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Intel, Micron Mark Flash Memory Milestone

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IM Flash Technologies, a joint venture of Intel and Micron, said its 50-nanometer manufacturing process will allow it to deliver higher density NAND flash memory chips. Rival Samsung uses a 60 nanometer manufacturing process for its competing flash memory storage devices.

[IM Flash Technologies](#), a NAND flash memory venture established by [Intel](#) (Nasdaq: INTC) and [Micron](#), leaped ahead of rival [Samsung](#) this week by sampling a 50-nanometer manufacturing process that more efficiently delivers high density flash memory chips.

Last week Samsung announced it had achieved manufacturing of its NAND flash memory chips with a 60-nanometer process. The 10 nanometer difference achieved by IM Flash will give Intel and Micron an edge, Semico Research analyst Jim Handy told TechNewsWorld.

"[Samsung] has been the process leader," he said. "It's going to give Intel and Micron a leg up on them."

Quick Flash

IM Flash's process [technology](#) will allow it to provide higher density NAND flash chips for MP3 players, handhelds and other consumer electronics. The company said industry forecasts put the NAND flash memory market at US\$13 to \$16 billion by 2006 and above \$25 billion in 2010.

Intel and Micron formed IM Flash in January to make memory chips for both companies.

"Working with Micron, we are poised to transition quickly to the 50 nm process technology and beyond," said Intel General Manager of the Flash Memory Group Brian Harrison at the time of the announcement.

Players, Not PCs

While there was some speculation that the more efficient, higher-density flash memory development might help push a trend toward [PC](#) memory drives that replace hard drives, Handy said there will be a much larger flash memory market for other devices, such as consumer electronics, which may require more of the chips.

Makers of MP3 players, video recorders and the like are poised to embrace flash memory technology that replaces "intricate mechanisms," according to Handy.

Hard-Drive Heading

Consumers are likely to recognize the difference. The new NAND flash technology from Intel and Micron could bulk up the storage capacity of popular mobile music players such as [Apple's](#) (Nasdaq: AAPL) [iPods](#), IC Insights Vice President of Market Research Brian Matas told TechNewsWorld.

"It might make it a little more attractive to put this type of memory in that type of product," he said.

Matas agreed that the higher-density flash memory solutions are not likely to displace desktop and notebook PC hard-drives anytime soon, but the latest manufacturing processes will help drive density up and price down, making the flash memory option more attractive for computer makers, he added.

"It's beginning to open that door a little bit more," he said.

In that vein, Samsung introduced a flash-memory drive-powered notebook computer earlier this year. [ECT](#)