

Tablet manufacturers target toddlers

By Matt Townsend, Bloomberg

Toddler-safe texting has arrived.

Spurred by burgeoning demand for kid-styled tablets, LeapFrog Enterprises Inc. and VTech Holdings Ltd. revamped their tyke-targeted devices to add features that let three-year-olds send short messages to grandma and even watch online videos without stumbling across websites kids shouldn't see.

"Exposing our children to the Internet at an early age is incredibly valuable, but how do you do it safely?" John Barbour, chief executive officer of Emeryville-based LeapFrog, said in an interview.

By tackling parents' fears about their kids going online, these toymakers are seeking to extend their dominance in a niche category of the booming tablet market that they created two years ago after releasing the first versions of LeapFrog's LeapPad and VTech's InnoTab.

With the added Web features in the recently released \$150 LeapPad Ultra and \$100 InnoTab 3s, they are also presenting more of an alternative to devices from Amazon.com Inc. , Samsung Electronics Co. and Apple Inc. in the larger market for tablets that is projected by researcher IDC to increase 34 percent to 67 million units shipped this year.

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