



Apple plans disk-free laptop

Philipp Gollner in San Francisco

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APPLE may sell notebook computers without hard disks later this year, an analyst said.

The devices would use the same type of fast memory as music players and digital cameras, driving down prices of hard-disk drives.

The maker of the popular iPod music player and Macintosh computers hopes to introduce flash memory in small computers known as sub-notebooks in the second half of 2007, Shaw Wu, an analyst at American Technology Research said.

A shift to flash memory in place of slower hard-disk drives would eliminate one headache for consumers: lengthy start-up times when turning on computers.

Apple already uses flash memory in its iPod Nano and iPod Shuffle music players. Flash memory is lighter, uses less power and takes up less space than hard-disk drives.

Mr Wu, who was among the first analysts to forecast the unveiling of Apple's iPhone music player/phone earlier this year, cited unnamed industry sources as the basis for his report.

"The time is right for the flash makers to make a move" as flash memory prices decline, Mr Wu said. "Apple, from what we understand, is pretty much ready. The ball is in the flash vendors' court."

Apple spokeswoman Lynn Fox said the company would not comment "on rumour and speculation".

A transition to flash memory for computers could put pressure on makers of traditional hard-disk drives including Seagate Technology, the largest US hard-disk drive maker, Mr Wu said.

Apple, known as a technology innovator, would be among the first personal computer makers to use flash memory for storing data in computers, a step that some chip memory makers, including Micron Technology, have said is inevitable as prices for flash decline and storage capacity increases.

Flash memory chips have solid state circuitry that uses no moving parts, making them less vulnerable to damage than hard-disk drives. Prices of flash memory have been declining rapidly but are still higher than those for hard-disk drives, Wu said, meaning early flash-based computers would be more expensive.

Apple would use a miniature version of its Mac OS X operating system in the flash-based sub-notebook computers, Mr Wu said, again citing unnamed sources. The computers could be introduced in the second half of this year, he said.

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