Dell CEO flashes Android tablet computer

The Associated Press

Dell is working on a 7-inch (18-centimeter) tablet that runs Google's Inc.'s Android operating software.

Not much else is publicly known about the computer. Dell Inc. CEO Michael Dell flashed it briefly Wednesday at Oracle's annual conference in San Francisco, but offered no hard details. Dell Inc. spokesman Matthew Parretta declined to say when the prototype would go on sale.

Dell is just one of many consumer electronics companies scrambling to crack the computer industry's most compelling new niche. Apple Inc.'s iPad proved consumers are interested and willing to pay — the company sold 3.3 million in the first quarter iPads were available. Some analysts say iPads have already started eating away at laptop sales.

Just as Apple's iPhone set the bar for the smart phone industry, the iPad, with its 9.7-inch (25-centimeter) screen, is now the reference point for future tablets, making it harder for companies with a different vision to compete.

Dell's first move in the modern tablet space was a much smaller gadget called the Streak, which went on sale in August. It has a 5-inch (13-centimeter) screen and runs a version of Android; it can also make phone calls on AT&T's network.

The Streak got a chilly reception, with critics saying the device was too awkward to use as a giant phone and too small to use as a computer. The response highlights another of the industry's biggest challenges: resolving the identity crises that crop up when devices try to do too many things at once.

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