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AMD's Small Factor

January 10, 2007

Move over, Mac Mini. AMD today announced plans for a new motherboard form factor that will make PCs smaller, quieter and more desktop friendly. The DTX standard is built on ATX, the most common of PC hardware factors, but has a much smaller footprint.

ATX, or Advanced Technology Extended, is the creation of arch-rival Intel. It's been in use since 1995, when it replaced the AT form factor. ATX motherboards measure 12

inches by 9.6 inches, while two attempts at smaller form factors, Mini ATX and microATX, measure 11.2 inches by 8.2 inches and 9.6 inches by 9.6 inches, respectively.

DTX will measure 200 mm by 244mm, or 7.8 inches by 9.4 inches. It's designed to use 65-watt central processors and 25-watt graphics processors, which will reduce the heat output and, thus, reduce the need for cooling.

A desktop system based on this technology will only give off 20 decibels of sound, according to Daryl Sartain, director of platform initiatives for AMD. A typical desktop PC can reach 50 to 60 decibels, depending on the fans.

AMD expects to see OEM announcements this summer, with products shipping, if not in time for back to school, then definitely for Christmas, according to Sartain. That coincides perfectly with AMD's move to 65nm manufacturing, according to Tony Massimini, director of technology at Semco Research.

"The significant thing here is that the timing of when [product] would hit the market matches up with AMD's own 65nm product. With 65nm, they would presumably be able to go to lower voltages and reduce power consumption that way," he told *internetnews.com*.

And reducing power consumption is a big issue these days. "In the corporate world, more and more attention is being paid to power consumption and what it does to the electric bill -- not just cooling the PC but cooling the offices, too," said Massimini. "All those PCs in an office give off a lot of heat."

There are numerous very small form factor PCs on the market now, sold under the brand names of foreign computer manufacturers like AOpen, but those are usually

proprietary efforts by each vendor.

DTX is an attempt to create a standard form factor for all OEMs. "What's occurring today and what we're seeing from our customer base is there's a big demand for small form factors but there are very few people able to supply to that. Those that are are doing it with proprietary, closed designs," said Sartain.

While meant to be smaller than existing designs, DTX motherboards will still fit into a standard ATX case and use the same back plane, said Sartain. It's not meant as a replacement for ATX, he added.

Massimini thinks a move toward a more standard size for mini PCs will help in terms of commodity pricing. "In the desktop market, the margins are really tight," he said. "If you have a whole lot of companies that can count on a standard size board, that will lower pricing."

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