

Masterpieces Come Alive Through Touch

Case Study: Quirinale Palace

Visitors use Touch to Interact with Ancient Texts at the Italian Presidential Residence in Rome

Some of the most celebrated writers came from Italy, whom centuries ago penned manuscripts that still today are studied and discussed around the world. To celebrate this legacy and the 150th anniversary of the Italian unification, the Quirinale Palace in Rome showcased the works of 18 famous Italian poets and authors including Dante Alighieri (Divine Comedy), Nicolò Machiavelli (The Prince) and Giovan Battista Marino (L'Adone).



“It was no traditional display...
but a modern, high-tech experience”

Touch Screen Displays: Connecting the Past and Present

The Italian unification was the political and social movement that merged different states of the Italian peninsula into the single state of Italy and which concluded in 1861. To honor this pivotal time in Italy's history, the Italian government desired an exhibit that would help celebrate the country's rich cultural history.

The exhibit, “Viaggio tra i Capolavori Della Letteratura Italiana,” opened to the public from February 2011 through April 2011 at the Quirinale Palace, the official Presidential residence. It was no traditional display of ancient texts encased behind glass but a modern,

high-tech experience. To bring new life into the old manuscripts, the Palace sought the help of Gesto, an interactive development firm based in Segrate, Italy. The event was promoted by the national government office in Rome, Presidenza della Repubblica.

Gesto created several displays using optical touch screen technology from NextWindow, which allowed visitors to interact with the manuscripts.

Some 15,000 people toured the exhibit, which brought together this large collection of famous Italian manuscripts for the first time,

according to Lorenzo Gabellini, CEO with Gesto. “Italian literature has an ancient history and helped Italy grow as a nation,” Gabellini says, explaining the choice of literature for the 150th celebration exhibit.

The De Sanctis Foundation of Rome helped develop the concept, with the hope that by using interactive technologies, the Quirinale Palace could create an enticing curiosity for the past which a static display could not easily accomplish. Gesto developed the multi-touch software, which included a module for viewing and interacting with the manuscripts through dual-touch gestures.





The exhibit's main interactive displays all incorporated NextWindow technology and included:

- An interactive, 40-inch screen that allowed visitors to read and observe the manuscripts in detail. Through the touch screen, users could select a book, browse through pages and zoom in for a closer look.
- A three-meter wide interactive book at which visitors could touch the screen to display the most significant pages of the manuscripts.
- An interactive map of Italy where visitors could "travel" along the narrative locations within the individual masterpieces.
- A touch-screen game, with different levels of difficulties, based on Italian masterpieces. Through the touch screen, visitors could initiate a quiz based on a particular sentence. Visitors guess which manuscript contains the sentence and at the end of the quiz, the system displays the number of correct questions answered.



Technology Considerations

Gesto had used NextWindow touch screen technology for previous client projects, and its consultants were impressed by the screen's stability, ease of use and reliability during the course of the exhibit. "NextWindow has the best touch solution on the market," Gabellini says. One consideration during the project was balancing old media with new media. While advanced technology was pivotal to making the exhibit a success, it also had to be unobtrusive, in order to maintain the integrity of the historical texts. The software had to be simple and

the interface easy to use. Says Gabellini: "At the end, the technology should be invisible but useful."

The interactive displays proved to be a novel and powerful experience for exhibiting famous works of literature. Instead of just peering through a glass pane, people had a rare opportunity to explore the documents and obtain information that would otherwise be unavailable. "This was a wonderful way to bring a masterpiece closer to the people," Gabellini remarks.