

A £50 Laptop to Change the World

The story of a simple to use, wind-up computer that's been specially designed for use in developing countries. Unveiled last week, the laptop will be sold at cost price to governments of developing nations to be distributed to schoolchildren free of charge.



The mini-computer is the result of the OLPC (One Laptop Per Child) initiative, set up to improve education in developing countries. OLPC is a not-for-profit spin-off project from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Testament to what can be achieved when technology corporations pool their resources, the laptop is assembled from parts currently costing £76, but due to drop to £50 soon.

Primarily an educational tool, the machine will run on customised open-source software (see tinyurl.com/2v535q) that is available free online. It will include a built-in webcam and wireless connection ability. Most intriguing is the power source – users will charge the device with either a winding handle or ripcord.

OLPC will be rolling out the machines soon in the launch countries (Argentina, Brazil, Libya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uruguay and Thailand) aiming to distribute a million laptops to each country by mid 2007.

Designed for hard use and finished in bright lime green, the device features a 7.5" screen and is fairly heavy due to its robust construction (a 2mm casing is used). An OLPC spokesman explains: "Our laptop is very low power, has few parts, no moving parts and no openings through which dust and water can get in."

There is no hard drive or CD/DVD drive. Instead flash memory and 3 USB ports can transfer files from machine to machine. As you'd expect, the keyboard is the ideal size for children's hands. Screen quality is said to be surprising good quality considering the cost and it can be swivelled and folded down to form an e-book reader.

OLPC are aiming to transform the global landscape of education with this device and, provided the dynamo technology can work effectively, it certainly looks like an exciting and feasible plan.

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