

Microsoft Technology Centers Use Touch To Sell Solutions



Case Study: Microsoft Technology Center

To help educate and engage business customers, Microsoft has a powerful resource under its wing: Microsoft Technology Centers (MTC). With 22 of these showrooms positioned in places like New York, Boston, Paris, Moscow and Tokyo, Microsoft experts can work closely with customers and partners to evaluate potential solutions in an interactive environment. Some 50,000 people worldwide visit the centers every year.

One such customer, the Texas Children's Hospital, sought the help of Microsoft to envision and design an extranet project, using Microsoft SharePoint Server 2009. "The MTC gave us a great chance to work with Microsoft experts to further conceptualize and design the service that we wanted to offer," says Matt Sides, Web Technology Manager for Texas Children's Hospital.



Microsoft

The Microsoft logo is displayed in a bold, black, sans-serif font on a wooden wall. The wall has a vertical wood grain pattern. The logo is centered horizontally and is partially framed by a large, light purple circular graphic element.

The Microsoft Technology Center offerings include:

- Strategy Briefings, which provide a high-level look at how Microsoft solutions can meet a particular customer's business needs;
- Architecture Design Sessions, which take a deeper dive into the customers detailed requirements and development options, and;
- Proof of Concept workshops, hands-on multi-week engagements which focus on building out portions of the proposed solution.

To capture the imagination of its customers, Microsoft has introduced a new piece of technology to enable more interactive and dynamic presentations – NextWindow touch technology. First appearing in 2009 at the Chicago MTC, a 52-inch mobile display was used in the Envisioning Center, a state-of-the-art environment for showcasing Microsoft technologies. This allowed customers a closer look at Microsoft solutions for collaboration, unified communications, business intelligence, and CRM, among other technologies, says Ed Mondek, Technology Architect at the Chicago MTC.

"We also have a future-looking Innovation offering, which focuses on research conducted within Microsoft and across the IT industry," he says. The demo covers natural user interface technologies such as speech, multi-touch and camera-based gestures.

In 2010, the Chicago center decided it needed a larger interactive screen, and replaced the 52-inch mobile display with a 103-inch wall-mounted unit, also using NextWindow technology. "This is the main display in the Envisioning Center, so it needs to be really compelling," Mondek explains. The new 103-inch display and the physical demo spaces were built and installed by Ravenswood Studio, a design firm based in Lincolnwood, Illinois that specializes in exhibit and experiential settings.





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Benefits of touch technology for presentations

Touch technology gives presenters the advantages of interacting with information in a more natural way. “It makes the facilitation role more effective because the presenters can stand up and interact with the display, and are not limited to sitting behind a PC or laptop,” Mondek explains. “It provides a more flexible presentation, and the whole experience is more engaging because the presenter is interacting with the display that the customers themselves are viewing.” Best of all, the displays allow Microsoft to actually use the multi-touch technology that it promotes in the Innovation demos.

Finally, the touch screen displays allow Microsoft to introduce customers to ideas around collaborative meetings, according to Mondek. “We can show the power of leveraging a large touch display to more easily bring up context from previous meetings or access drawings and videos.”



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Quality of NextWindow touch

Presenting information on a large touch screen display is also fun for the audience.

“The first time someone sees us use this display, they just smile,” Mondek says.

“They typically ask how we’re doing it, and they often come up and try it themselves.”

With many different touch screen technologies on the market, Microsoft might easily have chosen another solution. However, the NextWindow optical touch

screen offers distinct advantages in terms of cost, clarity, durability and ease of use on large displays, making it the best solution for Microsoft. “The new 103-inch display has been very reliable,” Mondek says. Teaching presenters how to use specific gestures for certain tasks has delivered the best results, he says. “Once you learn the gestures, it’s very easy.”

