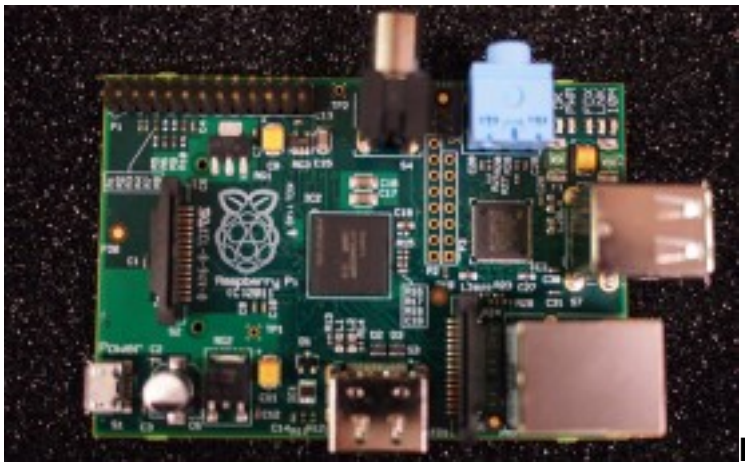
Can the World’s Cheapest Computer Empower a New Generation of Programmers?



Name: Raspberry Pi [1]

Big Idea: Raspberry Pi is a small, lightweight computer that runs on Linux and costs next to nothing — the Model A retails at $35, while the forthcoming Model B will be priced at $25.

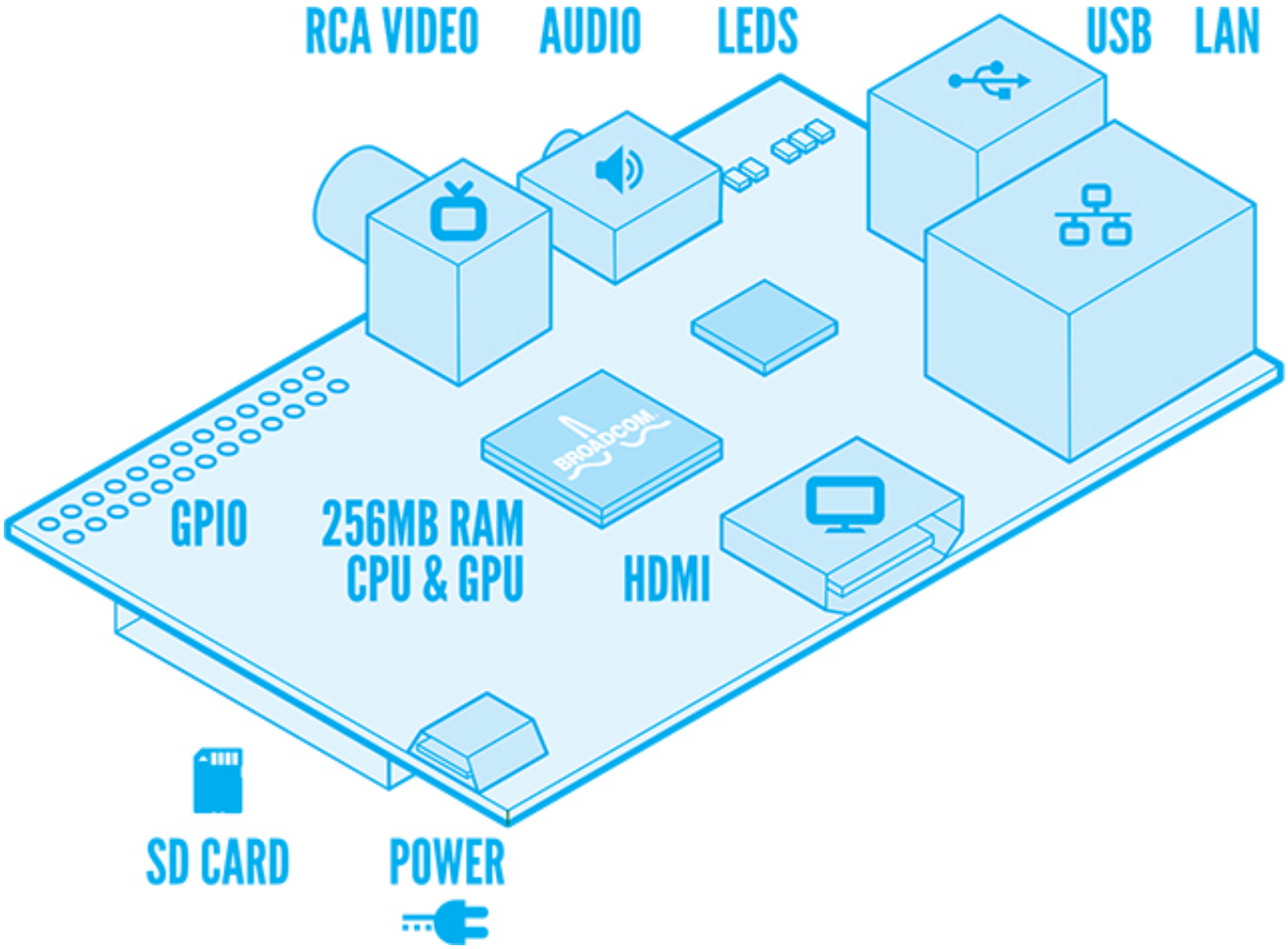
Why It’s Working: By far the cheapest computer on the market, the creator of Raspberry Pi hopes to get the gadget in the hands of children all over the world.

