

Brazil Offers Half a Million Cheap Linux-Powered Computers

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Beginning next week, stores all over Brazil will start selling computers on the installment plan, at low interest rates, for no more than US\$ 440, as part of the Linked Citizen Program, known as "Computers for All."

This information comes from the secretary of information policy in the Ministry of Science and Technology, Marcelo Lopes, according to whom 500 thousand units should be sold in a period of four to six months.

"It is our expectation that next week there will already be certified equipment available to Brazilian consumers, who will be given access to computers through this social inclusion program of the government," Lopes affirmed.

Those who are interested will have access to easier credit, funded with resources from the Workers' Assistance Fund (FAT), through the Bank of Brazil (BB), the Federal Savings Bank (CEF), and the Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES). The machines will be financed in up to 24 months with interests of 2% a month.

The Ministry also determined the minimal features the computers must contain, in terms of both equipment and programs. The idea is for consumers to take home a complete microcomputer, ready for use, with a Linux operating system and an array of open software programs with 27 software applications, including a photo editor, word processor, anti-virus, and internet navigator.

The computers will have the same configuration as conventional microcomputers, with a 15-inch video monitor, keyboard, mouse, microprocessor, CD-ROM, 1.44 MB floppy disk, 128 MB of memory, and a fax modem. Lopes went on to say that, in the case of internet access, price reductions are still being negotiated with the telephone companies and internet service providers. He reckoned there might be a monthly charge of US\$ 3 for 15 hours of dial-up access.

Lopes also observed that, besides fostering digital inclusion, the Linked Citizen Program will stimulate industrial production in the country.

"This is a government measure that combines digital inclusion with social inclusion - in which many Brazilian families that lack access to computers will be able to acquire them under extremely favorable conditions, while industry will be stimulated by the increase in demand for equipment," he said.

For the general coordinator of the program, Sérgio Rosa, the initiative will also help to combat the black market.

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