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Ncore develops the lightest notebook computer

After producing world-class software for over a decade, the Indian information technology industry is all set to prove that it can also produce quality computer hardware.

A Bangalore-based IT design house might have set the ball rolling by designing what it calls the "smallest and lightest" notebook computer in the world.

Some leading companies have booked the four-pound notebook, which is suitable for multi-media and other specialised applications.

Ncore Technology, the developer of this notebook called `Yantra,' has already bagged a big order from Canada.

The Canadian importer has placed a letter of intent for 14,000 units of a modified `Yantra.' The notebooks will be supplied over the next 18 months, starting December this year.
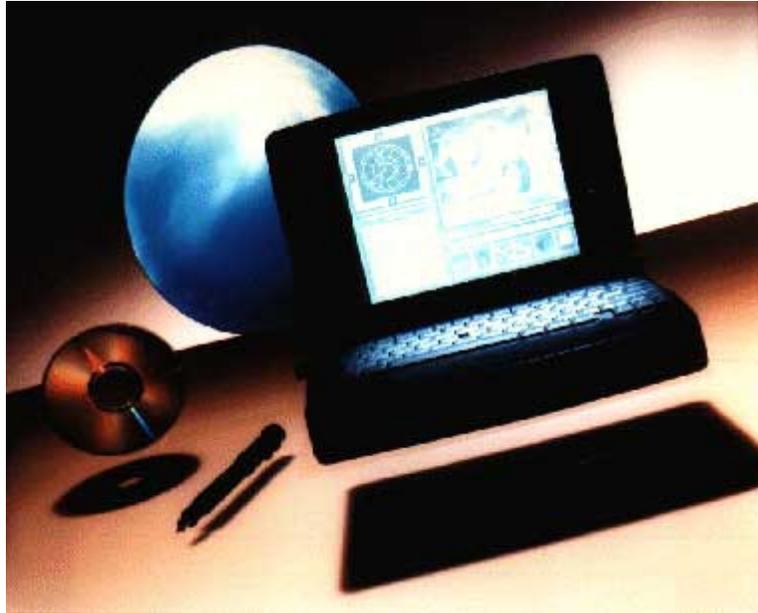
Ncore Technology, a 100 percent export-oriented unit, will also manufacture the notebook for a Japanese firm by the end of the current year.

The company has claimed an encouraging global response to its new product but prefers to keep the names of its global partners under wraps. A Japanese corporation has evaluated the notebook and may have the product notebook as a word processor. The specifications are currently being discussed.

The Japanese corporation may farm out a portion of its R&D work to Ncore and even invest in the company.

Vinay Deshpande, Managing Director of Ncore, said the company plans to soon upgrade the Yantra. Deshpande has roped in Anal K Jain, the former head of Sun Microsystems in India, to give the company a competitive edge at the global level. Jain has joined as an equity partner but no details were immediately available on his stake in the company.

"We're an independent design house ... the concept (the notebook) has yet to catch up with Indian IT companies," says Jain. According to him, many global brands depend on such design houses to hit upon future needs.

Ncore Technology's notebook, named `Yantra,' is being projected by the company as a revolution in computer hardware

The same view is echoed by Sridhar Mitta, president of technology division of Wipro Infotech, who says he has known Yantra from Alpha stage (drawing board stage): "I don't think any such type of notebook computer existing in the world today," he said adding, "this's an excellent product."

Sridhar Mitta, whose Wipro Global R&D is engaged in similar designing of products for global market, feels that Ncore would do well by targeting OEMs rather than involving itself in manufacturing: "Acer in Taiwan started off as a design house 10 years ago; even in Globar R&D, we design products keeping in mind of mostly for original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). Manufacturing in India is a costly business."

Ncore, which has 50 engineers working for it, is expecting a revenue of Rs. 6-7 crore this year. Last year it made Rs. 2 crore.

Anal Jain says if Ncore had the capital, it can sell Yantra for between Rs. 75,000-80,000 in India. But he insists that Yantra should not be confused with techno-gizmos like palmtop computers. "They've no practical relevance. Yantra is ideally suited for mobile computing."

Such a powerful multimedia notebook PC (with 800 MB; 1.2 GB of hard disk, upto 32 MB of RAM with a built-in CD-ROM and soundblaster in a 2.1 kg package) is particularly suited to use in application that demand portability along with access to large databases or CD-ROM, such as encyclopaedia, legal databases, field-service manuals (with animation, video clips, music and narration) as well as in portable presentation.

According to Jain, Yantra focuses on the concept of "true portability." It fits in less than half of a standard brief-case, leaving room for papers and other normal briefcase contents, eventhough, it sports a full size keyboard for touch typing. So, no aching shoulders and no need to carry a notebook PC outside a briefcase.