TechKnowNews

India and Brazil Are Bringing Computers to the Masses

With the Digital Divide an ever present and continuously enlarging threat, countries are diligently coming up with solutions to bring technology to the masses. Two examples of this are India, with the Simputer and Brazil with what is being dubbed as the Volkscomputer – the peoples' computer.

Conceived in 1998 to address the need for a low-cost access device that will bring local-language IT to the masses, the Simputer project has finally reached its goal. As of this writing, the Simputer was scheduled to be launched late April 2001. What is it you ask? Simply put, the Simputer is an Internet device that will have the potential to help even non-literate users to check the Web, and get access to information, which until now has been impossible.

The device, named the **S**imple **I**nexpensive **M**ultilingual **P**eople's Comp**uter**, uses a touch screen interface, but allows for an external keyboard through a USB interface, for those who require data entry capability. It is built around Intel's StrongARM CPU, and is based on the Linux operating system, with 16MB of flash memory, a monochrome liquid crystal display (LCD), and a touch-panel for pen-based computing.

One main attraction is, other than it will be sold for about US$200 to the home user, you don't have to know English to access the Simputer, nor do you have to be literate. Currently, the device supports Hindi, Kannada, and English. And to help fight illiteracy, the Simputer reads out text in these same languages.

An important feature of the device is the smart card reader/writer. This feature will help increase the functionality of the Simputer and provide more value-added services. Some applications for which the Simputer can be used include: micro-banking, dissemination of agricultural information, Internet access, education, and census data collection.

The Simputer Trust, the non-profit entity that developed this device, will license the device for manufacture by commercial companies.

Brazil's version of the Simputer is the Volkscomputer. Very similar in configuration, the machine will have a 500-megahertz processor, 64 megabytes of main memory and 16 MB more on a flash chip that substitutes for a hard drive. There's a 56 kbps modem and the software is Linux-based and, therefore, free. Because the machine is modular, schools can link a series up to a regular PC that would act as a server.

Volkscomputer was created by the Federal University of Minas Gerais as a result of a commission last year by the Brazilian federal government. Still in its prototype stages, Brazil hopes to manufacture the device for US$600 and sell it to individuals on an installment plan for as little as $15 per month. In addition, installing the Volkscomputer in schools will give Internet access to 7 million students. Brazil is currently looking for a local manufacturer to begin production of the device.

Sources and for more information, visit:
http://www.simputer.org, http://www.bytesforall.org, and http://www.siliconvalley.com/docs/news/tech/082944.htm

Legislation Introduced in USA To Encourage IT Training in the Workplace

Legislation that is said to promote technology instruction in the workplace was re-introduced by a group of Senators in late April. It was introduced last year, but did not receive strong support. Legislators say the bill currently has bi-partisan support and is being strongly lobbied for by industry and expect that the bill will most likely pass this time.

Known as the Technology Education and Training Act, the bill would provide businesses with US$1500 tax credit per employee for information technology training. This is expected to cover about one quarter of the total cost of training. In addition, a second part of the bill would make people enrolled in non-degree information technology

training programs eligible for scholarship tax credits, now available only to students enrolled in two- and four-year colleges.

While the bill has its supporters, critics say that a tax exemption that goes directly to an employee's income would be more desirable. If passed, the bill will cost the US Government $700 million over 5 years.

Source: The Chronicle for Higher Education
http://www.chronicle.com/free/2001/04/2001042502t.htm

Latin America's Widest Reaching E-Learning Solution is Launched

On April 25, 2001, VCampus and UOL Inc., SA announced the launch of UOL-Argentina's e-learning campus. VCampus is the leading provider of end-to-end e-learning solutions, headquartered in Virginia, USA, and UOL is Latin America's largest Internet portal. Together, this partnership will make e-learning available to 1 million UOL users in Argentina, and is the first step to reaching the 17 million UOL users throughout Latin America and the world.

VCampus will be the exclusive e-learning solutions provider to UOL-Argentina for a period of three years. Argentineans now have immediate access to 150 information technology and telecommunications courses, accessible on: http://www.UOL.com.ar/e-ducacion/vcampus.

Source and for more information, visit**:**
http://www.individual.com (search for Vcampus)

Virtual Cell Site Wins Pirelli "INTERNET"ional Award

The Virtual Cell site won the Pirelli INTERNETional Award 2000 given to a multimedia work that best spreads science culture. VirtualCell.com is a multidisciplinary collaboration between Science, Computer Graphics, and World Language Classes at Coyle and Cassidy High School in Taunton, Massachusetts. The students in advanced science classes design models and create the written text that will accompany the models on the web. The 3D computer graphics students take these specifications and develop the

models. The world language students translate the text. Mentor teachers monitor the process and guide the development of the models. Collegiate level content experts review the models for accuracy. The head of the project is Mr. Jim Rusconi, who teaches at Coyle and Cassidy High School. Mr. Rusconi was invited to Italy to receive the $2700 award, which was given to the school.

The Pirelli INTERNETional award was created by Pirelli, the Italian multinational company that manufactures tires and cables, and systems for telecommunications and energy transmission. The award is carried out entirely on the Internet and is given to the multimedia work that best spreads science culture.

The website http://www.pirelliaward.com/english provides all the details of the award and who is eligible for consideration.

Sources and for more information, visit:
http://www.virtualcell.com,
http://www.pirelliaward.com/english, and
http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,42759,00.html

University Libraries In Developing Countries Gaining Greater Access To Academic Journals.

As reported by EdInvest, the education investment information facility at the World Bank:

"A cooperative project among four universities in northern Europe and ten universities in East Africa will enable African scholars to have wide access to academic journals for the first time. The project -- known as the Supply of Academic Publications to and from Universities in Developing Countries, or SAP -- is set to begin in July 2001 (Source: Chronicle of Higher Education). A separate initiative is being undertaken by the Association of Information Systems (AIS) which has announced that all university libraries in middle and low-income countries will be granted free subscriptions to the Communications of AIS (http://cais.aisnet.org/) and the Journal of AIS (http://jais.aisnet.org/). These libraries should contact Jennifer Davis at jdavis@cis.gsu.edu of the AIS Office."