Google Poised to Show off Latest Devices, Services

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Google is expected to use its annual software developers' conference to showcase the latest mobile devices running on its Android software, while also unveiling other features in its evolving product line-up.

The gathering, scheduled to begin Wednesday morning in San Francisco, provides Google Inc. with an opportunity to flex its technological muscle in front of a sold-out audience of engineers and entrepreneurs who develop applications and other features that can make smartphones and tablets more appealing.

Reporters from around the world also will be on hand, giving Google a chance to generate more hoopla about its latest innovations.

The company, which is based in Mountain View, Calif., made a big splash at last year's conference by staging an elaborate production to highlight the potential of Google Glass — an Internet-connected device and camera that can be worn on a person's face like a pair of spectacles. Google co-founder Sergey Brin wowed the crowd last year by taking to the stage and then engaging in a live video chat with a group of skydivers who were in a dirigible hovering above the convention. When they jumped, the skydivers' descent to the rooftop was shown live through the Google Glass camera.

Some of the developers in attendance last year paid $1,500 apiece for a Google Glass prototype that was delivered to them in March.

Google hasn't spelled out what its executives will discuss during this year's opening keynote, which is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. PT and last for nearly three hours. Given that Google Glass is now being tested by the developers who bought the "Explorer" edition, the device might not be one of the featured attractions.

It's a safe bet the spotlight at some point Wednesday will shine on Android, which

already has been activated on more than 750 million devices around the world. Google gives the mobile operating system away, making it easier for gadget makers to sell their devices at prices below Apple Inc.'s iPhone and iPad.

Android has helped Google make more money because its search engine and other services, including maps, are usually built into the devices that rely on the software.

That tie-in drives more visitors to Google, giving the company more opportunities to sell the advertising that generates most of its revenue.

Much of the speculation about the conference, dubbed "Google I/O," has centered on a possible upgrade to the Nexus 7, a mini-tablet that debuted at last year's event as an alternative to the similarly sized Kindle Fire made by Amazon.com Inc. and the larger iPad. A few months after the Nexus 7 came out, Apple released the iPad Mini to counter the threat posed by Google's entrance into the market.

The next version of the Nexus 7 is expected to feature a much faster processor and a higher resolution display screen while maintaining the same $199 sales prices. If that turns out to be true, it could siphon even more sales from the iPad Mini, which starts at $329.

There's also speculation that Google will unveil a music-streaming service that would allow Android users to listen to their favorite songs and artists for a monthly fee.

Google has long been rumored to be in talks with music labels to work out the licensing rights for a service that would compete with Spotify, Internet radio provider Pandora Media Inc. and other outlets that stream digital music to Internet-connected computers, smartphones and tablets.

Another Google-designed phone under the Nexus brand is also a possibility. Google also could use the occasion to introduce a model made by its unprofitable Motorola Mobility subsidiary.

A sneak peak at the next generation of Android, code named "Key Lime Pie," could be in the offing, too.

Other potential product introductions include laptops running on Android or another Google operating system based on the company's Chrome web browser.

Google also may provide more insights into the popularity of Google Plus, a social networking alternative to Facebook that launched nearly two years ago. Google Plus had more than 135 million active users at the end of last year, based on Google's last public disclosure about activity on that network. That left Google Plus far behind Facebook, which boasts 1.1 billion active users.

In an attempt persuade more people to use its social networking service more frequently, Google has promised to keep adding tools that aren't available on Facebook.

On other fronts, Google is believed to be working on a digital gaming center that could be unveiled Wednesday. Getting into gaming would give Google an opportunity to participate in one of the most popular activities on mobile devices.

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