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and emerging technologies that could impact your firms in the near future.

Roman Kepczyk • Apr. 17, 2008

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Each year, a number of contributors from The CPA Technology Advisor take the pilgrimage to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas to scout out new and emerging technologies that could impact your firms in the near future. This year was no different, with noticeable updates to many existing products being released as well as some really amazing future technologies. For those not familiar with CES, it is the world's largest consumer electronics show with over 140,000 attendees visiting 2,700 vendors on a show floor that is equivalent in size to 35 football fields. While it would be impossible to see everything during our two days on the floor, by focusing on office technologies, we were able to hunt out a number of innovative tools. The following is a list of those technologies that I feel will have an IN-firm impact in regards to displays, touch computing, communications capabilities and image capture.

Display Technologies

Cool displays were everywhere beginning with Lumus Eyeware, which projects a computer screen image into a set of sunglasses that allows you to see both the screen image and the world around you. This technology is on the bleeding edge, but in the future could provide an extra screen with built-in privacy for users. As the accounting profession becomes more "paperless," it is pushing more users towards triple monitors, which has been a challenge for firms standardizing on laptop computers.

While firms have had success with screen splitters such as the Matrox Dual Head2Go, one of the CES vendors, DisplayLink showed a device that could attach

up to six additional screens to a laptop at a cost of \$100 per display, which

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plasma screen at 150 inches, which easily covers an entire wall! While I wouldn't expect a firm to buy one of these anytime soon, the technology innovation has driven down the price of large wall-mounted screens enough (40-inch devices at less than \$1,300) for firms to implement them in their conference rooms instead of traditional desktop screens or projection devices.

And if that wasn't enough, Panasonic also showed a new concept called the Life Wall. This projection system uses facial recognition to identify users in the room and then displays their "desktop" on a wall, with images re-sized according to how close the user is to the wall. The sensors respond to movement so users would move their hands to act as the "mouse" or input device to interact with the screen (think about the movie "Minority Report").

Touch Takes Off

Last year at CES, Microsoft introduced "touch" capabilities with its Surface Computing table that allowed multiple users to interact with digital images on a tabletop screen that is 30 inches in length. This year, we were allowed to actually demo the Surface device with five or six people simultaneously moving objects, changing the size of these objects or launching applications. This device can be easily used by the most computer illiterate people, and I would expect to see tax and accounting firms experimenting with them integrated into conference room tables to share tax returns and financial reports with clients.

Microsoft even demonstrated how a camera or smartphone could be set onto the surface and automatically upload or download files on the device. Touch technology became a hit with last year's iPhone and pushed business phone manufacturers to follow suit. Sprint's Touch phone and the Samsung F490 have integrated

similar touch capabilities into their phones, so we can expect to see this capability

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also have tethering capabilities, which allows the phone to also act as a digital “air card” so the user can also connect their laptop to the Internet via the digital cellular network.

BlackBerry continues to build solid business phones with its Curve and 8800, and some now have “world phone” capabilities that allow the device to be used in different phone systems around the world, which is required for those who travel abroad. Innovative new form factors were also touted including AT&T's Duo that not only has a slide out keyboard when using the PCD in “landscape” mode like some of the models above, but also a slide out number pad when the device is used like a standard phone in a vertical mode.

While phone-to-phone video conferencing is still a ways away, Creative Labs showed a pretty cool personal video conferencing device called inPerson that could connect to a broadband Internet connection and allow novice users to talk face to face with other people who have the device. The benefit of this tool was that it took care of all the technical aspects of video conferencing, which seems to be a hang-up in many firms.

Image Capture

There was a strong trend to AIO (all-in-one) devices that do printing, copying and scanning from every printer manufacturer at the show, so these devices are expected to become the standard in firms in the future. For field scanning, Fujitsu continues to stand out and demonstrated its ScanSnap S510 which is an upgrade to the company's 500 model that many firms utilize for high-speed scanning at audit sites. Fujitsu also introduced its S300 model, which is a portable scanner that weighs less than four pounds and can fit into a computer bag.

While this scanner is rated at eight pages per minute when plugged into an

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