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Palmchip plans to break innovation barrier

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After three years of non-compete, Palmchip Corp. has come out into the open with announcements that aim to stir design activity and to "stimulate the economy."

Early this month, the company launched its SocStart IP Program providing free [semiconductor](#) IP cores. Along with this launch was the announcement of its AcurX-51, an SoC platform with an integrated 8051 core.

According to the Palmchip press release, engineers can get access to IP cores in RTL format for a one-time royalty and license free use with the SocStart program. Meanwhile, the AcurX-51 is ported into Xilinx [FPGA](#) for firmware and [software](#) development. The AcurX-51 is also currently ported to TSMC, UMC, SiITerra and SMIC fabs.

"The beauty is that we have our design in RTL," explained Jauher Zaidi, Palmchip CEO. "It can be easily ported into any other company and fab."

'Creative' solution

Richard Wawrzyniak, Semico Research's senior analyst, said that the SoCStart program and AcurX platform providing free access to IP and a platform are a "creative approach to a problem that is plaguing the industry—the dramatic rise in design costs for SoCs at every new process geometry."

The research company's study has found out that platform development and third-party IP can offer time and cost advantages for many designers, while supporting design reuse for derivative designs. "This is a tremendous market advantage for companies who commit in a platform approach," said Wawrzyniak.

In an e-mail interview with Zaidi, the executive also pointed out the advantage of platform-based designs. "According to Moore's Law, we should be advancing at a rate that would see [transistors](#) double annually. This is further confounded by the simple fact that product life cycles have decreased from 24 months to three months, while at the same time design cycles can still take as long as 18 months. Obviously, this is a huge problem. Without platform based designs it can take six times longer to design a product than the actual products life cycle."

And during tough economic times, innovation seems to freeze. Palmchip appears to want to free innovation from the clutches of hard times.

"As stated in our press release, we are doing the first use license for free. Our goal is to stimulate the economy," Zaidi explained. "We want customers to start their design before they get a project budget. We also want to save the jobs of countless engineers that have nothing to do. Furthermore, we will all make money when the economy picks up again."

During Palmchip's three-year non-compete, the company was developing software and SoC technologies, Zaidi shared.

"We have developed new platforms like AcurX-lite and AcurX-51," the executive said. "We completed development in porting Linux OS to ARM and MIPS-based system. We created VoIP stack, Wi-Fi stack and completed platform-based design methodology. As a result, we are now ready to provide complete solutions to our customers to help reduce design time and total cost."

As Palmchip strives to drive innovation forward with the launch of its AcurX-51, Zaidi said the company will be developing technology for power management for home use, the medical field and for industrial purposes (i.e. connecting industrial machines to Internet networks).

The company has a 130-person office in Pakistan, Zaidi's home country, thus benefiting the area and Palmchip's customers. "In Pakistan, we are helping local telecoms companies. We have introduced low-cost WiMAX CPE and Fibre management software that uses GIS and GPS to pinpoint the fibre cut in the field. We have also obtained a government grant to develop very low-cost GPRS systems to digitize schools across villages in Pakistan."

In addition to its design activities and efforts in Pakistan, Zaidi said the company intends to target net tops, netbooks and smart book computing devices with their flagship AcurX platform.

"We are well positioned to embark on these projects today as our technologies are concentrated in mobile phones, Wi-Fi, DVD, HDD, camera and [Bluetooth](#) earpiece. During the next few years, you will be hearing more. Stay tuned."

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