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TechCrunch

TechCrunch Tablet Update: Prototype B

It's time for an update on the progress we've made on the low cost touch screen tablet that I first wrote about in July 2008 when I asked for a dead simple touch screen web tablet that boots right to the browser. Here's our **first post** on the tablet, which we're now calling the CrunchPad internally.

The idea is to get a new type of device into people's hands for as cheap as possible (we were aiming for $200, it looks like $299 is more realistic). It fits perfectly on your lap while you are sitting in front of the TV, so you can look up stuff on Wikipedia or IMDB as you channel surf. It plays Flash video flawlessly so you can watch movies and TV shows on Hulu or Joost or wherever. Or listen to music on MySpace Music. Or use TokBox to have a video chat with your parents. Then check email and call it a day. Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Hulu, Wikipedia, Google Docs and Gmail are the killer apps for this device.

Because the device skips the resource-sucking parts of the operating system and focuses on one application – the browser – very low end hardware can be used and still give users a desktop-like Internet browsing experience.

Comments

Cesar Torres ▭ - January 19th, 2009 at 12:19 am PST

This looks amazing, Michael. Best of luck with the progress and can't wait to get my hands on one.

What, no aluminum unibody? ;)

reply

Marvin ▭ - January 19th, 2009 at 1:16 am PST

This is really interesting.

Michael, even we'd done some tech research work on this kind of device (not exactly the same purpose) but very similar design and features about 2 years ago.

We'd considered **http://www.e-ink.com** ▭ 's electronic-paper displays (at that time colored screens were not available)…. and with a touch-screen layer of-course.

I must congratulate your team in doing the right thing with a focussed approach, rather than making a leaptop which does every damn thing on earth!! Will be of any help to you should you need any help from Asia on this product.

cheers,
Marvin **http://latticepurple.com** ▭

We built a working but very humble **Prototype A** in August. It barely booted, but once it did it was a working touch screen web tablet built on very low end hardware. And when I surfed the web with it, I knew I wanted one that worked properly.

Since August a lot has happened. First, we now have a team lead – **Louis Monier**. Louis, formerly the founder/CTO of AltaVista (he is credited with building one of the first Internet search engines), has also spent time at eBay (head of the Advanced Technology Group), Google and Cuil. Louis left Cuil in the Fall and has been spending his spare time working with outside teams to build the new prototype. He's in love with the project, and we're lucky to get his time.

Second, we've completed Prototype B of the CrunchPad and are ready to show it to you. I include pictures and video to show it in action.

CrunchPad Prototype B

The device has a 12-inch touchscreen with a 4:3 aspect ratio (which is ideal for web browsing in my opinion). It is powered with a Via Nano processor, which has performed at par with the Intel Atom in our testing. 1 GB of ram (its more than we need) and a 4 GB flash drive to store the OS and browser and any cache. Resolution is 1024×768, which means the vast majority of websites are viewed in full width without scrolling. The device also has wifi, an accelerometer (so when you turn the screen on its side you can view more of a web page), a camera and a four cell battery. Total cost of the device, when we include estimates for the case, codecs and other miscellaneous items, is just over $200. Prototype B is actually much less expensive because the screen we used isn't very good. The price estimate includes a much better, more expensive LCD.

The case, which was designed and built by David Yarnell and Greg Lalier from **Dynacept**, is 12.5" x 9.7" x 1.3" . It's about twice as thick as is needs to be without further engineering – we just built in a safety thickness in case of heat or other issues. The device weighs three pounds, partially due to the extra batteries we've stuffed into it to see how long we can run it without power. Still, the device weighs in at 2 oz less than the 10" eeePC.

The software: currently we're running a full install of Ubuntu Linux on the prototype with a custom Webkit browser. A lot of the work done to date has been on the drivers and the virtual keyboard, which you can see in the videos. The software has been created by Singapore-based **Fusion Garage**, who continue to work with Louis on the feature set and user experience.

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reply

Jon - January 19th, 2009 at 2:59 am PST

Congrats as well… it's nice to see you expand beyond your blog and into real products (diversification is nice).

Jon
http://WoodMarvels.com – Create Unique Memories

reply

slide out keyboard - January 19th, 2009 at 3:00 am PST

slide out keyboard which also work as stand instead of Lego..

reply

rubric - January 19th, 2009 at 12:26 pm PST

Please say "no" to the slide out keyboard. It has USB for an external keyboard. Leave it at that. This is a laptop, not a cellphone.

reply

More pictures:

he meant to use as a stand, not on the crunch pad having a built-in slide out keyboard

reply

Ian Mikutel - January 19th, 2009 at 2:28 am PST

Too all TC peeps reading about the CrunchPad, I just spent some time writing up a detailed post on it, trying to synthesize a lot of the information posted here, including new info gleaned from Mike in all the comments so far.

