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Portable computer for developing countries

By [Ernest Khoo](#), CNETAsia

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The Simputer

SINGAPORE--The handheld computer is commonly seen as a geek toy for affluent mobile professionals. However, the Simputer will change all that by bringing portable computing and the information age to developing countries.

The finished product will be slightly larger than a Palm handheld but will operate as a simple portable computer.

The device has 32MB of flash memory and 32MB of RAM. Other hardware features include a built-in modem, infrared port and USB port for connection with other devices.

The Simputer will be powered by Linux, and have an easy-to-use interface comprising mainly icons and graphics on its high-resolution 240 x 320-pixel touch screen. For users who are illiterate, the device also supports text-to-speech capability and will be able to provide voice feedback in local languages, according to specifications provided by Encore Software.

For an individual to use the device, he will need to purchase a smart card that will store his personal information. Once inserted into the Simputer, the device will then be able to give him access to his private information, such as bank accounts.

The Simputer Trust, a group of individuals from the Indian Institute of Science, and Encore Software Ltd, are behind the device. Vinay L Deshpande, chairman and CEO of Encore Software, revealed that the machine is expected to arrive in the second quarter of this year.

The Simputer will initially be available as a solution for government organizations. It will be targeted for the enterprise and lifestyle consumer at a later date, Deshpande said.

He added that India will be one of the first countries where the product will be made available.

The Bangalore, India-based Encore Software, which develops digital signal processor-based software and embedded systems, began the project two years ago, working on the idea of getting rural areas in India networked and connected to the Internet.

The Simputer will be used in villages and districts so that small communities can share the device for various uses such as sending and receiving emails and carrying out banking transactions.

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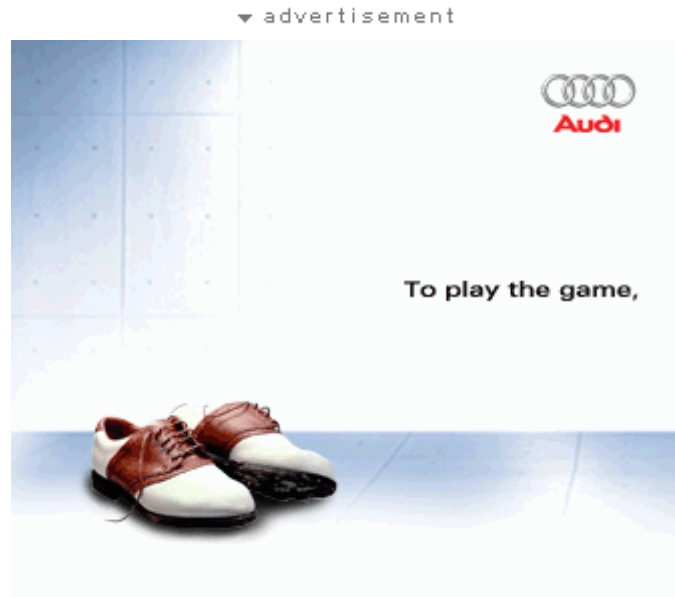
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Expected to cost about US\$200, the Simputer will be powered by three AAA batteries that can offer 6-8 hours of continuous usage, Encore Software claimed.

Meanwhile, Sharp Electronics Singapore has been engaged to provide its monochrome and color LCDs, flash memory, and smart cards for the Simputer.

At this morning's media briefing, Encore Software said that Sharp will also offer its engineering expertise to help with the development of the device.

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