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Touched by the tablet

More than 100 new tablets are expected to debut this year in response to strong worldwide demand

By Veathika Jain | Gulf News Report

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The global tablet market hit an estimated 16 million units last year, with a forecast of 43 million units in 2011, according to Taiwan's quasi-official Institute for Information Industry

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Technology is moving so fast that by the time you find your way around the latest gadget, the next version is already launched. Consumers were just about focusing on getting better laptops when Apple stunned the market with the iPad in 2010.

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Market research firm Gartner is more optimistic, predicting tablet sales will cross 70 million this year and 108 million in 2012, compared to just 17.6 million in 2010.

UAE retailer Jumbo sees a reflection of that trend on the shop floor. "Tablets currently account for approximately 15 per cent of overall PC sales but this number is on the increase month by month. We anticipate it to reach at least 25 per cent by the end of this year," said Nadeem Khanzadah, DGM Retail, Jumbo Electronics.

In the Middle East, tablets contribute 8 to 14 per cent of sales in the IT segment depending on promotions running at the time or stock situation, according to data from Ashish Panjabi, Chief Operating Officer, Jacky's Electronics.

Apple, which controlled 95 per cent share of the global market in the tablet industry last year, is bound to face some serious competition this year. Gartner estimates Apple's share of the market will decline to 47 per cent of worldwide tablet sales of 294.3 million in 2015 from 69 per cent this year, while Google's share will rise to 39 per cent from 20 per cent now. Google's Android has emerged as the only viable solution for tablet-makers who do not have their



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Burgeoning variety

More than 100 new tablets are expected to debut at next month's Computex Taipei, Asia's leading IT trade fair, organisers said. "Apple was the only player last year. But its competitors, even some monitor manufacturers, won't be absent from the new market," Chang Li, Secretary-General of the Taipei Computer Association, co-sponsor of the fair, told AFP. "Besides, the threshold of entering the tablet market is not high."

Panjabi said the main reason the iPad took off was because it made tablets consumer-friendly. "Tablets available prior to the iPad were mainly catering to the enterprise sector and weren't very consumer friendly. With the iPad, Apple changed the whole user experience."

Samsung was quick to follow, launching its Galaxy Tab in two sizes. Regionally, Samsung's mobile business, which includes tablets, held 20 per cent of Middle East market share in 2010, excluding Saudi Arabia, compared with 17 per cent in 2009.

Ashraf Fawakherji, Head of Mobile Division at Samsung Gulf Electronics, said the company achieved record growth last year because it tailored its offering for Arabs, with Arabic content and Arabic lifestyle applications.

A strong demand for tablet devices in the Middle East is predicted, as more consumers in the region require immediate up-to-date information, connectivity and portability. Currently, tablets are being used more as consumer devices because of the rich multimedia experience offered, in the form of games, movies and music.

However, content creation still largely happens on laptops or desktop PCs but this could also start to change as more iPad apps are released, for functions as varied as word processing, spreadsheets, creating movies or editing pictures.

Rohit Dev, Founder of Spendwisor.com — a virtual electronics mall, has been an early adopter and uses an iPad for his business needs. "The most important advantage of using a tablet is that when I travel, I can easily carry it with me. It is my work-cum-entertainment companion. The small size and lighter weight makes it easy to manage," said Dev.

Many business users are likely to adopt tablets as BlackBerry, whose

Playbook goes on sale today, and HP, which launches its own tablet later this year, put out products keeping customers in mind.

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