

Apple fans eagerly touch and swipe first iPads

JESSICA MINTZ - AP Technology Writer - Associated Press

Now that the iPad is in the hands of early adopters, the hard work for Apple Inc. begins.

Eager customers intent on being among the first owners of this new class of gadgetry stood in long lines across the country Saturday. They seemed willing to buy first — and discover uses for the iPad later.

In some ways, it was reminiscent of the lines and hoopla surrounding the 2007 launch of the first iPhone. The difference: People knew then that the iPhone would replace their existing cell phone, an appliance that has become a must-have for everyone from uber-geeks to stay-at-home moms.

With the iPad, which fits somewhere between phone and computer, Apple must convince people who already have smart phones, laptops, e-book readers, set-top boxes and home broadband connections that they need another device that serves many of the same purposes.

Many of the earliest iPad buyers say they will have a better idea of what they'll use it for only after they've had it for a while.

That didn't stop them from imagining, though.

Beth Goza has had iPhones and other smart phones, along with a MacBook Air laptop, yet she believes the iPad has a place in her digital lineup. She likened it to a professional tennis player owning different sneakers for grass, clay and concrete courts.

"At the end of the day, you can get by with one or the other," she said outside an Apple store in Seattle's University Village mall.

But she clearly doesn't want to just "get by." She's already dreaming up specific uses for her iPad, such as knitting applications to help her keep track of her place in a complicated pattern.

Danita Shneidman, a woman in her 60s, wanted one to look at photos and videos of her first grandchild, born this week in Boston.

And then there's Ray Majewski, who went to an Apple store in Freehold, N.J., with his 10-year-old daughter, Julia. The iPad is partly as a reward for her straight A's in school, and partly a present for himself.

"I like the electronic books, and my daughter is really getting into them as well," Majewski said. "I was thinking of getting a Kindle (e-book reader) but then said to

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myself, 'Why not get an iPad because I can get so much more from that than just reading books?'"

The iPad is essentially a much larger version of Apple's popular iPhone, without the calling capabilities. Just a half-inch thick, the device has a touch screen that measures 9.7 inches on the diagonal — nearly three times the iPhone's. Also like the iPhone, it has no physical keyboard.

For now, Apple is selling iPads that only connect to the Internet using Wi-Fi. Those models start at \$499. Versions that also have a cellular data connection will be available by the end of the month. They will cost \$130 more, with the most expensive at \$829.

In Apple stores in Seattle and on New York's Fifth Avenue, the atmosphere was festive, with employees cheering and clapping as customers entered and left. Some analysts predicted the gadget would sell out on Saturday. Although there didn't seem to be problems with supply at Apple stores, two Best Buy stores in the Washington, D.C., area didn't have iPads in stock for sale when they opened.

People could also "pre-order" iPads online to arrive Saturday. Prasad Thammineni did just that, but had to chase the UPS guy down the block from his office in Cambridge, Mass., to get his iPad.

After playing with it for a few hours, his impressions were mostly positive. Typing on the on-screen keyboard wasn't as comfortable as using a laptop with a regular keyboard, and Thammineni said he found himself using several fingers but not touch-typing normally. Still, he said, it was much easier to use than a Kindle keyboard.

But the weight of the device might keep him from typing on the go. Thammineni said that after about two minutes of holding up the device with one hand and typing with the other, it got too heavy, even at a mere 1.5 pounds.

Once the initial iPad excitement settles, Apple may have to work harder to persuade a broader swath of people to buy one. Many companies have tried to sell tablet computers before, but none has caught on with mainstream consumers. And while early adopters who pre-ordered an iPad in recent weeks have gushed about all the ways they hope to use it, skeptics point to all the ways the iPad comes up short.

They argue the on-screen keyboard is hard to use and complain that it lacks a camera and ports for media storage cards and USB devices such as printers. They also bemoan the fact that the iPad can't play Flash video, which means many Web sites with embedded video clips will look broken to Web surfers using Apple's Safari browser. And the iPad can't run more than one program at a time, which even fans hope will change one day soon.

College student Brett Meulmester stood in line at an Apple store in Arlington, Va., to try one out without buying one yet because of cost.

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Lower prices could push wider adoption, but when Apple slashed prices for the iPhone just months after its release, early buyers were irate. Tom Quinn, of Sea Girt, N.J., wasn't worried about paying a premium for being one of the first to have an iPad.

"When that happened with the iPhone, they gave out \$100 credit," he said. "If the same thing happens with the iPad, I'm sure they'll do something similar."

For others, cost was clearly not an issue — nor convenience, it seemed. Siggi Manz, a software developer who lives near Frankfurt, Germany, was spending just 20 hours in New York to snag one. Manz, who already carries Apple's MacBook Pro and iPhone, said the iPad would be ideal for note-taking.

"Opening a laptop is sometimes impersonal because the monitor is between us, and the iPhone is too little to really honestly type," Manz said.

James Stuart trekked to Seattle from Canada, where the iPad won't be on sale for another month — too long, in his mind.

"It's like a gorgeous woman — you just want to touch it," he said.

In San Francisco, tattoo artist Max Ackermann is convinced the iPad will "define a giant change in how we perceive computers in general."

Yet Ackermann admits he has no clue exactly how, saying, "It's definitely in its baby years."

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Associated Press Writer Bruce Shipkowski in Freehold, N.J., AP Business Writer Marcy Gordon in Arlington, Va., and photographers Diane Bondareff in New York, Jacquelyn Martin in Washington and Paul Sakuma in San Francisco contributed to this story.

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