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## \$200 "Simputer" set for November roll-out

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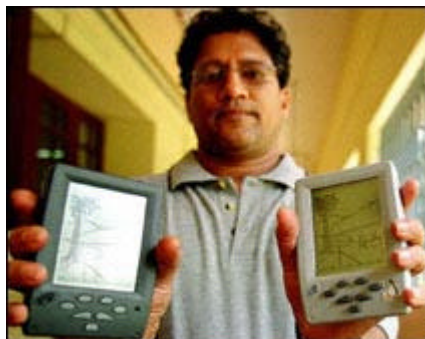
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(AFP PHOTO)

**BANGALORE, India -- The Simputer, a \$200 hand-held computer aimed at bringing the Internet to rural areas, will hit the market in November.**

The Simputer, short for Simple, Inexpensive and Multilingual, is the brainchild of the Simputer Trust, one of whose key trustees is the chief executive officer of Bangalore-based Encore Software.

The trust sells the design and license to make the "Simputer" and Encore is

expected to be the first to make and sell it.

### Designed for mass use

"We are not projecting this as a general purpose PDA (personal digital assistant) but we will use this as a platform to deliver various IT initiatives," said Mark Mathias, Encore's vice-president, on Monday.

Designed for mass use, the Simputer uses Linux, the open-source software that is freely available on the Internet and elsewhere.

Mathias is one of the seven group members of the project.

"The hand-held market is just about exploding in India and we believe we are the early entrants with such a product," he said.

The Simputer Trust unveiled the device in April. Mathias said Encore planned to begin sales of the product in November.

Encore expects to sell about 100,000 units of the Simputer in the first year of operations with the figure increasing to between 250,000 to 350,000 in two years.

### Digital divide

Encore's low-cost device, is part of a series of initiatives by a set of socially committed entrepreneurs and scientists to bridge the "digital divide" in India, which has a booming software industry alongside some 35 percent of citizens who cannot read or write.

Besides hooking up to the Internet, the Simputer, slightly larger than the popular PDA made by Palm, has a text-to-speech software and other easy-to-use applications aimed at allowing India's vast rural population to gain from

using technology.

"We are looking at a few areas like sales automation and specific applications in electronic governance," Mathias said.

India has a low personal computer penetration of about five million in a nation of over one billion people, but several provincial governments are increasingly using technology to help the rural population.

For example, there is a plan to use the Internet to make farmers aware of the prices their produce can fetch.

Encore's CEO Vinay Deshpande is also the president of India's Manufacturers Association of Information Technology.

The firm says it has received enquiries from companies in Latin America, Europe and some Asian countries for supplies.

The Simputer, powered by an Intel chip offers a 32 megabit memory and can be shared by users through a "smart card" reader which stores personal information.

*[Reuters](#) contributed to this report.*

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