

# AMD releases a consumer electronics chip

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The new Geode LX800 is an energy-efficient processor for small computers, set-top boxes, TVs and handhelds, according to Chief Technical Officer Fred Weber. The chip runs at 533MHz and is said to provide the equivalent performance of an 800MHz processor from Via Technologies.

While that's far less oomph than chips for notebooks and desktops, the processor only consumes about 0.9 watts and does not require heat sinks or fans. This lowers both cost and the overall volume of devices. At the same time, it's an x86 chip, so all the conventional software produced for desktops will run on it, unlike many CE chips.

"Software is more and more the problem people are facing," Weber said. Seventeen companies are currently tinkering with prototypes running the chip, and a few of these products will likely hit shelves later this year.

Both Intel and AMD have begun to squeeze their chips into consumer electronics devices. Intel won a contract to supply Celeron chips for a Microsoft set-top box and is working on a line of chips derived from its notebook and desktop lines for CE devices. AMD, meanwhile, earlier released the Geode NX line. These chips are used in the Personal Internet Communicator promoted by AMD in India.

Both companies, though, will face stiff competition from incumbents like Texas Instruments and ARM, which have for years developed chips, software and reference designs for CE manufacturers.

The company came up with the idea of going into electronics while producing the Opteron chip. "We saw that we could go up with x86, so we thought, if you can go up, you can probably go down," Weber explained. The strategy is now known as "x86 everywhere."

The consumer electronics market, however, differs substantially. For one thing, the chips must cost less. The highest-performing Geode LX chips, with a companion chipset, will cost \$45, far less than desktop and server chips.

"You need to sell millions of them to make money," conceded Weber. On the bright side, these chips cost less to develop than server chips, and manufacturers often want supply contracts that last five years.

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