

Apple's Mac mini Points to Renewed Interest in Small PCs

Martin Reynolds

The size of the Macintosh mini suggests that very small computers may see a revival. Although it likely will not threaten the market share of the PC, it could become popular as a media-dedicated consumer appliance.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 12 January 2005, Apple Computer introduced the Macintosh mini computer, a standalone desktop PC that is 6.5 inches wide and 2 inches tall. Prices start at \$499, which does not include a monitor, keyboard, mouse or wireless options. Two basic configurations of the Mac Mini will become available on 22 January 2005.

Analysis

The Mac mini signals a resurgence in interest in the truly small form factor computer. The Mac mini is the smallest product available from a major manufacturer. Apple has used notebook technologies to create a densely packed computer that is about the size of four DVD cases stacked on top of one another. The base unit is priced low, but adding memory for a total of 1GB, a faster processor, a recordable DVD drive, wireless keyboard and mouse, and internal wireless will drive up the price to more than \$1,300.

The base model of the Mac mini could make a fine second computer, possibly dedicated to music, movies and video, as its USB and FireWire ports enable storage, audio and video expansion. All it lacks to operate as a media PC is an optical audio port for a surround sound system, but that omission can be remedied through the addition of a USB peripheral. Watch for the emergence of USB peripheral boxes that fully integrate the Mac into a home theater system, which will signal that the Mac mini has become a model for what a media PC could be.

To be widely adopted by businesses, the Mac mini would require more available software. Windows has become such a pervasive part of the computing culture that business users who are accustomed to the Microsoft operating system will not likely switch their allegiance. However, the portability and small size of the form factor of the Mac mini will likely appeal to business users. Although the Mac mini will not cause a significant shift away from the PC, it will enable Apple to re-enter the homes of consumers who only own PCs, and will likely keep the Mac interesting to those few businesses that do use them.

Recommendations

- **Vendors:** Consider introducing PC products that can fit into the Mac mini footprint.
- **Users:** Evaluate ultra-small desktop devices as a possible alternative to notebooks, if image compatibility with notebook products is assured.

Analytical Source: Martin Reynolds, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Don't Base Mac-vs.-Windows Decisions on Faulty Assumptions" — Presuming that students would benefit from working with the dominant Windows platform, a school district replaced its Macs with PCs, only to find that its policy failed to enhance the educational experience. **By Bill Rust**
- "Forecast: PC Market by Operating System Worldwide, 1998-2008 (Executive Summary)" — Gartner's most recent forecast reflects piracy in emerging markets and predicts that by 2008, 7.5 percent of PCs will ship with Linux, though more than half of them will end up running Windows. **By Annette Jump**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this FirstTake.)

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Corporate Headquarters
56 Top Gallant Road
Stamford, CT 06902-7700
U.S.A.
+1 203 964 0096

European Headquarters
Tamesis
The Glanty
Egham
Surrey, TW20 9AW
UNITED KINGDOM
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters
Level 7, 40 Miller Street
North Sydney
New South Wales 2060
AUSTRALIA
+61 2 9459 4600

Latin America Headquarters
Av. das Nações Unidas 12.551
9 andar—WTC
04578-903 São Paulo SP
BRAZIL
+55 11 3443 1509