Massive Demand for $35 Computer

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The ultra-cheap Raspberry Pi computer went on sale Wednesday amid overwhelming demand, crashing the distributors' websites and selling out on one site shortly thereafter.

The $35 Raspberry Pi Model B, which is the size of a credit card and runs on open-source software developed at Toronto's Seneca College, became available for pre-order at 1 a.m. ET Wednesday from British manufacturers and distributors Premier Farnell and RS Components.

Almost immediately, the Raspberry Pi Foundation, the non-profit group that designed the computers as a device that young people could learn how to program, was flooded with complaints from customers who couldn't access the distributor websites to place their orders.

At 3:08 a.m. ET Wednesday, the Raspberry Pi Twitter account reported that Farnell was sold out of the computers, despite a limit of one per customer. Meanwhile, RS was asking potential customers to express interest on their site.

"With tens of thousands of customers looking to order on the RS website since the launch of Raspberry Pi earlier today, this is the greatest level of demand RS has ever received for a product at one time," Chris Page, general manager of electronics at RS Components, said in a statement.

He added that the company was working closely with Raspberry Pi "to satisfy this unprecedented demand" and expected to begin shipping the devices on a first-come, first-served basis after it gets its first boards late next week.