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Strong world-wide consumer demand for portable personal computers boosted PC shipments by 14% to 16% in the third quarter over a year earlier, raising the prospect of the first strong holiday PC sales in three years.

Two new reports from market-research firms suggest that demand for notebook computers and the acceptance of wireless networks in the home are driving world-wide PC sales at the fastest rate since the third quarter of 2000.

The reports also show world-wide shipments by No. 2 PC supplier Hewlett-Packard Co. of Palo Alto, Calif., pulling nearly even with market leader Dell Inc., based in Round Rock, Texas. Both companies are due to report fiscal third-quarter results next month.

According to Gartner Inc., world-wide shipments in the quarter ended Sept. 30 rose 14.1% over a year earlier, to 42.6 million units. The U.S., Europe and Asia all reported rising shipments, Gartner said.

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International Data Corp. separately said it believes unit shipments rose 15.7% during the same period. The two companies' numbers often differ slightly because they use different methods to calculate shipments.
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H-P, which lost the top spot world-wide to Dell a year ago, pulled to within striking distance after sharp price-cutting of consumer PC prices in August. The price cuts hurt the company's profits but helped boost its U.S. shipments by 35%, the largest increase of any supplier.

Dell's world-wide share rose to 15.3% from 13.6% a year earlier, while H-P's consumer sales helped propel its share to 15.1% from 13.5% a year earlier, Gartner estimated.

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Kevin J. Delaney in Paris contributed to this article.

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