

## **Forget netbooks; now mini-laptops are smartbooks**

*Ashlee Vance*

*Just when consumers were starting to understand the concept of the netbook — those smaller-than-laptops PCs — the electronics industry is lobbying another category of computer at them.*

Now a group of electronics companies that use the ARM processor have banded together to turn netbooks into smartbooks.

At the Computex trade show next week in Taipei, a whole crop of new mobile computers will go on display, and the devices will share one major thing in common. They'll use a variant of the ARM chip architecture rather than Intel's Atom chip as their main engine. It's a trend that Matt Richtel and I wrote about in April.

The companies making the ARM chips, like Qualcomm and Freescale, have teamed up to try to wrestle the netbook moniker away from Intel. They want PC makers to describe the ARM-based devices as smartbooks.

The ARM-based smartbooks should be selling for less than netbooks and they will have much longer battery lives — around eight hours as opposed to two hours. Of course, the battery life comes with some major trade-offs. The ARM chips have less computing power than Intel's Atom, and rely on the Linux operating system instead of Microsoft's Windows.

But the software interest is there for the ARM crowd. Adobe may soon be making an announcement about supporting high-definition Flash on smartbooks. Broadcom, another ARM chip maker, may make the Flash splash in tandem with Adobe at Computex.

Nvidia, too, intends to show off the multimedia skills of devices based on its Tegra chip, yet another ARM product. The company has talked to me about computer makers' possibly showing off laptops that include detachable screens. Inside the screen would be a Tegra chip that enables the screen itself to get access to the Internet and process data. So you could buy a laptop and get an e-reader of sorts as well.

Smartbooks echoes the term for the Web-enabled cellphone, smartphones. Meanwhile several PC makers are squabbling privately over the use of netbooks. Dell, for one, wants it to be the generic term. The industry analysts have rallied around "mini notebooks," but that doesn't come trippingly off the tongue. Microsoft's term, "ultra mobile PCs," has been left on the wayside.

But the explosion of new products this year may help decide matters. Nvidia thinks this year's Computex show will be a breakthrough in novel computing devices that go against our long-held views of PCs.

"This is the true beginning of a new era," said Jen-Hsun Huang, the chief executive of Nvidia. "All of a sudden you will get computing devices of all shapes and sizes."

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