A pervasive personal trainer, an electronic leash, a light canvas...

EDITORS’ INTRO

In this issue, we cover several new devices, most of which are used during activities. We found a pervasive personal trainer, embedded in a set of head phones, and a Wi-Fi-enabled SD card that eases photo uploading onto online photo-sharing sites. We also highlight a few devices aimed at children and their parents, including a new 99-quid laptop focused on the education market and a discrete, electronic leash for wandering children. Finally, we bring to your attention a new artistic medium for reducing stress in a hospital waiting room. Please continue to send pointers to upcoming products with exciting possibilities, your feedback on existing products, and your personal experiences with them (your name will be included with your review). Email us at pvcproducts@computer.org.

—Maria Ebling and Mark Corner

DEVICES

BODY TRAINER

Sega ‘Toys’ new Body Trainer headphones aim to act like a little voice in your head, motivating you to exercise harder. Using an ear clip to measure your heart rate, the Body Trainer adjusts the pace of the music to motivate you to increase your rate, also offering helpful tips and commands, such as “please pick up the pace.” As we have already seen in GPS navigation systems, it’s only a matter of time before someone adds a variety of more “motivational” voices. Personally, we’re looking forward to Mr. T helping us with the treadmill. This is the latest installment in what promises to be a robust market of devices that combine health and entertainment. The product will launch in Japan in April for approximately US$60.

INSTANT WI-FI

EyeFi has introduced a storage and Wi-Fi SD card all rolled into one. Insert an EyeFi card into any device that uses SD storage, and it instantly becomes Wi-Fi enabled, with the ability to upload photos automatically to photo-sharing websites, programs such as iPhoto, and desktop folders. As only a few cameras on the market have Wi-Fi built in, and many new devices are using SD storage, this goes a long way to making media creation and display devices completely wireless. An EyeFi card with two gigabytes of storage runs about US$100. The next challenge for EyeFi will be to wedge a Wi-Fi card into a microSD form factor.

For more information, visit www.eye.fi/a-wireless-memory-card.

KEEPING TRACK OF THE KIDS

Smart Target’s Kiddo Kidkeeper is effectively a discrete, electronic leash for children: one piece is attached to the child while the other is held by the parent. The parent continuously monitors the proximity of up to four children. When a child wanders more than a predetermined distance away from the parent, the parent’s device sounds an alarm. The device then indicates the direction the child has wandered. There are two settings for the predetermined distances—13 or 26 feet. Of course, there is the obvious disadvantage is that the children’s units aren’t permanently attached to them so there’s nothing preventing them (or a malicious person) from removing it. Despite this issue, the product has the potential to give parents peace of mind without the child feeling like a pet dog being taken for a walk through the mall.

For more information, visit www.smart-target.pt.

BUDGET LAPTOP

Elonex’s ONE is the United Kingdom’s first £99 laptop (see figure 1). It includes a word processor, a spreadsheet, calculator, email, wireless connectivity, Web browser, and of course, music. The keyboard can be removed to turn the laptop into a tablet computer. Measuring 22 × 15 × 3 cm and weighing less than 1 kg, this entry-level model has a
7-inch high-resolution thin-film transistor LCD display (800 × 480), and an LNX Code 8 Mobile 300-MHz processor with 128 Mbytes double-data-rate two synchronous dynamic (DDR-II SD) RAM and 1 Gbyte of flash memory. It uses 802.11b/g, supports 10/100 Mbps Ethernet, and has two USB 2.0 ports, two built-in speakers, audio-in and headphone jacks, two mouse emulators (one on the rear of the main body for use with the tablet and one in the keyboard), and an integrated 3-cell battery that can run up to four hours of Linux Linos 2.6.21. The higher-end model offers 256 Mbytes of DDR-II SD RAM, a 1 GB flash memory, and Bluetooth. An optional wristVAULT offers additional storage (at an additional cost). These no-frill models are aimed at the education market and are expected to be deployed in English classrooms in September. They have been designed for school-age children and are said to be shock resistant with no moving parts to improve reliability. The only issue we have with this device is that no laptop should come in the color pink—though admittedly one of our daughters would disagree. Anyone wanting to reserve one can do so with a small deposit; delivery is expected to start in June.

For more information, visit www.elonexone.co.uk.

BRIGHTENING THE WORLD

Lite Brites on steroids. That’s the vision that came to mind when we saw Philips Electronics recently unveil Imagination Light Canvas (see figure 2). The light canvas lets visitors at the newly opened Mercy Medical Center in Rogers, Arkansas, “draw” on the wall using a variety of colors. The canvas has more than 1,400 LEDs embedded in a 14 × 6 foot touch-sensitive wall. Children (and adults) can draw images on the wall. Images remain visible for a few minutes and then slowly fade away. The canvas is green, consuming approximately the same amount of energy required to power your toaster each day. At this point, this is a one-of-a-kind installation, but who knows what will happen if this pervasive computing appliance proves to reduce stress in hospital waiting rooms.

For more information, visit www.penac.philips.com/themes/lightcanvas.