

Holiday Gadgets: Apple iPhone orders start

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Makers of consumer electronics have been refreshing their products for the holiday shopping season. Advance orders for Apple's new iPhone began on Friday. Delivery times climbed quickly, suggesting heavy demand.

Apple announced the iPhone 5 and other products on Wednesday, while Amazon, Nokia and Motorola unveiled new mobile devices last week. Nintendo also offered price and availability details for the Wii U, the first major game console in years.

These are some of the gadgets to expect in the coming months:

— NEW IPHONE

On Friday, advance orders for the iPhone 5 started. They are bigger, but thinner than previous models and they work with faster cellular networks known as 4G.

Apple Inc. began taking orders at midnight Pacific, promising delivery by next Friday, when the new phone also goes on sale in stores. Within hours, the expected delivery time had grown to two weeks.

Apple is also updating its phone software and will ditch Google Inc.'s mapping service for its own. Besides appearing on the new phone, the new iOS 6 software will be a free upgrade for older devices, including the past three iPhones and the past two iPads. That upgrade will be available starting next Wednesday.

Sales of Apple's iPhones are still strong, though the company lost the lead in smartphones to Samsung this year. Samsung Electronics Co. benefited from having its Galaxy S III out in the U.S. in June. A new iPhone will allow Apple to recapture the attention and the revenue.

— SMALLER IPAD

Apple has done well selling its full-sized tablet computer, which has a screen that measures nearly 10 inches diagonally. Many companies have come out with iPad alternatives, but the ones that have had moderate success have tended to be those with smaller, 7-inch screens and lower price tags.

There's speculation that Apple will come out with a mini iPad — possibly with a 7.85-inch screen — to maintain its dominance. Although Apple said nothing about it Wednesday when it revealed the iPhone 5, the belief is that it will come this fall.

— REKINDLING THE FIRE

Amazon.com Inc.'s 7-inch Kindle Fire is one of the smaller tablets with decent sales.

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On Friday, it started shipping an updated version with a faster processor, more memory and longer battery life. It also cut the price to \$159, from \$199, making it far cheaper than the iPad, which starts at \$399 for the 2011 version still on sale. (The most recent ones start at \$499.)

Amazon is also releasing higher-end models under the Kindle Fire HD line. A 7-inch one goes for \$199 and an 8.9-inch one for \$299. There's also a \$499 model that can use the 4G cellular networks that phone companies have been building. A data plan will cost an extra \$50 a year. The smaller HD model started shipping Friday, while the larger ones will be available Nov. 20.

Buyers of the Fire HD will get the option to turn off the advertisements that appear on its standby screen for \$15.

Amazon also refreshed its line of stand-alone e-readers, offering the Paperwhite, with its own light source. Tablets such as the iPad and the Fire don't work as well in bright light because they are lit from the back. Amazon says the light on the Paperwhite is directed down at the display.

Barnes and Noble Inc., which makes the 7-inch Nook Tablet, may have an update this fall as well.

Toys R Us, meanwhile, said Monday that it is making a 7-inch tablet aimed at children. The Tabeo will go on sale Oct. 21 for \$149.99.

— MOTOROLA'S RETURN

Though it's a pioneer in the cellphone industry, Motorola hasn't had a hit since the Razr phone came out in 2004. Under new owner Google Inc., Motorola Mobility is trying to change that.

Last week, Motorola announced three new smartphones bearing the Razr name. The \$99 Droid Razr M is now on sale. Two high-end models, the Razr HD and Razr Maxx HD, are coming this year.

These are the first major products from Motorola since Google bought the company for \$12.4 billion in May. Google, meanwhile, continues to sell a 7-inch Android tablet, the Nexus 7, made in partnership with AsusTek Computer Inc.

— CALLING ON WINDOWS

Microsoft Corp. will release a new version of the Windows operating system on Oct. 26, one that's designed to work on both traditional computers and tablet devices. A new version of the Windows Phone system is coming out, too.

Once-dominant phone maker Nokia Corp. has been struggling in the shadow of Apple and Android, and it's counting on the new Windows system for a revival. Last week, Nokia and Microsoft unveiled two new devices under Nokia's Lumia brand — the 820 and the 920.

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Nokia CEO Stephen Elop says the new phones will go on sale in the fourth quarter in "select markets." He didn't say what they would cost or which U.S. carriers would have them. Investors were disappointed, and Nokia's stock fell 16 percent on the day of the announcement.

Samsung, which surpassed Nokia as the world's largest maker of mobile phones in 2011 and overtook Apple in smartphones this year, showed off a Windows 8 phone late last month. It didn't announce an availability date either.

— SURFACE

Microsoft plans its own tablet computer, too. It's new territory for Microsoft, which typically leaves it to others to make devices using its software. Now, it will be competing against its partners.

The Surface tablet will come in two versions, both with 10.6-inch screens, slightly larger than the iPad's. One model will run on phone-style chips, just like the iPad, and will be sold for a similar price. A heavier, more expensive version will run on Intel chips and be capable of running standard Windows applications. The Surface will go on sale on Oct. 26.

— NEW BLACKBERRYS

A year ago Research In Motion Ltd. disclosed that it was working on a next-generation phone system for the BlackBerry, which now looks ancient next to the iPhone and Android devices. It was supposed to be out in time for this year's holiday season. That won't happen.

In June RIM pushed the release of BlackBerry 10 devices into early next year, saying it wasn't ready. That means RIM will not only compete with the new iPhone and Android devices out this fall, but it will also have to contend with the new Windows devices.

— PLAYING GAMES

Nintendo's new Wii U game machine will go on sale in the U.S. on Nov. 18. A basic, white model will cost \$300. A deluxe version, which comes in black and sports extra features, will cost \$50 more. The GamePad touch-screen controller for it will offer new ways to play.

In "New Super Mario Bros. U.," for example, players holding the old Wii controllers control Mario, Luigi and other characters. The person with the GamePad can help them along by using a stylus to create stepping stones for the characters or stun enemies.

Players can also turn off the TV entirely and play on the GamePad.

Nintendo Co. has been trying to drum up excitement for the Wii U, the first major

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gaming console to launch since 2006.

The company also announced new entertainment features for the console. Called Nintendo TVii, the service collects all the ways users have to watch movies, TV shows and sports. This includes pay-TV accounts along with services such as Hulu and Netflix. The GamePad works as a fancy remote controller and will let viewers comment on what they are watching.

TVii will be available Nov. 18 as well, at no extra cost.

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