

Bug Labs lets consumers build their own gadgets

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The BUGbase, the hub that every BUGmodule snaps into. Image credit: Bug Labs.

A New York company called Bug Labs has recently released information about their new product called BUG. A collection of various open source hardware modules, BUG allows consumers to build their own gadgets, such as cameras, keyboards, speakers, GPS and more. The product requires no soldering or solid state electronics skills, so virtually anybody can mix, match, and create their own unique device.

These modular gadget kits may be more than just fun for tech

enthusiasts, however. The product is just the beginning of Bug Labs' goal to redefine consumer electronics with—a name they've coined—"community electronics." Just as software was democratized 30 years ago with open source alternatives, the company hopes that BUG will invert the currently top-down consumer electronics market with its open source hardware.

Each BUG hardware module can produce one or more Web services. Consumers simply snap together the modules the way they want, and the Web services connect. A module called the BUGbase, a programmable and "hackable" Linux computer, serves as the hub for every device. With space for four connections, the BUGbase consists of a CPU, 128MB RAM, built-in WiFi, rechargeable battery, USB, Ethernet, and a small LCD.

The BUGmodules, which simply snap into the BUGbase, so far include a digital camera/video cam, GPS, touch-sensitive LCD screen, and an accelerometer to detect motion. BUG devices are attached to BUG via the Bug Module Interface (BMI). The company explains that creating BUG applications is simple and intuitive, using JAVA and OSGi. Users can share the BUG applications they create with other users/developers through an online community called BUGnet.

As the company explains, the inspiration behind the BUG idea comes from the childhood interest of taking things apart and seeing how things work:

"With BUG, we want people to recapture and share this excitement again, and we want them to apply this to their everyday device. We believe everybody is an inventor at heart, so we've developed a platform for users to create and forever modify their favorite gadget, allowing for ultimate customization and use."

BUG products aren't ready for sale yet, but pre-orders will be taken by the end of the year. Also, according to Bug Labs' Website, www.buglabs.net, founder Peter Semmelhack will speak at the 2008 SxSW Trade Show in March.

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