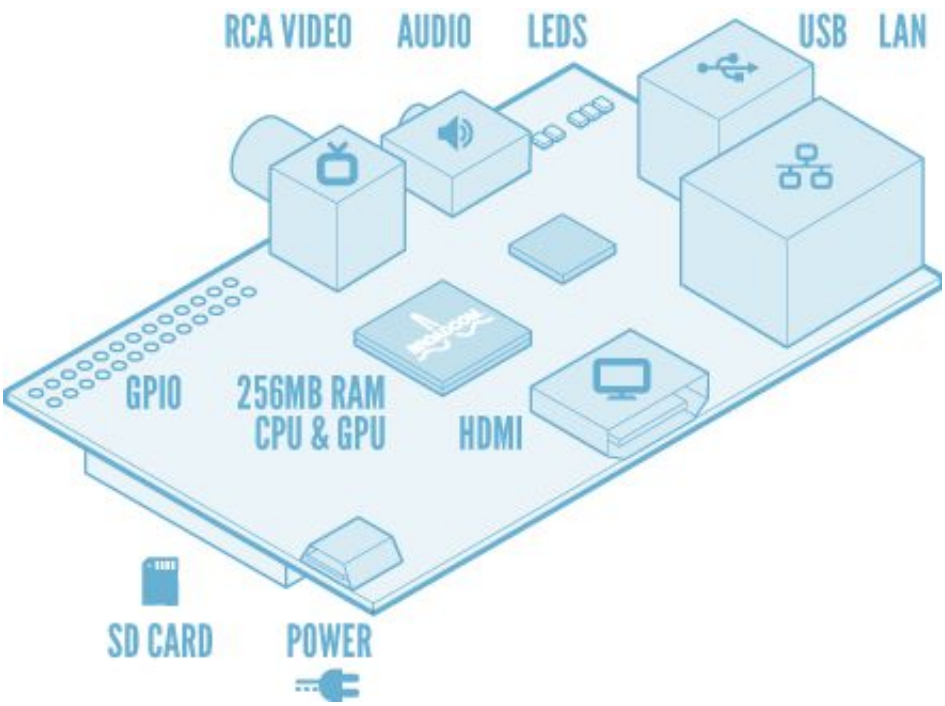
Distributors reel from Mad Wednesday rush for $35 Pi

March 1 2012, by Nancy Owano



(PhysOrg.com) -- No long lines winding down Madison Avenue; no marching bands in Barcelona; no glossy ads in mainstream magazines. Just news of a product available for pre-order is all it took to trigger a crush of responders and to sell out the long awaited, credit-card sized computer with a $35 pricetag. The Raspberry Pi computer sold out in hours on Wednesday, after sites distributing the product witnessed unprecedented traffic.

According to the *Financial Times*, one of the two device distributors, Premier Farnell, reported half a million hits in 15 minutes, The other distributor, RS Components, said they had never before witnessed that level of demand for any one product at one go.

What's the big deal? Those following the rise of the Raspberry Pi say the answer is not only price but principle. Developed by the Raspberry Pi Foundation in the UK, the miniature PC is intended to eventually become an affordable mainstay for schools to use, to expose children and youths to programming and command lines rather than just touchscreens and in-store apps.

Wednesday's opening offer for pre-orders is actually for a developer release. The Foundation aims to build a community of developers who can write software for the device before they issue the school-targeted product, priced even lower, at $25, which will be available at a later date.

In the UK, the Foundation efforts are widely applauded and not only for aiming to educate youth. Some observers think the mad rush for the devices reflect a backlash trend toward old-school hobbyist programming among those tired of showroom computer bling.

The Raspberry Pi, based on the ARM chip, does not come with monitor or keyboard; it is a bareboned PC on a naked circuit board with connectors. The Raspberry Pi is designed so that it can plug into a TV and a keyboard. The computer supports Python, a suitable programming language even for novices. The device runs Linux. (Its first proof of concept is based on Debian but a Fedora ARM secondary architecture project has a Fedora Linux distribution for ARM-based devices. The Fedora version is the work of faculty and students at Seneca College, Canada, where they configured and optimized it to work with the Raspberry Pi.)

The chips and connectors allow users to connect cameras and other gadgets via USB, and can deal with high-definition video and sound. More specifically, the device has a 700MHz processor, 256MB of RAM, SD card support, two USB ports, an Ethernet hookup and HDMI and RCA outputs.

“Although we are still waiting for units to arrive from China, you can start buying the Raspberry Pi today,” announced the foundation site.

They entered into licensed manufacture partnerships with the two British companies, Premier Farnell and RS Components, and the two will be manufacturing and distributing the devices on behalf of the foundation. Each Raspberry Pi sold will generate a small profit for the foundation, which it will put back into the charity.

The foundation's web site also sought to explain on Wednesday that both distributor websites were experiencing heavy load and that international customers may find that Raspberry Pi was not yet available in their areas. The foundation asked for patience and to check back.

More information: www.raspberrypi.org/