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OLPC aims for mass production in third quarter

By China Martens, IDG News Service, 01/03/07

One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) hopes to begin mass production of its low-cost notebooks aimed at children in developing nations in August or September.

In late 2005, when the nonprofit organization released a prototype of the machine, it aimed for mass production toward the end of 2006.

OLPC plans to conclude its third build of the laptop by early April, completing any last-minute engineering tweaks, according to Christopher Blizzard, software team lead for OLPC at [Red Hat](#) in an interview Wednesday. The laptop is in the first build phase, with the second build phase due to commence in late January. The laptops are being manufactured for OLPC by Taiwanese company Quanta Computer.

So far, OLPC has released a few hundred laptops to governments around the world, with plans to increase those numbers into the low thousands over the next few months, Blizzard said.

Last year saw some wavering among nations that had previously committed to purchasing the OLPC machines for their schoolchildren, notably India and Thailand.

The countries whose governments have committed to buying laptops for their schoolchildren are Argentina, Brazil, Libya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Thailand and Uruguay, Blizzard confirmed.

Off the list are China, India and Egypt. OLPC has decided to concentrate on gaining experience in other countries before tackling huge nations China and India, which it may look to enter at the provincial or state level, he said. Blizzard didn't give a reason that Egypt is apparently no longer involved in the project. OLPC is continuing discussions with other Middle Eastern and African countries about signing up for the project.

OLPC is firmly focusing all its efforts on developing nations and has no plans to offer laptops to any developed countries. In late 2005, it looked as though Massachusetts might also commit to the project, but that's not on the cards now.

"This is a humanitarian effort," Blizzard said. The hope is that equipping children with their own laptops will help significantly improve the level of education in developing nations and encourage children to learn outside of school as well as in the classroom.

While OLPC had hoped the laptops would cost US\$100 apiece, they're up around the \$150 mark. As production ramps up into the millions in 2008, the organization is hoping the price of the machine will fall dramatically.

As the laptop has moved from prototype to finished machine, it's appeared in a variety of hues from orange to yellow to blue to its current green. The color changes were more about differentiating between different

design phases than anything else, Blizzard said. Ultimately, it will be up to the purchasing nations to determine what color they'd like their laptop consignment to be, he added. The main issue is to make the laptops as distinctive as possible to lessen the possibility of them being stolen or resold.

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