

China's challenge to the iPad raises a red flag

(Reuters) - China Communist Party members can now carry a tablet PC to verify identification cards, read the blogs of cadres and manage state-owned firms without fretting that using a bourgeois Apple Inc iPad will ruin their street cred.

Enter RedPad Number One, an Android-based tablet computer filled with software applications (apps) catered to a party official's every need for control. Delivered in a decadent leather case for 9,999 yuan (\$1,600), it is twice the price of Apple's most expensive iPad 2.

The eye-popping price has China's microblogs alight with chatter over just why this device is so expensive and who is footing the bill.

"Is it the god of toys? Why don't they throw in a free iPad with it," said Looperrr on Weibo, Sina Corp's, microblogging platform.

RedPad Number One spokesman Liu Xianri said in an interview with the Southern Daily on Wednesday that sales of the tablet were completely market driven.

"We are looking to compete against the foreign brands," Liu said in response to a question on whether public funds may be used to buy the RedPad.

RedPad's price was high, Liu said, because of the number of pre-installed apps that cater to bureaucrats and state-owned company managers.

For example, it has apps that allow users to check the validity of a journalist's government accreditation as well as read state-run newspapers and microblogs.

But an online survey on Thursday showed that more than 2,000 netizens believed that the RedPad was meant to be a symbol of privilege, while another 1,500 thought its purpose is to fleece taxpayers.

"After reading all the articles about this, I am impressed," said microblogger Xixizhiniu. "What an honor it is for you, the taxpayer, that you place a 9,999 yuan into the hands of the leaders!"

(Additional reporting by Sabrina Mao in BEIJING; Editing by Ed Lane)

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