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Apple store buzzes with Nano fever

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SAN FRANCISCO--Sally Robert, of Tiburon, Calif., doesn't even own a television set. But she's got a couple of iPods and lots of accessories--and she was on a mission Saturday to update her collection with the just-released iPod Nano.

Robert, who found out about the Nano while looking online for an iPod-ready BMW, was just one of numerous shoppers at the Apple Computer store in downtown San Francisco, where the diminutive new addition to the iPod family created a palpable buzz. The iPod Nano, unveiled this week as Apple's replacement for the popular iPod Mini, is much smaller than its predecessor, has a color screen that can display photos and uses flash memory rather than a bulkier hard drive.

Actually, to call Robert a "shopper" is a bit of a misnomer. Unlike others, who took their time around a crowded Nano display table at the front of the store, she asked an employee at the door where to get the wee device he was casually holding in his hand. He replied "at the register," and Robert got right in line. She knows her verve for everything iPod is a bit "ridiculous. But it's a life choice," she said.

In contrast, Brian Chance of Santa Cruz, Calif., who was attending a trade show at a downtown hotel, spent some time making sure he could see the iPod Nano screen clearly enough with his bad eyes. After years of hearing from a friend how great the iPod is, what put Chance in purchase mode, he said, was discovering the world of podcasting while on his computer at his hotel Friday night.

"I get bored with my own music after awhile and I like to hear the spoken word," he said, adding that he also likes the iPod's stopwatch, alarm clock and other functions.

Chance, at one point, was one of 10 customers testing out 10 Nanos at the display table. Meanwhile, the adjacent iPod Mini display table sat lonely, with no one testing out the 10 display Minis and iPod Shuffles. The Nano is replacing the Mini, which Apple is phasing out.

Also in San Francisco on business was Jon Benediktsson, of Iceland, who bought three Nanos--one for each of two his teenage children, and one for one of their friends.

"I saw something in the news (about the Nano) and liked it immediately," he said. The Nanos will replace his kids' Mini, so Benediktsson,

who has no iPod of his own, said he thinks he might get a used Mini out of the deal.

Shoppers Jin and Don Jiang of San Francisco had just come from a nearby Cingular store, where they expected to fall in love with Apple's also newly released iTunes phone. The Rokr phone, made with Motorola and carried exclusive by Cingular, holds up to 100 songs.

But the Jiangs were disappointed at the Rokr's design, which Jin said was bulky and Don said "looks just like a regular phone." They fell for the Nano, however, even though it wasn't what they were initially looking for. "If we get it today, it will be an impulse buy."

Minutes later, they bought it.

Nicholas Blum, a San Francisco resident who was at the store to drop off his iPod Photo for repair, was in awe of the Nano's size. The device weighs 1.5 ounces and is 0.27 inches thick, thinner than a standard No. 2 pencil, Apple says.

Like the Jiangs, Blum had been watching for the iPod phone. "I was so unimpressed with the phone and so over-impressed with this," he said of the Nano.

The iPod Nano comes in black or white and in two sizes: the 4GB iPod Nano holds about 1,000 songs and the 2GB iPod Nano holds 500 songs. They cost \$249 and \$199, respectively. The Mini line, while available, comes in four colors and in capacities of 4GB for \$199 and 6GB for \$249.

The Rokr phone sells for \$249.99 with a two-year service agreement. It has a color display and features built-in stereo speakers, as well as stereo headphones that also serve as a mobile headset with a microphone.

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