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About Those New CrunchPad Pictures

by Michael Arrington on April 10, 2009

A little background for those of you who haven't heard of the CrunchPad: **This is the post** that kicked off the project. I wanted something I couldn't buy, and found people who said it could be built for a lot less than I imagined. The goal – a very thin and light touch screen computer, sans physical keyboard, that has no hard drive and boots directly to a browser to surf the web. The operating system exists solely to handle the hardware drivers and run the browser and associated applications. That's it.

The key uses: Internet consumption. The virtual keyboard will make data entry a pain other than for entering credentials, quick searches and maybe light emails. This machine isn't for data entry. But it is for reading emails and the news, watching videos on Hulu, YouTube, etc., listening to streaming music on MySpace Music and imeem, and doing video chat via tokbox. The hardware would consist of netbook appropriate chipsets (Intel Atom or Via Nano), at least a 12 inch screen, a camera for photos and video, speakers and a microphone. Add a single USB port, power in and sound out, and you're done. If you want more features, this ain't for you.

Price? It can be built for less than \$250, including packaging. Add in fixed costs and other stuff you have to deal with (like returns), and you can sell it for \$300 and probably not go out of business. Physical design is important, and the software is the key to winning.

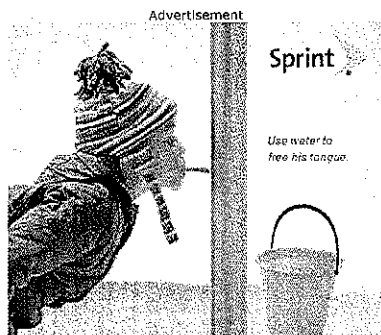
We stumbled through an **initial prototype** that barely booted, but we finished it in a month. **Prototype B** was much more impressive and usable. That effort was led by **Louis Monier**, with software developed by Singapore-based **Fusion Garage** and industrial design work by David Yarnell and Greg Lalier from **Dynacept**.

Anyway, we've continued to tinker with the project, which is referred to as Mike's Science Project internally (or, "that thing"). But we certainly aren't ready to talk about anything more at this point. But we did meet with Fusion Garage again today to test out the most recent prototype (B.5?). This is a significant step forward from Prototype B because the software stack is now entirely customized. The last version had a full install of Ubuntu Linux with a custom Webkit browser. This version has a bottom-up linux operating system and a new version of the browser. We also switched from Via to the Intel Atom chip. The total software footprint is around 100 MB total, which is a solid achievement. Also, this time the ID and hardware work was driven by Fusion Garage out of Singapore.

In fact, all the credit should go to Fusion Garage. But frankly we weren't planning on talking about it at all, it just isn't the right time yet. But, to make a long story short, someone accidentally published some photos we took to the web, they were seen and **shortly were everywhere** (see **lots lots lots lots more**). Even our own **CrunchGear** couldn't resist.

Ok, so now that what's done is done, where do things stand? Well, I'm not ready to say yet. But one thing I've learned about hardware in the last year is that you need partners to actually make things happen, and the credit for what we saw today goes entirely to the **Fusion Garage** team. Those guys are rock stars.

Here's are pictures of the various prototypes in chronological order if you're interested. The first was our initial conceptual drawing.



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