Almo Partners with NEC to Serve Up Raspberry Pi

The incorporation of support for the latest Raspberry Pi compute module support into NEC's newest displays combined with Almo's content creation services promises to expand the opportunities for deploying digital signage.

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The digital signage landscape continues to evolve, with many of the latest advancements designed to expand the number of locations where digital displays can be deployed and to make it easier for even the smallest players to take advantage of the powerful marketing tool.

At the forefront of those changes is display maker NEC Display solutions. In its latest move, NEC has begun integrating Raspberry Pi’s Compute Module 3 support into its next-gen V-series and P-Series displays. The technology will allow companies to deploy flexible and powerful digital signage applications based on Raspberry Pi programming technology at a very low cost.

“NEC prides itself on building modular display solutions that offer its customers the greatest degree of flexibility, power, and choice,” said Laura Kauke, channel marketing specialist with NEC Display Solutions. “The RPI is fully integrated into our displays allowing users to not only display their content, but also utilize functions such as the watchdog timer and real-time clock to monitor the Raspberry Pi, as well as full control of the display.”
In addition, NEC is partnering with software providers in retail, airport information systems, education, and corporate to provide presentation and digital signage software which runs on the Raspberry Pi platform. Lutherville, Maryland-based A/V equipment and systems provider Almo Professional A/V is one of NEC’s primary partners in the Raspberry Pi rollout.

“We are working with our Almo Content Services partners to take advantage of this new and exciting offering from NEC,” said John Wills, business development manager with Almo.

“There are many emerging content creation software offerings written for the Raspberry Pi platform and we plan to offer our integrators and dealers the latest in innovative HTML 5-based digital signage at relatively half the cost of other media player platforms,” Wills said. “This new world of capabilities inserts into an elegant design of displays suitable for smooth installations in any environment.”

**Reviewing the recipe**

It all sounds interesting, but what exactly is Raspberry Pi?

The Raspberry Pi is a series of small single-board computers initially released in 2012 by the UK-based Raspberry Pi Foundation to promote the teaching of basic computer science in schools and developing countries. The credit card-sized boards delivered good performance and were very inexpensive, selling for less than $35.
The units ended up being far more popular than expected, with developers and hobbyists incorporating them into applications ranging from robotics to weather balloons to Christmas light controllers. It wasn’t long before Raspberry Pi-based digital signage media players began appearing on the market.

Several updates have been released since then, and in 2014 the Raspberry Pi Foundation released what it termed a “compute module” for embedded applications.

The latest Raspberry Pi 3 compute module boasts significant performance and networking capabilities. With a quad-core 1.2GHz processor, the board is no longer just a basic computer for coding but a reliable intelligent device with unlimited possibilities. The module provides twice the RAM and roughly ten times the CPU performance of the original Compute Module.

“When we started Raspberry Pi, we had one main goal of helping people learn about computing and how to make things with computers,” said Eben Upton, CEO at Raspberry Pi Trading, the Foundation subsidiary that manages its engineering and trading activities.

“However, we’ve been fortunate enough to have sold 10 million Raspberry Pis so far and the commercial success has led to the third generation of a more mature and powerful technology which can be used with NEC’s intelligent display,” Upton said.

**Tasty opportunities for dealers and integrators**

The new NEC displays allow easy access to embedded intelligence connected to Internet of Things devices for digital signage as well as presentation use. They also offer the opportunity to customize the screens to individual needs, making the displays a reliable solution anywhere and anytime.

In addition to the standard Raspberry Pi 3 compute module, NEC will also offer a customized model to meet the performance demands of the display industry.
For its part, Almo has partnered with several content creation firms to develop digital signage and presentation software for displays outfitted with the Raspberry Pi compute modules. Those partnerships will allow Almo to offer those services to its integrators and dealers who don’t have those capabilities themselves.

“That in turn will allow those integrators and dealers to offer content creation services to their own clients without having to manage those tasks in-house,” Wills said. “It gives them an opportunity to expand their service offerings and create an additional revenue stream without having to make the investment in an internal design team.”

Source: Raspberry Pi Foundation