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NAND flash memory could change the portable industry

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Companies manufacturing NAND flash memory hope to make a big splash at tradeshow this year, as their technology may soon replace hard drives in mini notebooks and provide cell phones with incredible storage capabilities.

Manufacturers of NAND flash memory say they will expand the market for their chips over the next few years and colonize devices that now rely on hard drives or other types of memory. The NAND noise will be particularly strong at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) this week in Las Vegas, with manufacturers showing off the solid-state technology as an increasingly important component in cell phones and talking up how it will find its way into notebook hard drives in 2006. Bottom line: Hard drives may have a cost advantage as a way to store data, but they're bulky, take longer to start up and use more energy.

By about the turn of the decade, NAND could even replace hard drives entirely in some mini notebooks because of the increasing amount of data the chips can hold, according to Steve Appleton, CEO of Micron Technology, one of the world's largest memory makers.

"The average notebook has 30GB (of hard drive storage).

Jim Handy, an analyst at Semico Research, says NAND won't replace notebook hard drives as long as Microsoft keeps expanding the number of storage-heavy features in its software, but it will become standard in video cameras, displacing tape, recordable DVDs and mini drives.

Flash-based cameras, already a staple in Japan, are smaller, and the cost premium associated with the chips can be hidden in a \$500 camera. I expect it will go with flash," Handy said.

NAND flash will also begin to appear in car navigation systems and play a role in large data storage systems at corporations and government agencies in the relatively near future, said Jon Kang, senior vice president of Samsung Electronics' technical marketing group.

The NAND evolution fits the pattern established in Moore's Law, which states that the number of transistors on a given chip will double every two years.

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