

Coding tidings: BBC micro:bit set to increase audience

June 1 2016, by Nancy Owano



(Tech Xplore)—In Tuesday's news: The BBC micro:bit, the little pocket sized computer that was originally designed to get UK [children](#) coding, is going commercial and selling via pre-sale signups.

It rolled out to Year 7 kids in March, but this is something new. After delivering the micro:bit computers to school children to turn them on to coding, Matt Burgess in *Wired* said these are now to sell to the [public](#).

The BBC micro:bit can be pre-ordered via Element14's website, for

£12.99 (about US\$19).

Steve McCaskill is deputy editor of *TechWeekEurope* and he wrote that "Element14, which also manufactures and [distributes](#) Raspberry Pi devices, will also accept bulk orders or more than 90 computers and says it is looking at the possibility of selling the micro:bit outside the UK."

McCaskill quoted Richard Curtin, strategic alliance director at element14, as saying that they were excited about product availability for purchase in the UK and that they anticipated "massive demand" from not only parents and teachers but makers as well. Curtin said they were gearing up their supply chain and manufacturing.

This device is the result of a collaboration between the BBC and many partners. They are not all listed here but they include Wellcome Trust, Samsung, Microsoft, Barclays and ARM. (The latter's ARM mbed hardware, software development kits [HDK and SDK] and compiler services were part of the creation of the BBC micro:bit.)

If this all seems to resonate with the other UK trailblazers, Raspberry Pi's founders, the question may be, why bother with development of another mini-computer designed to educate, when there already is the popular and affordable Raspberry Pi?

Natasha Lomas has an answer in *TechCrunch*: "The micro:bit follows in the footsteps of another UK low-cost learn-to-code micro computer, the Raspberry Pi...While the Pi has been hugely [successful](#), selling more than eight million units cumulatively since its 2012 release, its primary user-base has tended to be a maker community of adults, rather than schoolkids. Hence the BBC seeing room to make its micro:bit."

Now that availability of the device has been expanded beyond schools, Lomas said it will be interesting to see how popular the micro:bit will be,

"and whether it can repeat the Pi's sales success but end up landing in the hands of a younger generation of budding coders."

BBC micro:bit is a pocket-sized computer that clearly has learning opportunities for the younger set. It enables one to code, customize and control. It has sensors (an accelerometer so it can detect motion) and built-in compass and LEDs, with a website full of coding languages. There is a dedicated website for this.

The computer has 25 LED lights that can flash messages and be used to create [games](#). There are two programmable buttons that can be used to control games or pause and skip songs on a playlist

Built-in Low Energy Bluetooth connectivity enables the BBC micro:bit to interact with other devices and the Internet.

It provides the basics of JavaScript, Microsoft Block Editor, Microsoft Touch Develop and Python, said *Wired*.

"Those gold markings aren't just for show: the entire edge of the Micro Bit is a 'standard' edge connector which allows it to connect to a Raspberry Pi, Arduino, Galileo or Kano," said *PC Advisor*. "The Micro Bit can also act like a USB flash drive when connected to a PC so programs can be [dragged](#) and dropped onto it."

Jamie Rigg, Reviews Editor, *Engadget* UK, said those who pre-order the device now would get it in [July](#).

More information: www.microbit.co.uk/

uk.farnell.com/bbc-microbit

www.element14.com/community/colton-academy/microbit

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Citation: Coding tidings: BBC micro:bit set to increase audience (2016, June 1) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2016-06-coding-tidings-bbc-microbit-audience.html>

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