

Will Low-Cost Laptops Help Kids in Developing Countries?

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The nonprofit organization One Laptop Per Child is working to develop computers that could be built for just \$100 each and distributed to children in developing countries.

So far the organization has won the backing of some major technology companies as well as the United Nations. Intel Corp., which initially had its own low-cost PC design, decided to join the effort in July. The OLPC expects to begin mass producing its laptops, which are designed to be used outdoors and can be powered with a pull cord, later this year.

Still, some of the program's critics, which have included Dell Inc. Chief Executive Michael Dell, argue that the OLPC machine's computing power is insufficient, and that the laptops won't be very useful without necessary supporting infrastructure. (Read a Wall Street Journal story about one entrepreneur's difficulty trying to wire Rwanda.)

The Wall Street Journal Online invited Walter Bender, president of the One Laptop effort and former director of MIT's Media Lab, to discuss the program with eMachines co-founder Stephen Dukker, whose start-up company sells technology for low-cost computer labs. Below is their exchange, carried out over email.

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