

Brazil Starts Selling the Not-That-Cheap Linux-Powered Popular Computer

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Brazil's state-owned Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF, Federal Savings Bank) started offering this Monday, November 7, a credit line to finance popular computers. Each equipment will be sold for no more than US\$ 620, about six minimum monthly wages.

One month ago, the Brazilian government had informed that the new computers, which will be powered by Linux and not Windows, wouldn't cost more than US\$ 440.

The initiative is part of the "Linked Citizen - Computers for All Program," a federal government measure to promote digital inclusion in Brazil.

Those interested will have access to a credit line of up to US\$ 530 with a 2% monthly interest rate, to be paid in up to 24 months.

The Ministry of Science and Technology has defined the minimum hardware and software characteristics that popular computers must have: 15" video monitor, keyboard, mouse, CD-ROM drive, 1.44 MB diskette drive, 128 MB RAM, and fax modem.

Resources for the popular computer program come from the Workers' Assistance Fund (FAT).

Stores all over Brazil have already started selling these computers, according to the secretary of information policy in the Ministry of Science and Technology, Marcelo Lopes. Lopes says that 500,000 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 last month.

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 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 free software programs with 27 software applications, including a photo editor, word processor, anti-virus, and Internet navigator.

According to Lopes, the Linux-powered 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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