E Ink, maker of Kindle display, to offer color

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Up until now, people who have bought e-readers have had to make a compromise: either read in color on a highly reflective screen, or read in shades of gray on a display that's easy to make out even outdoors.

E Ink Corp., the company that makes the black-and-white display for Amazon.com Inc.'s Kindle, said it will begin selling screens that also show colors.

The new technology, called E Ink Triton, displays 16 shades of gray, along with thousands of colors. As with other E Ink displays, people should be able to read it anywhere without having to squint.

Amazon did not immediately respond to inquiries Tuesday on whether that means a color Kindle is coming.

Amazon has said that although it hasn't ruled out color E Ink displays, the technology isn't yet ready for prime time.

Even in color, E Ink still presents compromises. On the one hand, e-readers with E Ink screens have longer battery lives than those with reflective LCD displays, such as Apple Inc.'s iPad. But colors will appear more muted on E Ink displays. And E Ink's technology still cannot play video, as the iPad and other tablets can.

The first e-reader with a color E Ink screen will come from Chinese manufacturer Hanvon. The e-reader will have a display that measures 9.7 inches diagonally, and readers will be able to get online through either Wi-Fi or a 3G cellular connection. It is expected to go on sale in China for about $440.

Hanvon, which sells other products such as tablets in American stores, said it might sell its newest e-reader in the U.S.

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