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The "$100 Laptop" Starts Mass Production

OLPC's program picks up speed

The OLPC (One Laptop Per Child) announced that it will begin mass production of its XO laptops and shortly afterwards shippings will start. Hardware producers received the green light to speed up the manufacture of all computer parts needed to make the millions of the desired low cost machines. As the OLPC organization already stated in a press release, three million XO laptops are needed to make the program viable. By October 2007, the first batch of laptops should be ready for shipping to developing countries. The organization chose not to reveal the names of the countries that will receive the first wave of XO laptops. "There's still some software to write, but this is a big step for us," Walter Bender, head of software development at One Laptop per Child (OLPC), told the BBC News website. The road of the OLPC foundation led by Nicholas Negroponte has not been without bumps and drawbacks as at one time it was opposed by many hardware producers and vendors that saw OLPC's XO laptops as a threat to their own market shares in developing countries. Since 2002, when the "$100 laptop" project went public the idea was both lauded and ridiculed. Among the ones that gave OLPC more grief were the Intel chairman Craig Barret that called the entire project a "$100 gadget" and Microsoft's founder Bill Gates that questioned its design, the lack of a hard disk drive and the "tiny screen". Professor Negroponte's answer to all these criticism was always the same: "It's an education project, not a laptop project".The XO laptop has a pretty unusual design and there are many cutting edge technologies involved in its manufacture process, so it would be a great mistake to think about the XO as a piece of obsolete hardware that is being sold so cheaply simply because nobody would pay more for it. The XO is built for harsh and remote conditions and it has a rugged, waterproof case, being also very energy efficient. "The laptop needs an order of magnitude less power than a typical laptop," said Professor Bender. "That means you can power it by solar or human power." The laptop will be mass produced by the Quanta company in Taiwan and the final design will bring together more than 800 computer parts made by different manufacturers such as AMD which is the producer and supplier of the very low power processor. "This is the moment we have all been waiting for," Gustavo Arenas of AMD told the BBC News website. "We certainly believe very strongly in the mission and vision of OLPC so finally starting to see it come to fruition is not only gratifying, it is also rewarding."