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14 lakh Aakash Tablets booked in 14 days

By Harsimran Julka , ET Bureau | 3 Jan, 2012, 10.54AM IST

NEW DELHI: The new year may be a year of low-cost computing in India. Sales bookings for the world's cheapest tablet, Aakash, have soared to 14 lakh units just two weeks after it was put up for sale online for Rs 2,500 a piece.

To cater to the 'unexpected' demand, UK-based vendor Datawind, the maker of the \$35 tablet, has decided to establish three new factories - in Cochin, Noida and Hyderabad - in the first half of 2012 to assemble the tablet. [Datawind](#) currently has only one factory in Hyderabad, with its vendor [Quad](#), which makes the LCD panel for the tablet.

"We never expected such a high response from both corporate and individual buyers. We plan to supply 70,000-75,000 units per day once the factories are in place by April," [Suneet Singh Tuli](#), CEO, Datawind told ET from [Panama](#), where he was invited to advise its government on its low-cost computing project.

"Around two weeks ago, we received a call from India's computer emergency response team that our website was probably suffering from a large cyber attack. We had to inform them we had just opened sale through our website," Tuli said. Datawind, which put out a limited 30,000 tablets for sale online with e-commerce provider [Ncarry.com](#), has already exhausted the first lot.

A spokesman for Ncarry.com, said that the website is catering to orders across India, with delivery in 5-7 working days. Ncarry is a subsidiary of Netherlands-based Nimbuzz, which makes instant messaging applications. The [Nimbuzz](#) IM comes pre-installed on Aakash.

Pre-sales bookings for the Aakash tablet (about 400,000 in October) had surpassed the Indian tablet market which grossed about 250,000-300,000 tablets till last year.

Even with a resistive touch and slow processor, Aakash has received about 1 lakh orders a day since online launch last month. In comparison, [Apple](#) sold about 10 lakh [iPads](#) in 28 days and 30 lakh in 80 days of its launch in April 2010. Currently, the cheapest model of iPad at Rs 29,500, is about 12 times costlier than Aakash.

Aakash's maker Datawind is, however, strangled with supply constraints, compared to Apple which managed smooth deliveries of the iPad. "We are not accepting cash for bookings currently, as we want to sort out supply issues," Tuli added.

Datawind plans to put on sale online the next version of Aakash - Ubislate 7, priced at Rs 2999, by mid-January. The newer version will come with a slot for insertion of a SIM card, for access of internet by GPRS or 2G connection. The current version of the tablet can access internet via WiFi access.

Besides, the newer version will be twice as fast with a 700 Mhz processor compared to a 366 Mhz processor in the current tablet. In another development, the government has extended the letter of credit to Datawind to supply the next lot of 90,000 tablets, even though IIT Rajasthan is yet to provide the test specifications for the next version, which it wants to procure for supply to students. The delay from the government's end is likely to land Aakash in the hands of commercial buyers before students for whom the low-cost tablet was meant for in the first place.

