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Is that a PC on your wrist?

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By Kuriko Miyake

(IDG) -- IBM is working hand-in-hand with Japanese watchmaker Citizen Watch on new prototypes of IBM's WatchPad wearable computer, the companies have announced.

The WatchPad 1.5, a wristwatch-sized device measuring 2.5 by 1.8 by .6 inches and weighing 1.5 ounces, runs Linux on a 32-bit ARM processor at a maximum speed of 74 MHz. It has 8MB of DRAM and 16MB of flash memory, a speaker and a microphone.

It has a reflective monochrome liquid crystal display QVGA screen, a fingerprint recognition device for security, and an acceleration sensor that detects the user's hand movements. It also has IrDA, RS232C, and Bluetooth network interfaces. Version 1.1 of Bluetooth, the version used for the prototype, can be used for voice control, according to the companies.

The wristwatch computer works not only as a personal digital assistant, but also as a controller for PCs, using Bluetooth.

IBM unveiled its first-generation WatchPad 1.0 prototype last year, and has since exhibited it at a number of trade shows.

While that device was too premature for commercial use, according to Yoichi Takao, director of IBM's research laboratory in Tokyo, "this one is technically ready," as a result of codeveloping the device with Citizen.

Reducing power consumption was important, according to Citizen. The battery now lasts for at least a day, while the processor speed is five times faster, the company says.

Citizen is developing the hardware for the Watchpad, while IBM works on the software, so the companies view development of the WatchPad from different perspectives.

Citizen hopes to expand what a wristwatch can do as a small PC, rather than adding a telecommunication function. IBM, on the other hand, expects the device will be used for browsing the Internet and sending e-mail, says Takao, adding, "[If NTT DoCoMo's third generation mobile phone service] Foma can download moving images, then why not for WatchPad. A telephone handset is inconvenient

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for users to view moving images but, on a wristwatch, it is easier."

The WatchPad 1.5 has been jointly developed at IBM's laboratories in Japan, the United States and Switzerland. Citizen is the only partner for the product, IBM's Takao says.

Although the device is technically ready, the companies need to further develop applications, and research business models and have no fixed date for commercialization, Takao says.

"In the first quarter next year, we hope to start trials with Linux users at universities in Japan and the U.S., and to narrow our targeted customers," he says.

The price of the product is expected to be the same as that of IBM's latest WorkPad PDA, around \$399, the companies say.

The prototypes, in various designs, are expected to be unveiled at Citizen Forum 21 in Tokyo on November 6 and 7.

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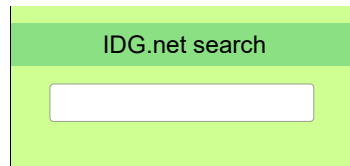
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