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Cray Intros Supercomputer Value Meal for \$25K






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For organizations that need high-volume computational power but can't afford access to behemoth supercomputers running a quadrillion operations per second, Cray has introduced the CX1. It's a small supercomputer that can fit in an office and goes for as little as \$25,000. When it's released later this month, it will ship with Microsoft HPC Server


2008 pre-loaded.

Supercomputer maker has introduced the CX1, a small and low-cost supercomputer  running [Microsoft's](#) (Nasdaq: MSFT)   new HPC Server 2008. The system is scheduled for official release Sept. 22.


Aimed at users across a range of markets, including financial services, aerospace, automotive, petroleum, life sciences, government, academia and digital media, the systems are priced from US\$25,000 to more than \$60,000.

They boast an assortment of user-friendly features. In addition, the comparatively compact size of the CX1 means that the system can be housed in most office  environments.

Filling the HPC Gap

Studies released by the Council on Competitiveness and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) found that a majority of firms engaged in high performance  computing (HPC) said the technology is indispensable and vital to their ability to compete and survive. Smaller organizations such as workgroups and departments in larger firms have often found HPC systems cost-prohibitive and have been hampered by the inability to access in-house IT experts to help them use the high-powered systems.

The CX1, according to [Cray](#) (Nasdaq: CRAY) , was designed to address these impediments to deploying an HPC. The system is the lowest-priced [supercomputer](#) available from the manufacturer.

The CX1 offers up to 8 nodes and 16 dual- or quad-core [Intel](#) (Nasdaq: INTC)  Xeon processors. It delivers up to 64 gigabytes of memory per node and up to 4 terabytes of internal storage.

The systems can be configured, according to Cray, with a combination of compute, storage and visualization blades in order to meet the requirements of individual customers. The desksize-sized machines are also interoperable with Linux.

Raising the Supercomputer Bar

Cray's name recognition and the inclusion of HPC Server 2008 are two factors working in the [computer's](#)

favor, said Kevin Wohlever, director of Supercomputing Operations at the Ohio Supercomputer Center.

"That Cray is involved in this to take personalized supercomputing down to a user level like this and that Cray has teamed with [Microsoft](#) are significant," he told TechNewsWorld.


However, Wohlever noted that while 10 years ago the CX1 would have been considered a supercomputer based on their capacity and capability, that's not necessarily the case today.

"What they are, they are entry-level points for researchers and can provide good personalized computational research environment for small groups. This is not a supercomputer environment. Ten years ago you had to spend \$100 million or \$10 million to get this environment, now you can buy it for \$25,000, but in the meantime there's five new levels [of supercomputers] above that," he stated.

In fact, supercomputers today are largely clusters assembled from large volume components, according to Gordon Haff, an analyst at Illuminata.

The partnership between Cray and Microsoft fulfills the goal of both companies to enter this market.

"Microsoft has been pushing to get more share in this space for ages -- although they've ramped up their efforts over the past couple of years. It's still a small part of the HPC market, but it leverages some applications that are only available on Windows as well as desktop development tools," he told TechNewsWorld.

"In short, for companies that already do a lot of their engineering work on Windows systems, extending Windows into their HPC clusters can make a lot of sense. From Cray's perspective, this is just about expanding addressable market," Haff said. 

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