

Touch the future

DisplaySearch, a leading global market research and consulting firm specialising in the display supply chain, forecasts that the total touch screen market will grow to US\$9 billion (about R66.6 billion) in 2015, from US\$3.6 billion (about R26.6 billion) in 2008, with a compound annual growth rate of 14%. In South Africa, the technology is quickly taking off and it is now being used in a diverse array of applications, including the fast-growing mobile, retail and interactive digital signage industries.

By Mauro Mercury⁵ May 2010



A recent seminar for Western Cape users of this technology was attended by representatives from the Foschini Group, Virgin Active, GAAP (Point of Sale), Datacentrix and Clickthinking to view the latest offerings from the company.

The new touch screen self-service division, offers application design and development, kiosk hardware design and manufacturing, project management, remote content and device management tools, as well as on-site support and service level agreements maintenance through approved service partners.

Growth areas

Traditionally the first markets to implement touch screens as an interface are the restaurant and hospitality industry and the gaming industry, but there are some new applications for touch today, including:

- Points of sale;
- Information- and payment kiosks;
- Educational purposes (self awareness applications, health and safety in the working environment applications, training and review applications);
- Automating processes (industrial companies that are replacing traditional keyboard and mouse setup by touch screen driven configurations);
- Banking;
- Medical industry (applications in and outside the operating theatre).

Retail applications

There are many challenges facing retailers of which the most common is the continuous need to communicate with its customers. According to Eddie Dryden Foschini data senior manager enterprise

architecture, “We are constantly exploring different channels that best meet the needs of our customers and the touch screen kiosks provide opportunities for customers to explore product and service features at their own pace and empower themselves with respect to their purchase decisions. This service also creates brand differentiation in the market. The product is creativity fused with functionality.” The group is currently expanding its ‘Proof of Concept’ in four @home stores to a top 20 stores rollout and exploring the potential of introducing the system across its diverse brands.

Driving business

The advantages of a touch screen interface are also business drivers:

- Ease of use - Touch screens are much more user-friendly and entries are much faster so it reduces required operating time and time is money;
- Reduction of errors - Whether it is in the restaurant industry, call centre, large factory, bank, etc, a properly developed touch screen application will give the user a clear choice of actions available. Cases are known where error entries were reduced with up to 90%;
- Attractiveness - If the solution is public focused, for example an information kiosk, the public will be much more inclined to use the solution when they are looking at an information kiosk that does not have a keyboard and mouse but an attractive touch screen interface instead. In addition, keyboards and mice are slowly becoming obsolete in the business environment - people are using touch on their mobiles and PDAs already;
- Product life cycle - Touch screens are very robust and will outlast a keyboard/mouse set-up several times;
- Environmentally friendly - Touch screen solutions allow for more digital communication, reducing traditional print. Less power is consumed and less hardware is used (keyboard, mouse, etc) which means less hardware needs to be recycled.

Key factors

Companies looking at implementing touch screens should consider the five most important key factors:

1. Type of touch screen (size, technology, desktop, kiosk or computer format) has to be based on the environment in which the touch screen will operate and the type of user
2. Choose the right touch screen technology for your application
3. Make sure that the products have been specifically designed for touch and not been added as an after-thought
4. How long will the product be available? Does it carry a guaranteed product life cycle that your business and your client require?
5. Ensure the vendor is officially recognized to ensure that you get efficient support from the manufacturer

The bottom line is that it should add to your business' bottom line.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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