Most of the press about cheap laptops for young students has focused on MIT’s OLPC (One Laptop per Child), but now Intel has rolled out its own, called Classmate PC. Announced in April, the second-generation, Intel-powered PC is described by the chip maker as a “netbook,” and it certainly looks like a computer for kids. Simple to use, the laptop is wireless capable, has longer battery life (up to five hours), a water-resistant keyboard, and better shock resistance (sports a rubberized case and carrying handle). It has a Celeron M processor, nine-inch LCD screen, 512MB memory, a 30GB hard drive, and an integrated webcam. You can get the computer with either a Windows XP Home or Linux operating system, and it includes two USB ports, an Ethernet jack, two-in-one card reader, and headphone and microphone jacks. Stereo speakers are built in. Intel has put together an education software stack that will be available in eight languages and is working with more than 80 software, hardware, and content providers to develop what they call “a complete infrastructure.” The price for the Classmate in its second-generation format is $400.

www.intel.com/intel/worldahead/classmatepc

The Logitech diNovo™ Edge keyboard is a high-end peripheral that combines design and technical excellence. Cordless, it communicates at distances up to 30 feet via a Bluetooth dongle plugged into your computer. The Edge has lithium-ion batteries, which charge in a stand/charging station that matches the glossy black design of the keyboard. Inserted on edge, a five-minute charge will provide enough power for a day, and a two-hour charge is sufficient for two months of regular use. The most striking thing about the Edge is its design. About a half-inch thick, the face is a high-gloss, laser-cut black Plexiglas, bordered at the bottom by a brushed aluminum wrist rest. Instead of a mouse, there’s a flush-mounted TouchDisc for controlling the cursor and scrolling, with two buttons for selecting. A backlight follows your finger movements. Just above it is a volume slider that also backlights the movement of your fingertip as you slide up and down the control. The on-off switch for the keyboard is in the same area. The row of hot-keys is backlit in orange when you touch the function key.

www.logitech.com

The two biggest problems with taking notes—trying to remember what you weren’t able to get down and trying to read your own hurried scribble—are solvable. The Live-scribe PULSE™ Smartpen has a simple answer. While you’re writing, it’s listening. The PULSE is a computer and digital recorder as well as a ballpoint pen.
The Original Schedule for the Disappearance of Windows XP was to be June 30, 2008. On that day, the software was to be withdrawn from store shelves. The not-quite seven-year run would complete the out-with-the-old cycle as the current Vista operating system still struggles to ramp up its corporate installation base.

And why would you want to deep-six the most widely installed operating system in the world when you own all the licenses? It’s the software world’s version of planned obsolescence, refined years ago by both software and hardware manufacturers into the “upgrade cycle.” Create a near-perfect operating system for a particular piece of hardware that does all that the buyer may want it to do, and you’re only going to sell one, maybe two if the hardware is really good, to each customer. I have hand tools that were handed down to me from my grandfather—some from companies that were so good they’re no longer around. Care to count how many Windows you have purchased since version 3.1?

The real question with XP is why has Microsoft recently announced a reprieve that will extend availability to OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) until June 30, 2010? The company is already talking about Windows 7, the next Windows after Vista. Rumors fueled by Bill Gates project a

continued on next page
release date some time in 2010. Does all this make Vista just a place-holder that was unable to unseat its predecessor?

**The XP Petition**

On January 14, 2008, *InfoWorld* posted an appeal to its readers online to sign a Save Windows XP petition. Not willing to be forced to the next version in the upgrade cycle, the editors asked their readers to “Join us, and tell Microsoft that you want to keep XP available indefinitely. Not for another six months or a year but indefinitely.” The magazine created a separate Web page, www.SaveXP.com, and by the middle of March they had 106,491 signatures. The page is still up, and there’s even an offer of free code for the little app at the top of the page that has a countdown clock for the time left to save the OS.

In the end, it wasn’t the public outcry that forced the embarrassing decision to carry last year’s model forward. Nor was it the less than spectacular takeoff of Vista in the work world. It was a new class of undersized, underpowered, ultra-compact PCs.

In April, Eric Bangeman reported on the *Ars Technica* site: “Previously scheduled to be pulled from shelves less than three months from now, XP Home will be available to OEMs building what Microsoft calls ultra-low-cost PCs at least through June 2010, and possibly later. XP may remain available for a full year after the next version of Windows is released.”

If the success of these budget laptops continues, XP might not only survive its next-generation replacement but Vista’s replacement as well. And the two predominant reasons for this emerging Dorian Gray of software are: (1) Vista is too complex and cumbersome to work on these budget laptops, and (2) Linux runs very well on these machines and has one other additional advantage—it’s free.

The three most visible ultra-compact laptops are MIT’s OLPC (One Laptop per Child—http://laptop.org), Intel’s Second Generation Classmate PC (www.intel.com/intel/worldahead/classmatepc), and ASUS’s Eee PC (http://eeepc.asus.com). The initial development of these miniaturized laptops has focused on the educational market—international and third world in MIT’s case—but cost and portability of these has inspired Intel to branch out into a new low-power chip development cycle featuring their recent Atom microprocessor. The chip features power consumption of one to two watts, compared to 30+ watts of their top-of-the-line processors for conventional laptops.

Another advantage of the early Linux versions of these devices is the ability to run the free Open Office with its full suite of office tools. And the profile of the ASUS Eee PC qualifies it for more than just an at-home classroom adjunct. For about $300, you can get an Eee that has wireless and Ethernet connections, an SD card slot with capacities up to 8GB instead of a hard drive, 512MB of RAM, a built-in webcam, SKYPE, available external storage, and so on. They won’t fit in your pocket like Apple’s wildly successful iPhone, but the Eee’s seven-inch color screen is a much larger page on which to read your e-mail.

There should be a serious push of these ultra-compacts in June. One item that still has to be settled is an appropriate nickname/classification. Wikipedia suggests that they might soon be known as Netbooks, but Intel, at least for now, prefers to call them MIDs (Mobile Internet Devices).

Whether MIDs or Netbooks, these really small laptops will present the buyer with a real choice in operating systems: XP or Linux. And since the limited processing capacity of these low-cost devices won’t run full-blown versions of programs like PhotoShop, XP will lose one of its natural advantages—the ability to run all kinds of other sophisticated software that hasn’t been ported to Linux yet. The main attraction of these Netbooks will be size first, Internet second, and work third.

The sun is low in the sky for XP, but expect to see it hanging around the horizon for at least another few years.

---

**ASUSTek Computer Inc.**