date were not disclosed.

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