



The Simputer: A handheld for the masses?

By [Ernest Khoo](#)
 Staff Writer, CNET News.com
 January 11, 2002, 7:00 AM PT

Handheld computers are commonly seen as geek toys for affluent mobile professionals. An Indian group hopes to change that image with the Simputer, a device designed to bring portable computing and the information age to developing countries.

The [Simputer Trust](#), a group of individuals from the Indian Institute of Science, and [Encore Software](#) are behind the device. Vinay L. Deshpande, CEO of Encore, said the machine is expected to arrive in the second quarter.

The finished product, which will run the Linux operating system, will be slightly larger than a Palm handheld but will operate as a simple portable computer. It will use 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 interface comprises mainly icons and graphics on a 240-by-320-pixel touch screen. 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.

Sharp Electronics Singapore has been engaged to provide its monochrome and color LCDs, flash memory and smart cards for the Simputer. At a media briefing Friday, Encore said Sharp will also offer its engineering expertise to help with the development of the device.

Sharp's Zaurus handheld, recently [rereleased](#) in the United States, also uses Linux.

To use the Simputer, individuals will need to purchase a smart card to store personal information. Once inserted into the device, the card will provide access to private information, such as bank accounts.

The Simputer will initially be available for government organizations. It will be targeted at businesses and consumers at a later date, Deshpande said.

India will be one of the first countries where the product will be made available, he said.

Bangalore, India-based Encore, 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 e-mail and carrying out banking transactions.

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



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