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Indian Linux appliance moves up-market

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Simputer maker Mobilis is readying a new family of low-cost Linux-based PCs for the Indian market. Mobilis's "Mobilis" and "SofCore" systems will ship in three to four months, offering a surprising range of functionality at prices appropriate for India's developing industrial economy, the company says.

(Click for larger view of Encore Mobilis webpad)

Mobilis says it will price its new systems between 10,000 and 15,000 rupies, or between $230 and $345 by today's exchange rates -- slightly more costly than the Simputer. The Simputer was conceived by Indian academics as a way to bring the digital age to rural Indian villages, but at about $200 has been criticized for being too expensive for wide adoption in a country where the average per capita income is about $350. India has about 13 million PCs, and a population of just over 1 billion, according to various sources on the Web. Mobilis says its Simputer has achieved modest success.

The Mobilis models include laptop and webpad versions, both of which use a 7.4-inch LCD display, weigh less than two pounds, and have a claimed battery life of six hours. A nifty case can be used to prop the webpad up for use with an optional external keyboard. A CAN bus allows automotive deployments, where the Mobilis can tap into a car's embedded computer to display speed and other information, Mobilis says. A wireless model incorporates a GPS receiver as well as WiFi networking.

A desktop model called "SofCore" will also be available, and will be the least expensive Mobilis system.

All Mobilis systems include a range of productivity software based on open source software. Additional details about the Mobilis systems, including extensive links to coverage in the Indian press, is available here

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