Joojoo Web Tablet To Reach Consumers By Month's End

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SEATTLE (AP) — The Joojoo, a Web-browsing tablet device that's the subject of a high-profile Silicon Valley legal dispute, appears on track to reach early buyers at the end of February.

The flat touch-screen computer was known until December as the CrunchPad, after the technology blog TechCrunch. It was born from a post by the blog's well-connected and outspoken founder, Michael Arrington, that called for collaborators on a "dead simple and dirt cheap touch screen Web tablet."

Singapore-based Chandrasekar Rathakrishnan stepped up. His software startup, Fusion Garage, worked with Arrington and his team until November. At that point the project imploded, with Fusion Garage announcing it would sell the device under a new name — and without Arrington's involvement.

Despite a federal lawsuit filed by Arrington, Rathakrishnan said Wednesday that production of the JooJoo is under way. CSL Group, a Malaysia-based mobile phone and netbook maker, is subsidizing production costs in exchange for an undisclosed revenue share, Rathakrishnan said.

Arrington is seeking damages and to keep Fusion Garage from selling or profiting from the Joojoo device. His lawyer didn't return a message seeking comment about whether they might take further legal action.

CSL, which makes Blackberry-like phones it calls "Blueberry," will also be an investor in the startup's next round of funding, expected to close in the next two weeks. Late last year, Fusion Garage said it raised $3 million in a first round.

In an interview, Rathakrishnan would not say how many people pre-ordered the $499 tablet. But "a good part" of those who did will receive their devices at the end of this month, he said.

The tablet landscape has changed dramatically since the Joojoo was first unveiled. At the International Consumer Electronics Show in January, Hewlett-Packard Co., Dell Inc. and others presented tablet prototypes. Less than a month later, Apple Inc. took the wraps off a long-anticipated version it calls the iPad.

Apple's iPhone upended the smart phone category, leaving competitors scrambling to come out with touch-screen phones and application stores of their own. Many analysts expect Apple's iPad to define the nascent tablet category in the same way.

Rathakrishnan, however, said he believes the Joojoo gives consumers a better

experience than the iPad because it has a larger screen and people will use it to surf the "real" Web, or sites they see on their regular PCs, rather than consume bits and pieces delivered through add-on apps.

He also implied Apple had imitated Fusion Garage in its development and marketing of the iPad. Both devices start at $499, Rathakrishnan noted, and Steve Jobs, Apple's CEO, made his presentation from what looked like a couch after Fusion Garage described the Joojoo as perfect for "couch computing."

Apple didn't immediately return messages seeking comment.

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