

The Dining Desktop

You're probably all familiar with touch-screen technology. The name says it all. You touch the screen of a certain device while moving your finger to select the desired application (or in everyday language – the “clicky icon thingy”). Almost every POS system in every establishment today uses this technology to help the restaurateur keep track of every purchase and sale made in his/her business.

Now imagine you're out at a restaurant with some friends and you each place your beverage on the table. All of sudden, different pieces of information appear by your glass, such as wine pairings with the restaurant's menu. Then, with the flick of your finger across the surface of the table, you order the recommended meal and request the bill. Sound like science fiction? Not at all. This is because the Microsoft Corporation has just developed the Microsoft Surface™.

This technology turns an ordinary tabletop into a vibrant, interactive surface. The product provides easy interaction with digital content through natural everyday gestures, touch and physical objects.

Still confused? Well, let's go back to the beverage example. Surface™ also features the ability to recognise physical objects that have identification tags similar to bar codes. This means that when a customer simply sets a wine glass on the surface of a table, a restaurant could provide them with information about the wine they're ordering, and even pictures of the vineyard it came from. The experience is limitless, as it gives users access to information on the specified wine-growing region all while looking at recommended hotels in the area and planning the actual trip without leaving the table.

This technology is made up of a 76cm screen in a table-like form. Basically, it's a surface that comes to life for guests to explore,

Technology has just taken the next step forward. We thought you'd like what the nerds across the Atlantic have come up with.

learn, share, order, buy and so much more. Soon to be available in restaurants, hotels, retail stores and public entertainment venues, the Surface™ will transform the way in which people shop, dine, entertain and pretty much live.

Surface™ uses cameras to sense objects, hand gestures and touch. This user input is then processed and the result is displayed on the surface using rear projection. Surface computing is a new method of working with computers that is so far beyond the traditional mouse-and-keyboard experience that you will wonder how you managed to live without such technology. Can you remember a time before cellphones were even invented? People, society and the world in general all change and evolve everyday. Surface technology is the next big thing for the hospitality industry and as you're reading this, it's already being used .

According to Tom Gibbons, corporate vice president of Microsoft's recently formed Productivity and Extended Consumer Experiences Group, the company's first partners come from the leisure, entertainment and retail industries. "That's part of the beauty of surface computing – the market for this type of experience is significant," says Tom. "Right now there are half a million high-end restaurants, hotels and retailers in the US alone. That's pretty impressive. We've looked at





the market extensively, and when you consider that the revenue-generating opportunities include services, hardware and software, we believe there will be a multi-billion-dollar addressable market for surface computing.

The first companies to roll out Surface™ will be Harrah's Entertainment, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, T-Mobile USA and a distributor, International Game Technology (IGT). Surface™ is giving these partners a distinct and very easy way to differentiate their consumers' experiences."

Tom says that surface computing will revolutionise the industry, very similar to the way in which ATMs changed the processes of how we get money from the bank. "Surface™ lets the users manipulate a tremendous amount of information with their hands, so that the content

Surface computing has four key attributes:

- ◆ **Direct interaction** - users can actually "grab" digital information with their hands and interact with content by touch and gesture, without the use of a mouse or keyboard.
- ◆ **Multi-touch contact** - surface computing recognises many points of contact simultaneously, not just from one finger, as with a typical touch screen, but up to dozens and dozens of items at once.
- ◆ **Multi-user experience** - the horizontal form factor makes it easy for several people to gather around surface computers together, providing a collaborative, face-to-face computing experience.
- ◆ **Object recognition** - users can place physical objects on the surface to trigger different types of digital responses, including the transfer of digital content.

works with you rather than for you," he says. For example, with Surface's mapping application, hotel guests can manipulate a map and either move it or shrink it before accessing personalised data for local tourist sites, attractions and venues. To do this today, you'd need a paper map, books, concierge and even a bookstore to find and gather all of the information.

According to reports in the US, Surface units will retail between R35 000 and R70 000 depending on the degree of information and software required. Not bad considering the comprehensive nature of the technology and what each unit can do for an establishment in the hospitality industry.

Although the food and beverage application will be predominately used in fast casual settings as well as pubs and popular restaurants, fine dining establishments may stick to traditional service methods because let's be honest, some things should never change.

Hotels and upmarket guesthouses could really benefit from this technology by having units available in either the lobby, main restaurant or even as an assistant to the concierge. 