Growing up in the ’80s, Eben Upton spent a lot of time in his bedroom learning to code. And in 2006, when Upton became a talented and successful mobile chipset developer, he began to realize that not everyone has the opportunity to immerse themselves in the world of programming.

“Many [kids] just don’t have computers at all,” Upton explains. “If they do, it’s a family computer, and you don’t want to mess with it.”

So, he began the Raspberry Pi Foundation. Registered as an official UK charity, the organization had a single goal in mind: to put cheap computers in the hands of youth and encourage them to expand their programming horizons. Upton says that the first Raspberry Pi computer [2] had the capacity similar to the original computer he learned to code on, but he decided through multiple iterations that it would be more attractive with a modern spin and a Linux OS [3]. And in order to keep production costs low, Upton says that the hardware for the flashcard-sized Raspberry Pi is decidedly no-frills — simply a core computer running on a mobile phone chipset developed and provided by Upton’s employer, Broadcom. The results of many prototypes were the Raspberry Pi Model A and Model B.

“What we’ve ended up with is something that’s very powerful from a multimedia level,” Upton explains. “We’ve styled the user experience to a recognizably modern thing while staying at the same price point.”



And that price point is shockingly low. Cost-efficient parts and minimal overhead contributed to the Model B's jaw-dropping $35 MSRP — and sent geeks from all over clamoring to get their hands on it. Upton says that even as early as January, the organization only expected to sell 10,000 units. Instead, the Model B's February launch on Leap Day of this year crashed the websites of the vendors [4] who sold out in minutes [5].

"I think the numbers that are kicking around now are well over a quarter of a million units ordered so far," Upton says of the Model B's sales. "We're very pleased."

And it's not just geeks looking to get a piece of the action. Upton says that the foundation has been approached by commercial companies, hospitals, museums and others looking to integrate the Raspberry Pi's low-cost computing systems into their own everyday services. He adds that while the company is maintaining a strict role as a distributor of materials, the foundation has given special consideration to orgs looking to do good with the tiny computer.

"We've been helping people by making sure they get early access to boards and making sure that they're getting a little support to put them in the right direction," Upton adds.

But this is just the first step toward Upton's larger goals. He says he hopes to debut the even cheaper Model A, which will be priced at $25, sometime before the end of the summer. Looking ahead, Upton says he's excited to implement specialized software, tutorials and sample codes to encourage kids (and adults) to tackle the world of home programming.

"We're trying to put the fun back into the computing," Upton explains. "So now we have things going out the door. The goal is to refocus and make a polished educational offering around the device."

Mashable [6]

Posted by Janine E. Mooney, Editor

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http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/news/2012/05/can-world%E2%80%99s-cheapest-computer-empower-new-generation-programmers?qt-blogs=0

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[1] http://www.raspberrypi.org/
[2] http://mashable.com/2011/12/28/raspberry-pi-coming-january/
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