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Roman Kepczyk • Apr. 17, 2007

A number of The CPA Technology Advisor columnists (Dream Team) had the opportunity to attend the 2007 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas held in January. This is one of the largest tradeshow in the world, with over 1.8M square feet of exhibits from over 2,700 exhibitors representing office, home and automotive electronics. With a focus on tax and accounting firm automation, I recognized a number of technologies that could evolve from the consumer side to impact accountants in practice. Here are some of my favorite new technologies that I anticipate will impact our firms in the future:

Dell Vision

The accounting profession has embraced Dell products for servers, workstations and a multitude of peripherals. During his keynote, Michael Dell announced a number of service changes and new products that gave listeners some things to cheer about. First, Dell has added thousands of service technicians within the United States and has reduced the number of toll-free numbers by over 80 percent. Dell found that there was an immediate 10 percent improvement in customer satisfaction, and the company plans on continuing this trend. As many firms are standardizing on laptops, they are finding that the cost to get triple monitors may be prohibitive compared to using oversize screens. Dell touted new 27-inch and larger screens that make it easier to have multiple views on these secondary oversize displays. This solution is also easier for firms using Citrix or Windows Terminal Server to optimize video real estate. Dell also touted his new Green initiatives that include free recycling for all equipment in any country where Dell does business, as well as the company's new "Plant a Tree for Me" initiative. When purchasers complete their transaction, they will be given the option of paying \$2 per laptop and

\$6 per desktop to plant a tree and offset the emissions associated with the electricity

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popular smart phones and added improved voice recognition capabilities to many applications. Motorola rolled out the Q Professional, which is one of the thinnest of all smart phones that not only has exceptional voice quality, but includes all the contact, calendar, e-mail and messaging features to which PDA users have become accustomed. Finally, Samsung rolled out a series of Microsoft Mobile devices that will please, particularly its line of SPH phones, such as the i760. These devices come with slide out keyboards that allow the user to optimize it both as a phone and as a communications device, which I feel will become the standard format for PCDs in the future.

Lumus Video Eyeglasses

Much discussion surrounds the undersized smart phone screens and suggests that, while they are capable of handling full spreadsheets, they only allow a very small portion of them to be seen on-screen. A number of micro PCs on the market also have the same "small screen" issue. Imagine the ability to project these images onto your eyeglasses, similar to looking at a 60-inch or larger screen from a few feet away. Lumus displayed working prototypes of such glasses, which could be made with prescription lenses, as well. With time, the projection components will only get smaller, and this may provide users with a view to an additional screen and also allow them to review confidential data in private view.

SanDisk Solid State Disk (SSD)

SanDisk demonstrated a new 32GB SSD that could eventually lead to the elimination of hard drives in mobile devices. Hard drives continue to get smaller but still rely on a multitude of moving parts that eventually wear out and crash the drive. Solid-State drive technology utilizes flash memory to not only store information without moving parts, but also to access the information at speeds that are significantly faster than hard drives. This will be a boon for Microsoft Windows Vista users as the

operating system has been optimized to use “ReadyBoost” solid state memory to load

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One of the downsides to many of today’s PCDs is that entering large amounts of information directly into the PCD when outside the office can be very tedious, particularly if the user does not have an integrated keyboard. While plug-in and Bluetooth keyboards have been available over the years, they have been somewhat bulky and prone to breaking. Imagine a cloth keyboard that you can roll up and store in a pocket or a purse that is made out of smart fabrics that respond to touch. G-Tech (Eleksen Group), which made its name for building MP3 player controls into clothing, showed a smart fabric keyboard that allows you to type into your PCD via a Bluetooth connection. While it was somewhat difficult to use for two-handed “touch typing,” this device worked ideally for “two finger” typists.

Methanol Fuel Cells (long-life batteries)

Toshiba set a Guinness World Record for developing the world’s smallest fuel cell battery that runs on Methanol. At this year’s CES show, the company displayed a laptop, a headset and an MP3 player that operated on fuel cells. The promise of this technology is that it could lead to eight hours or more of battery life for a laptop, and recharges could eventually be purchased at convenience stores in the battery section.

Technology

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