

Apple launches online, app store in China

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Chinese shoppers in the market for an iPad now won't have to travel so far to get their hands on one.

Apple Inc. said Wednesday that it has launched an online store (apple.com.cn) in China to allow shoppers there to order popular products such as iPhones, iPods and iPads for home delivery. The company also has made its popular App Store available to China-based customers.

Previously, customers in mainland China could pay for these products online, but had to go to one of Apple's four stores in Beijing and Shanghai to pick them up. The move makes it possible for Apple to make more aggressive headway in the Chinese market.

While the iPhone has been a runaway hit in the U.S. since it first went on sale in 2007, it has not reached the same level of ubiquity in China. Apple commands just 7.1 percent of the smartphone market there, ranking fifth behind Nokia Corp., Samsung Electronics Corp., Motorola Inc., and Sony Ericsson, according to Analysys International.

The new App Store will let Chinese iPhone and iPod Touch owners access the company's curated catalog of over 300,000 applications. However, to purchase these "apps" customers must have dual-currency credit cards, a requirement that means some Chinese Apple fans will remain barred.

The moves expand on Apple's attempts to win more customers in China. The company has already said it plans to open 25 more retail stores in China by 2011.

Shares of the Cupertino, California-based company fell \$1.13 to \$306.92 in afternoon trading.

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