

Portable power stations for iPhone: Makers target 10 percent export growth

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Banking on iPhone's unrelenting popularity across export markets, suppliers are boosting product development and output.

Riding on the bullish iPhone line, accessory suppliers in China are optimistic of sustained growth, eyeing at least 10 percent increase in export revenue this year. Sales of the former were estimated at 10 million units in 2009. Projections from analyst RBC indicate shipments will exceed 35 million units this year, and top 82 million by 2012.

Shenzhen Hali-power's model HI-P60 external iPhone power bank doubles as a pocket projector with a built-in speaker. It runs on a 11.1V 1,300mAh Li-polymer battery and measures 148x70x41mm.

Covering all price points from low-end to upscale models, China's iPhone accessories segment is generally classified into two major categories. One is made up nonelectronic items such as screen protectors, skins and cases.

The other consists of electronic attachments and power supplies, including earphones, microphones, speakers, docking stations, FM transmitters, A/V converters and cables, power banks and chargers. Unlike the first group, these carry IPR fees for iPhone's 30-pin connecting socket for docking stations, chargers and power banks. Manufacturers adopt patented dock connectors to obtain Apple's "Works with iPhone" certification and boost shipments.

Only a few large makers such as Shenzhen Hali-power Industrial Co. Ltd have so far been granted the license. The company has both "Works with iPhone" and "Made for iPod" seals of approval. Many others, including Newlift Technologies Ltd and Shenzhen Reflying Electronic Co. Ltd, are applying for the rights to use such marks for smoother export transactions.

To bolster competitiveness, suppliers keep a close eye on latest iPhone models and technological advancements for R&D, with current activities focused on the 3GS handset version.

Most are boosting efforts to widen selections, while some are exploring add-on features. Newlift, for instance, develops six to eight accessories annually. It released the model NT-074 gaming handgrip in 2H09, which is designed for playing games on the iPhone 3G/3GS and iPod touch 2G/3G.

Shenzhen Hali-power rolls out more than 10 products per year. It has introduced the model HI-P60 power projector, which displays 5 to 70in videos and photos on the wall. The unit also functions as a 2W speaker and an external power bank using a 1,300mAh Li-polymer battery.

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Products & prices

iPhone cases from China are mostly made of leather, silicone and crystal plastic. The first type accounts for the majority of output, and is priced from \$1 to \$3. Silicone and crystal cases are about \$0.50.

Earphones and microphones range from \$1 to \$3, while portable speakers are \$4 to \$12, depending on the sound quality.

Cables are mainly made of silicone and are quoted between \$1 and \$4. Basic low-end models are designed only for data transmission, while midrange and upscale A/V units connect an iPhone to a monitor or TV for video and audio playback.

FM transmitters, usually \$5 to \$10, support digital PLL tuning and 87.7 to 107.9MHz frequency range.

The iPhone's irreplaceable battery design has restricted China companies from developing replacement cells but not from introducing alternative backup power supplies and accessories. Power banks or external batteries are priced from \$10 to \$40, varying on the capacity and battery chemistry.

Leveraging mainland China's position as the top battery hub in the world, about 100 iPhone portable power station makers offer products with 1,200 to 2,000mAh capacity. Li-ion models dominate the output with about 80 percent share. Smaller and lighter Li-polymer versions with the same capacity are priced 30 percent higher. Most batteries are sourced locally.

Shenzhen Hali-power uses cells from Taiwan suppliers. Its HI-C20 model is compatible with the iPhone 3G and 3GS. The device features a 1,300mAh Li-polymer battery and supports up to 230hr standby or 3.9hr 3G talk time.

Chargers go for \$1 to \$3 for basic configurations, including travel and in-car units. Charging kits, which bundle various plugs, are quoted at \$5 to \$10.

Docking stations vary widely between \$6 and \$50 because of add-on features. Low-end variants basically charge, transmit data and output A/V for \$6 to \$10.

Midrange units, priced at \$15 to \$25, have a speaker, volume control, FM radio and alarm clock. Upscale models, which go for as much as \$50, are differentiated from the two types by high-quality speakers with dynamic bass boost and surround sound. These are mostly compatible with other MP3/MP4 and portable media players, and integrate card readers.

