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\$100 laptop gets working prototype

By [Jonathan Skillings](#), CNET News.com

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The One Laptop Per Child crusade for low-cost PCs for developing nations is another step closer to the assembly line.

The nonprofit organization this week is showing off an initial working prototype of its so-called \$100 PC. This marks the first time the project has combined its candy-colored designs with computing hardware.

"Both the (industrial design) and the hardware had been shown separately in the past," Walter Bender, OLPC's president for software and content, said in an e-mail to CNET News.com. The working laptop, he wrote, is "completely self-contained, a real milestone for us."

One of the [machines on exhibit](#) this week features a new, vividly orange exterior that complements other prototypes done up in shades of green, blue and yellow. But it's not a final design just yet: The system carries an 800-by-480-pixel display, while the eventual production version is expected to have a 1,200-by-900 display.

The OLPC group was meeting at its Cambridge, Mass., office this week with task forces from the countries in which it plans to launch the \$100 computer in early 2007. The Linux-based computers will not be for individual sale, but rather will be made available through large-scale government initiatives.

The goal of the project, unveiled in 2005 by MIT Media Lab founder Nicholas Negroponte, is to get the PCs into the hands of millions children in countries including India, China, Brazil and Nigeria, as an educational tool. It's not alone in its low-cost ambitions: [Chipmakers Intel and Advanced Micro Devices](#) and [software giant Microsoft](#) have similar systems in the works.

Other details about progress on the systems appeared on the OLPC site over the weekend. For instance, a team from Linux vendor Red Hat has [trimmed the software distribution](#) from 400MB to about 250MB, uncompressed. "There is still low-hanging fruit left to pull out of the image, including bitmap fonts we don't use (7MB), the X font server (1MB) and Perl (30MB)," the site says.

Negroponte had [complained last month that "Linux has gotten fat,"](#) hampering efforts to produce "small, fast, thin systems."

The machine on display this week is running Fedora Core 5.0, Bender said.

The first 15 A-Test boards have been successfully assembled and tested, according to the OLPC site, and

wide-scale distribution of developer boards is expected by mid-June. Taiwanese contract manufacturer Quanta has been selected to manufacture the systems.

The PCs, which will not have a hard drive, are meant to work wirelessly with other systems in their area.

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