

Touch Screens: From Seemingly Impossible to Increasingly Common

By KEN SCHATZKE, Senior Member

James Bond movies are showcases for cutting edge devices—from the plausible to the seemingly impossible.

In *Quantum of Solace*, an MI6 agent shows 007 and M the links between suspects on a digital table simply by touching its surface. Although it seems fantastic, this particular device is much closer to reality than you might think; touch-enabled devices are becoming increasingly common in schools and places of business.

SMART Technologies is a Canadian company on the forefront of touch-enabled devices and related technologies. It produces interactive whiteboards, public displays, tables, and other devices.

The company's flagship product, the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, is used in schools and businesses around the world. Customers connect the SMART Board interactive whiteboard to a computer and projector, and then see the computer's display on the board. They can interact with windows, buttons, and other elements by simply touching them on the board's surface.

I've been working as a documentation specialist at SMART since January 2008. In many respects, my work is similar to that of most technical writers—I develop online help, manuals, specifications, and release notes, and work

with other writers, editors, usability specialists, and subject matter experts on a daily basis. We have meetings, projects, deadlines, and reviews like any other company.

That said, SMART is an exciting place to work as a technical writer. Our products, along with other touch-enabled devices, represent a significant change in how users interact with the digital world. Educators are using touch-enabled devices, such as the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, to teach to students of all learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Businesses are using similar technologies to improve employee communication and collaboration. As an example, employees can now record notes on an electronic whiteboard and then save them to a file for later reference rather than having to write them on a traditional whiteboard with the obligatory “PLO” while searching for a scratchpad or laptop computer to capture them.

Multi-touch technology expands on these possibilities further by allowing multiple users to interact with a single device at the same time. Computing no longer has to be a solitary activity. One of SMART's newest products, a multi-user interactive table designed for primary school children, is being used by

the Spaulding Youth Center in New Hampshire to help autistic students learn and develop social skills. As the software for touch-enabled devices evolves, interactions in the digital world will begin to resemble those of the real world. Imagine shuffling through the photos on your computer like the ones in your shoebox, or laying out a page on a digital table like tech writers of a certain vintage used to do on drafting tables.



Ken Schatzke stands with coworkers in front of their touch screen technology (fourth from the left, wearing a black and white striped shirt).

the Spaulding Youth Center in New Hampshire to help autistic students learn and develop social skills.

As the software for touch-enabled devices evolves, interactions in the digital world will begin to resemble those of the real world. Imagine shuffling through the photos on your computer like the ones in your shoebox, or laying out a page on a digital table like tech writers of a certain vintage used to do on drafting tables.

So what does this mean for me and my colleagues at SMART? We've needed to expand the traditional software documentation vocabulary to include terms like press or touch (versus click) and show users how to interact with our company's products. In addition, we've had to incorporate more graphical, touch-friendly elements into our help. SMART's large, diverse customer base requires us to do all of this while considering the needs of audiences ranging from school students to business professionals.

SMART and other companies that produce touch-enabled devices are creating third-party developer communities with the ultimate goal of fostering broad bases of content and applications for their devices. In addition, the next version of the Windows operating system—Windows 7—will include multi-touch functionality, vastly expanding the software ecosystem for touch-enabled devices. New content and application will require documentation. Perhaps you may be one of the technical writers that produce this documentation. 

Ken Schatzke (KenSchatzke@smarttech.com) is a senior member of STC and has been working as a technical writer for the past nine years. He lives in Calgary, Canada, and holds a bachelor of applied communications in technical writing from Mount Royal College. He is actively involved with the Alberta Chapter and Lone Writer Special Interest Group within STC.



Create as you want Publish where you need

Efficiently generate rich technical content that works seamlessly across platforms

Technical communicators who need to print manuals, produce online help systems, update knowledge bases, and craft training modules now have an integrated suite of applications that makes it easy to:

- author standards-compliant content in Adobe FrameMaker® and Adobe RoboHelp®, and repurpose it conveniently by single-sourcing and publishing to multiple channels such as print, HTML, XML, Adobe PDF, and Adobe AIR® runtime
- create interactive user experiences that engage, by adding 3D models and Adobe Captivate® 'show me' movies, and letting your images say a thousand words with the powerful capabilities of Adobe Photoshop®

"Technical Communication Suite 2 provides an integrated solution that makes it easy to create multiple deliverables from a single source of content. Instead of jumping from one application to another, my clients can use a consistent and familiar Adobe interface for all of the software tools professional communicators need."

—Thomas Aldous, President, Integrated Technologies, Inc.

Meet the Adobe team at



The Technical Communication Summit
conference.stc.org

Learn More

www.learnaboutTCS.com

Try it Now

www.tryTCSnow.com

Adobe, the Adobe PDF logo, Acrobat, the Acrobat logo, Adobe AIR, Captivate, FrameMaker, Photoshop, and RoboHelp are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

© 2009 Adobe Systems Incorporated. All rights reserved.