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Hong Kong: Diverse options keep line fresh

The iPhone is the most accessorized mobile phone by Hong Kong companies, with each update widely anticipated for any opportunity to develop new auxiliary items.

Cases, the most extensively supplied nonelectronic item, are made of PC silicone or leather. Hundreds of designs are available to cater to different user preferences. In-house color printing capability enables manufacturers to accommodate diverse buyers' requests.

Choices of metallic finish on plastic cases are not restricted to smooth surfaces but apply to textured models as well. Customers can select various levels of reflection intensity and specify the case thickness. Some suppliers offer engraving services to achieve an elegant, high-end effect. Two of H&Y Industrial Ltd's latest iPhone PC cases sport pounded metallic and chrome finishes.

For electronic items, desktop cradles are getting a lot of attention among charging solutions. Most units come in black or white, and feature minimalist designs matching the iPhone's slim exterior. Aside from battery charging and data synchronization functions, optional features include a movable connector, audio output and extra charging ports.

Kidigi Co. Ltd's LC universal cradle series has an adjustable connector to accommodate most iPhone and iPod models without having to remove the cases.

Another power solution on the rise is the backup battery. Most versions boast higher capacity compared with originals, while some come with a cable.

iPhone docks continue to be integrated into clock radios and desktop music systems. They have become a standard optional feature in many Internet, DAB and HD radios.

The Radius model from Hip Shing Electronics Ltd comes with a clock radio, dot-matrix LCD and dual alarms.

The unlocking of more Bluetooth profiles, including advanced audio distribution, in iPhone 3G and 3GS versions, invigorated Hong Kong suppliers of headphones and speakers based on this wireless technology. A selection of portable to hi-fi variants is available, and additional designs are under development by about dozen Bluetooth specialists in the territory.

Avantwave Ltd's model Bluenut Bluetooth 2.1+EDR compliant speaker has a class D amplifier with two 2.5W speakers, a

slide switch, an auxiliary input jack, auto-power off and an angle-adjustable stand.

Assorted iPhone accessories are available in gift packs. These typically include a case or charger and small items such as a stylus, screen protector and earphones.

Taiwan: Portable power stations in spotlight

About 40 to 50 makers in Taiwan offer portable iPhone power stations, which usually double as emergency chargers and power banks. Most also produce chargers and docking stations.

Power stations are categorized as single- or multifunction. Power 7 Technology Corp., for example, offers the PowerLink model, which combines a battery pack, data cable and flash drive compatible with the iPhone or iPod.

Holy Wealth Technology Group Co. Ltd's 3-in-1 Multi-Bar ON805 model works as a 200mAh emergency charger supporting up to 30min talk time. It can also be fitted with a 250/270, 500, 600, 750, 1,600 or 2,000mAh battery.

Units incorporate a 30-pin connector or USB port with adapter to connect to iPhones. Variants with a USB connector are considered universal chargers for similarly interfaced electronic devices.

Li-polymer batteries are now makers' preferred power source for portable devices because of their compact size and light weight. Most models comply with UL and FCC, some even passing stricter Apple standards.

Ching Wei Telcom Co. Ltd offers an iPhone case with a built-in ultraslim battery measuring 2 to 3mm thick and supporting up to 2,000mAh capacity. The supplier is currently exploring new materials and plans to release plastic cases integrating batteries within the year.

Taking advantage of their strong electrical and industrial design background, companies such as Power 7 have established design teams that follow iPhone trends. The majority of makers provide OEM, ODM and off-brand products to Apple-certified accessory distributors. Only a few, including Ching Wei, have this certification themselves.

Manufacturing and major design centers are located in Guangdong province in mainland China.

Prices depend largely on power capacity and functionality.

Entry-level portable power stations with 200mAh power capacity go for \$4 or \$5. Single-function models with 750 to 1,600mAh capacity are quoted between \$6 and \$10. Those with 2,000mAh are \$15 to \$20.

Multifunction units are priced between \$8 and \$15.

Note: All price quotes in this report are in US dollars unless otherwise specified. FOB prices were provided by the companies interviewed only as reference prices at the time of interview and may have changed.

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