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Apple Offers iMac's Laptop Offspring, the iBook

By STEVE LOHR JULY 22, 1999

With its corporate comeback gaining momentum, Apple Computer Inc. introduced a powerful notebook computer yesterday intended for the consumer market -- a machine that breaks new ground in the personal computer industry for both its industrial design and its use of **wireless** technology.

The housing of the shell-shaped laptop computer, called iBook, combines translucent white plastic with rubber sheathing in either of two colors -- blue or tangerine orange. In being colorful, the new notebook echoes Apple's popular iMac desktop model, introduced last August, which comes in five colors. And like the iMac, the Apple iBook has been designed to be easy to use and to get access to the Internet.

"We asked home and education customers what they wanted, and when you added it all up, what they really wanted was an iMac to go," said Steven P. Jobs, acting chief executive of Apple.

The iBook has a number of other innovative design touches. It has no latch, and has a handle that flips up from the rear. Its power cord winds up in a plastic device that resembles a slender yo-yo, for quick, tangle-free packing. The lights that

indicate that the battery is charged or being recharged, turning from amber to green, ring the cord socket on the computer.

The iBook has a six-hour battery life -- the length of an average schoolday -- and is powered by a fast microprocessor, rated at 300 megahertz. Priced at \$1,599, the iBook is fast, powerful and stylish, though a bit heavy at more than six pounds, according to industry analysts. Apple says it will be available in September.

The **wireless** features for iBook were the most striking technological innovation that Apple announced at the Macworld trade show in New York yesterday, analysts said. The technology, developed jointly with Lucent Technologies Inc., amounts to a **wireless** local network.

Called Airport, the technology allows people using iBooks to have **wireless** connections to each other and to the Internet as long as they are within 150 feet of a small white "base station" that is plugged into a telephone or network connection at home or in a school. The speed at which data is relayed from the base station to an iBook machine is extremely fast, comparable to office Ethernets. It can deliver Internet access to each of the iBooks at the same speed as the base station's Net connection, which can range from slower conventional dial-up modems over telephone lines to high-speed network links.

The iBook communicates with the base station via two antennas built into the notebook computer. The **wireless** feature, analysts said, would be a convenience for home users, especially in households with more than one computer. But they added that it would probably be most attractive to schools, which could save the time and trouble of wiring many machines in classrooms.

The **wireless** local-network feature, analysts noted, makes Apple the leader in using **wireless** technology.

"The iBook itself is impressive, but it's the **wireless** technology that is the real magic here," said Richard Doherty, president of Envisioneering, a research firm. "It puts Apple nine months to a year ahead of the rest of the industry."

To use the **wireless** technology, an iBook user must make two optional purchases, a \$99 add-in card and the \$299 base station, which can link as many as 10 machines.

People use notebook computers in homes and schools. But other than companies saying their less expensive models are intended for students and home use, analysts say that notebooks today are not really designed for the consumer market.

"Apple is creating the category, and everyone else will be forced to follow -- much as the iMac made the industry rethink desktop machines for consumers," said Tim Bajarin, president of Creative Strategies Inc., a consulting firm.

The iMac has been a big contributor to Apple's recovery. Its share of the consumer PC market has jumped to an estimated 12 percent, from 5 percent a year ago. Roughly 90 percent of iMac owners use their machines to surf the Internet, and 33 percent of iMac buyers are first-time computer users.

Wearing his trademark black turtleneck and frayed jeans with no belt, Mr. Jobs used his 90-minute address to the Apple faithful to underline the signs of the company's revival. Apple has reported seven consecutive profitable quarters, and its current cash hoard amounts to more than \$3 billion, he said.

The vital constituency of software developers -- nearly 4,000 to date -- are "coming back to the Macintosh and recommitting themselves to the Mac," Mr. Jobs said, referring to Apple's operating system. Some new converts to the once-again expanding Mac community shared the dais with Mr. Jobs yesterday, including the game maker Bungie Software and I.B.M., which is writing its Via Voice speech recognition for the Macintosh.

A masterful public performer, as well as a renowned leader of product teams, Mr. Jobs included a few theatrical touches yesterday. The morning began with a taller, younger semblance of the Apple co-founder talking of introducing "insanely great" new products. It was, in fact, Noah Wyle, the actor who plays Dr. John Carter on "E.R.," mimicking Mr. Jobs -- though many in the audience did not catch on

immediately. Mr. Wyle had played Mr. Jobs in the recent television movie "Pirates of Silicon Valley."

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