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## Comment: Windows 7 - Do we even want touchscreen?

What will we really do with it?

by Chris Hall published on 4 June 2008

The world is a-twitter with musings about Windows 7, the successor to Windows Vista, which Microsoft were aiming to roll out in 2010, 3 years post-Vista, but possibly sooner. Well, that's the plan and reading between the lines you can see a heavy doses of, "please, guys, get Vista", from Microsoft's end. Especially considering, as Chris Flores said on the Windows Vista blog, "Microsoft is not creating a new kernel for Windows 7. Rather, we are refining the kernel architecture and componentization model introduced in Windows Vista".

As we've seen with the uptake of Vista, urging people to change operating systems doesn't always go as planned, especially when you are convincing people, or users (which most of us are) that this is something new and different.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that what we are being shown of Windows 7 is something new (ish) and is perhaps something that people, or users, might want to get excited about. Of course we are talking about the integration of multi-touch at OS level.

But what does this really mean when you step away from the gloss of graphical demonstrations and desirable coffee tables? It means more than just a new OS, it means a new way of working. With the keyboard and mouse being such a natural way to interact - something that has become second nature - do we even want or need touchscreen?

Touchscreen has been pushing its way into our lives, from phones, to cameras, to integrated remote controls and, of course, tablet PCs have been around for some time. The thing that you quickly learn from these devices is that if you don't do it right, you've done it very wrong. When



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you get it right, your praises are sung far and wide. But survey the landscape of devices out there incorporating touch and ask yourself how many are a real pleasure to use? Not many.

When it comes to everyday computer applications, however, do you really want to be using touchscreen? Can touch enhance your experience in the office, using Word for example? I often forego the mouse in favour of keyboard shortcuts because it is faster, it becomes about finding the fastest way to get characters onto the screen.

What about, harking back to the type of demos we've seen, working with images? Ok, so you could flick through images, rotate, pull them up and so on, but there is a major flaw here. You are touching the viewing surface and you know what that means? Dirt, grease, smears: a touchy-feely experience dictated by cleaning. What will follow? Aftermarket touch gloves for a premium Windows 7 experience?

Besides, touch will not be accurate enough for those who really want to work with images, and for those that do, well, just ask Wacom. But why wait? You may as well get a graphics tablet now.

Flores tells us that "one of our [Microsoft's] design goals for Windows 7 is that it will run on the recommended hardware we specified for Windows Vista". Of course there will be hardware demands for touch, so are we expecting to see manufacturers rolling out supporting products? For all notebook users out there, reach out and tap the screen, go on, do it. What do you see? Wobble. This will be a real consideration for any sort of touch interaction given the standard notebook form factor.

What do we really want to know about Windows 7? Increased stability, improved customisation, improved security, faster startup times? These are the things that matter to me, not a fringe application I might never use.

Ok, I'm being a little narrow-minded. The inclusion of touch in a standard OS will open a range of opportunities for PC users in different environments. The Microsoft Surface coffee table idea is one that looks great and combined with the right hardware, fantastic! But at what cost? Touch in this environment works, it's interactive at a level where interactivity matters, it can be social, collaboratively creative, informative to a group. For business, it could be the future of brainstorming - the humble flip chart resigned to the cupboard.

For daily usage, I can't see myself wanting or needing multi-touch for the range of tasks that I ask a computer to do. But perhaps I'm missing the point. Windows 7 will be Windows with touch, not Windows by touch. Windows 7 will not only feature touch support, but will open the door for developers to enhance the touch environment and who knows - maybe something revolutionary will happen? People who need touch at the moment can get it, but who knows what the future holds?

Apparently "Microsoft will be baking touch right into the OS". Let's just hope it isn't a half-baked solution.