

Brazil Gets a Microsoft Gift: the XP Starter Edition

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On Wednesday, April 13, Microsoft releases in Brazil its Windows XP Starter Edition, the truncated version of Windows, created to deter the advance of open-source operating system Linux.

The Starter Edition, created in mid 2004, is already been sold, with relative success, in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Besides offering what Microsoft believes is a tempting alternative to Linux, the new more affordable software is also an attempt to discourage pirates.

Microsoft has not divulged how much the Starter package is going to cost, but, according to the Brazilian edition of PC World, a computer loaded with the Starter Edition will cost US\$ 75 more than the same machine configured with Linux.

Microsoft seems to have rushed the Starter Edition into the Brazilian market after the Brazilian government announced that it intends to launch this year its program PC Conectado, which will sell computers to the poorest Brazilians, in installments of US\$ 17 a month for 24 months.

Brazilian authorities have hinted they want the subsidized machines to come loaded with the Linux operating system. Microsoft has already made its case to the government, showing how the Starter Edition works, in the hopes that it will be chosen for the popular PC program.

Sources inside the government say that those responsible for the PC Conectado weren't impressed with Microsoft's presentation. Among their complaints are the limitations of the Microsoft software.

They are not happy, for example, that the Starter Edition does not allow either connection to a local network or opening of more than three applications simultaneously.

Today, 87% of Brazilians surfing the Internet belong to the so-called classes A and B (the rich and the upper middle-class). The intent of the government is to reach the poorer citizens from classes C, D and E.

Brazil has reserved US\$ 76 million in its 2005 budget for the creation of 1000 'Casas Brasil' (Brazil Houses), telecenters that will house in one place computers connected to the Internet, cultural centers and community radios.

In the so-called Plano Brasileiro de Inclusão Digital (Brazilian Plan of Digital Inclusion), there are other measures being taken by the government.

One of them is to increase the number of public schools connected to the Internet from the present 20,000 to all public institutions of basic learning: 173,000.

Another measure is to improve the country's telecommunications infrastructure in a way that the majority of the population may have access to the Net.

Rogério Santanna, secretary of Information Logistic and Technology of Brazil's Planning Ministry, says that the Lula administration will not rest before it starts a digital-inclusion revolution.

"Digital exclusion is the youngest daughter of social exclusion," he says. "The poorer a person is the farther he or she is from the Internet."

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