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Creative Best Practices Desktop Apps Emerging Platforms Opinions Social Media Wireless Word of Mouth

Touch Technologies Will Rock Our World

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Posted by Neal Leavitt on May 28th, 2011 at 2:32 pm

Touch is becoming an integral component for numerous display products, yet it's still in an evolutionary phase.

Rhoda Alexander, director of monitor research for market research firm iSuppli, said hardware designers are overlooking an opportunity to leapfrog over what Apple is currently offering by moving the mobile platform beyond a simple consumption tablet to include true creation offerings.

"Touch provides the all-important key to a growing number of content doors, enabling users to easily flick from one application to another," said Alexander. "Yet for the most part, these doors swing one way, allowing users to easily pull content while providing only rudimentary input options."

The ideal paperless solution, added Alexander, would allow users to interact with the electronic content in the same way one does with the media it is replacing. This is particularly true in education environments where students and educators want more flexibility than a soft keyboard provides.

"They want the ability to make notes in margins and underline critical passages with the simple motion of a stylus, to jot down thoughts as they occur, and to sketch out a diagram or a mathematical solution," she said.

Guillaume Largillier, co-founder and chief strategy officer of Bordeaux, France-based Stantum, which has been providing multi-touch technology solutions since 2002, concurred that education will be a key vertical for touch – and the broad solution will be multi-touch technology, an ideal form factor for mobile and school computing because it's transportable and offers enough surface area for proper content manipulation and viewing.

"But the specific form factor requires the right type of multi-touch technology—a technology that makes touchscreens easier and less costly to build than those that use traditional capacitive multi-touch and, most importantly, that respond best to the needs of the user," said Largillier.

"A user-friendly, touch-enabled smaller screen that doubles as a connected, multimedia e-textbook would be welcomed by students, parents, and teachers," says Lynn Marentette, a noted school psychologist who blogs about accessible off-the-desktop natural user interfaces.

"Tech-savvy teachers often incorporate digital storytelling and multimedia activities into their lessons, and 21st century learners need a fast and easy way to input and manipulate their creative content. Although some of the netbooks in line for purchase by the schools offer this capability, they don't provide the mode of touch that students love, a touch that might make learning tangible—and real," Marentette adds.

In developed countries, noted Largillier, students account for about 25 percent of the population. But in emerging countries, with governments investing heavily in developing their IT and education infrastructures, the addressable market is already close to a billion users. Also, given that education is now on the cusp of the cloud revolution, it would not be surprising if the education market becomes the next El Dorado for makers of connected devices of any sort.

"Computerized slates could be a learning and discovery tool from the very start, rather than yet another

discipline to learn—a concept that has much more in common with paper notepads and plastic slates than it has with traditional classroom PCs," he said.

And Largillier notes that a single interface could respond to the educational needs of users throughout their school careers—from elementary school to university—adapting input mechanisms, graphical elements, interaction flow, and applications as the user's ability grows.

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One Response to "Touch Technologies Will Rock Our World"

1. *Jonathan Handler* says:
   July 11, 2011 at 3:00 PM

   I avoid all touch solutions because I have well rounded fingers and do not have fine motor skills. In elementary school (3rd or 4th grade), my teacher sent a note home that I needed to improve my fine motor skills. The situation never got much better and probably has become worse since some earlier time in my life.

   Every time, I talk about this in a group, even in groups as small as three or four people, there is always at least one person who does not want to do anything that requires fine motor skills.

   Some people will try it because its cool, but the rest will look for alternative technology. Personally, I prefer full sized keyboards. If necessary to move in a small area, I will use a mouse.

   I also have an 18 year old daughter who avoids phones with touchscreens, just like I do. I can tell you with absolute certainty that she does not like to do what her father does. In this case, she does it because it is what works for her.

   I estimate 25-40% of the population would prefer to avoid touch screens of any kind. We would prefer to have real, working buttons.

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