

MIT Develops \$100 Hand-crank Laptop

By Anne Trafton, Massachusetts Institute of Technology News Office

An MIT professor's plan to offer \$100, hand-crank laptop computers to children in developing countries has drawn interest from several foreign leaders as well as Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, who plans to distribute them to schoolchildren.



Nicholas Negroponte, co-founder and chairman of the Media Lab, has been working on the laptop idea since 1999 and plans to have a working prototype ready in November. He demonstrated a model last week at the Technology Review Magazine Emerging Technologies Conference at MIT.

In January 2005, Negroponte and his Media Lab colleagues Joe Jacobson and Seymour Papert announced the foundation of One Laptop Per Child (www.laptop.org), a nonprofit dedicated to designing and distributing the computers. According to the project's website, leaders in Thailand, Brazil and Egypt have already expressed interest in the computers, which can be powered by electrical outlets or by hand crank.

"Laptops are both a window and a tool: a window into the world and a tool with which to think. They are a wonderful way for all children to 'learn learning' through independent interaction and exploration," Negroponte wrote on the website.

Much of the cost savings comes from lowering the cost of the display down to about \$30. The designers also streamlined the computers' software. But the Linux-based, full-color, full-screen laptops can do anything a regular laptop can do except store huge amounts of data, according to Negroponte.

The computers will also have wireless Internet access, but only if they are within range of an Internet base station.

Although the program is targeted to developing nations, Romney said he thought Massachusetts children could also benefit. Two weeks ago, he announced a plan to spend \$54 million to roll out the program over two years, starting in fall 2007.

Several companies are helping to develop the laptop, including AMD, Brightstar, Google, News Corp and Red Hat, the website said. The laptops will not be available for the general public to purchase.

For more information about the project, visit <http://laptop.media.mit.edu>

http://www.mngislis.org/newsletter/issue45/MIT_Develops_Laptop.htm