I think its a pretty complete post, take a look and feel free to share your opinion, would love to hear from you all.

http://www.ianm...-prototype.html

reply

rootingforacause - January 19th, 2009 at 1:23 pm PST

Hey all you Vulture Capitalists out there ...

look at this Arrington guy – he's from your stable – lawyer, innovator, venture capitalist, well versed in IT and IP law, made lots of bucks, arrogant like the majority stakeholder in a big bad business, and yet, knows how to listen to geeks and common people with good ideas.

Here are the videos:

CrunchPad Prototype B 1
★★★★⯪

ideas.

This is a challenge to all of you vultures out there – you have it in your pocket to get our economy out of the shit that (…) got it into. But do have the common sense to go with all the money you have tucked into your safe? Spare a few bills for these techie types – who DONT ask for expensive furniture in posh offices – all they ask is a web platform, the hardware they need to test their ideas and some money for assurance to not go hungry. Wanna be the next Buffet? These techie guys are your friends.

Don't spend all your money on sexy models and expensive furniture. Buy these guys kits, hardware, web servers and of course, pizza, coffee, clothes and rent.

Larry and Sergey were turned down by "respected" vulture capitalists for over a year. Ask those guys how they feel now. Really, ask them. Now.

Mike is showing you in all the glorious detail, how to go about doing it – unfortunately, you need to do some thinking beyond your stock valuation and risk prediction percentages and figures and also beyond your secretary's figure. Go figure.

If you cant do anything on your own just read what Mike has posted so far and remember, Larry and Sergey were turned down by VCs for over a year.
One rich guy saw what they saw and he didn't trouble them with a single question. He just put the cash into their hands after a hour's worth of talking and he didn't come back to ask for anything for months.
And now, you cant live without that one-box website they made, can you?
I'm talking of Google (some VCs still do not know their story)
In short, study this story properly.
(PS: No hat tips needed :-))

reply

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CrunchPad Prototype B 1
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YouTube

CrunchPad Prototype B 2
★★★★☆

▶ ○━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━ 0:00 / 3:06 🔊 ⛶ 🔼

YouTube

What's next?

We've completed our original goal of building a "dead simple and dirt cheap touch screen web tablet to surf the web." The hardware is nearing lockdown. Software development is rolling. And we've spent very little money to get to this point.

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In short, study this story properly.
(PS: No hat tips needed :-))

reply

KUSH - January 31st, 2009 at 1:50 am PST

cheers to that

reply

brian 💬 - January 19th, 2009 at 11:13 am PST

I can't help but think you people are missing the picture. By building a team around someone who has never done a consumer CE project, you're missing most of the costs. Like the tech support call center. Like the returns. Like the profit for the retail channel. Like profit for yourselves. Like advertising – selling 1,000 units to the tech crunch loyal is all well and good, then what?

The rule of thumb is end user purchase price is 2x bill-of-materials. If you've got a $300 pre-transformation BOM, you've got a $600 end user product.

Go look at GPS units. Lower hardware profile in a couple of ways, far cheaper screen, maps are a profit center for most companies, and look at their prices. That's the effect of marketing, sales, support, channel. What, you think they're just out there burning their money? That's a tough business, and if they could present a $10 lower price they would.

Another example is the Kindle, which is probably selling at 0 profit and 0 ad budget

We've completed our original goal of building a "dead simple and dirt cheap touch screen web tablet to surf the web." The hardware is nearing lockdown. Software development is rolling. And we've spent very little money to get to this point.

We've received **thousands** ♡ **of comments** and emails from people who want this device right now. We've had tremendous support from the community in helping us build the prototypes, and Via has been flat out amazing with their support of the project.

We've also gotten quite a bit of interest from the investment community. The real question for us is whether this project has legs and should go forward towards production units, which is a very big step from a working prototype. That would require spinning the company off from the blog and building a team around Louis. It's a decision we haven't made yet.

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could present a $10 lower price they would.

Another example is the Kindle, which is probably selling at 0 profit and 0 ad budget because it's on the front page of the largest retailer in the world every day. And guess what – amazon won't publish their sales figures, but it's pretty low.

If you have a way to sell products that doesn't involve advertising and channel and profits for investors, you may be on to something. But when you go to investors, I suggest you leave that last part out.

reply

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D. Link to Louise Monier