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## Feature: Desktop Hardware

### Uruguay poised to make first governmental OLPC purchase

By [Lisa Hoover](#) on October 06, 2007 (2:00:00 PM)

Uruguay's government this week [announced the results](#) of a study indicating that XO computers from the [One Laptop Per Child](#) project were a better value for the nation's schoolchildren than Intel's similar offering, the [Classmate PC](#). The next step is likely to be a purchase agreement between OLPC and Uruguay for at least 100,000 laptops. Though nothing has been finalized yet, when asked what needs to happen for formal agreement to occur, OLPC founder Nicholas Negroponte simply says, "business closure."

OLPC has been in talks with the Uruguay government for about a year. When the country decided to pursue the idea of giving portable computers to all its schoolchildren, it issued a Request for Proposals to solicit bids from suppliers. A months-long study was conducted by [Uruguay's Technological Laboratory](#) (LATU), in which [Brightstar Corp.](#) presented the OLPC's XO unit and [Grupo Positivo de Brasil](#) offered the Classmate PC from Intel. The XO edged out the Classmate by a narrow margin, with scores of 56.84 and 53.06 respectively.

While other nations have done small test programs within a school or village, Uruguay's study represents the first time a government agency has done a comparative analysis of the XO and another computer to determine their applicability to its country's educational system.

Although Negroponte has not had a chance to thoroughly review the study, he says it's likely the XO stood out for a number of reasons, including "low power, mesh network, sunlight readability, and the strong educational heritage from which it was born."

Brightstar presented the XO proposal with only teacher training and tech support, but the bid includes an additional 1% supply of replacement laptops and some replaceable parts to accommodate repairs and maintenance by the children who own the units. The XO was originally priced at \$205, but LATU negotiated the price down to \$199.

Grupo Positivo's proposal included hardware, a Linux-based operating system, connectivity, teacher training, servers, and tech support in Uruguay, and was priced at \$274. The proposal also offered an option to include the Windows operating system -- along with a per-unit price increase.

Uruguay plans to run a pilot program in the Cardal School in the country's [Florida department](#) and intends to have a laptop in the hands of every child in the school by the end of the calendar year. If the results are positive, it hopes to roll out units to all the schools in the country by the end of the current administration in 2010. Uruguay has said that when it formalizes an agreement with a laptop supplier, it will include a

commitment to purchase 100,000 units, with an option to buy 50,000 more.

Negroponte says if Uruguay places an order for XO laptops, the project is ready to deliver. "Some machines would arrive as early as December 1," he says. Complete order fulfillment depends on a number of factors. "The exact rollout of laptops ... is driven as much by other orders and the need to keep overall manufacturing smooth -- flat or upward sloping -- not with peaks and troughs, to drive the price lower and lower."

According to Pablo Flores, a team member with the Ceibal Project, the organization overseeing the implementation of laptops in Uruguay's classrooms, there is a "logistics plan to distribute the laptops school by school" once delivery is taken. Flores says the Ceibal Project team is already preparing schools for the influx of laptops. "We are working very hard to integrate the computers into the educational system. We are training teachers and working in a collaborative environment to join together the contents and applications chosen by educators, as well as sharing educational experiences."

### **A waiting game**

Now that the the testing phase is complete and the Uruguay government is close to making a purchase decision, Grupo Positivo has five days to formally protest the decision and present objections. It is unclear, however, if the organization will lodge an objection, since Intel, maker of the Classmate PC, is a member of the OLPC board. As Vota notes, "Objecting to the decision would be like objecting to your own brother." Grupo Positivo de Brasil could not be reached for comment.

The Uruguay government's vote of confidence gives the OLPC a much-needed boost at a crucial time for the project. Although OLPC has received a tremendous amount of publicity, comparatively few of the units have actually been sold. Mexican businessman Carlos Slim [purchased 250,000](#) through private funding, and Lybian leader Muammar al-Gaddafi [continues to waffle](#) on the idea of buying 500,000 via his charitable organization, the Gaddafi Foundation.

Wayan Vota, editor of [OLPCnews.com](#), says, "If Uruguay and OLPC reach a formal agreement, it is a great day for Uruguay's children -- their future *is* One Laptop Per Child. The choice of XO laptops is also a wake-up call to the technology industry. The government of Uruguay has spoken, and its message is clear: They want the OLPC's computing revolution of technology adapted specifically for the developing world, not yesterday's designs simply cheapened down to meet a price point."

The original intent of the OLPC project was to sell low-cost computers directly to government entities. Despite garnering conceptual interest worldwide, the project has as yet been unable to pin down any governmental agencies willing to commit to a purchase, leading Negroponte to recently take a different approach.

Beginning November 12, a limited number of XO laptops will be available to the American market for \$399. For every order placed, OLPC pledges to donate one laptop to a child in a developing country, in what it calls the [Give 1, Get 1](#) program. Negroponte promises that the first 25,000 buyers will receive their orders in time for the Christmas holiday.