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TECHNOLOGY

The Mouse: More Than Just A Peripheral

Although the name may suggest a sideline role, computer peripherals have become a key component of how we interact with technology, from input devices like mice and keyboards, to output devices like printers, and more entertainment-driven hardware like speakers, gaming controllers, webcams and memory card readers.

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Although the name may suggest a sideline role, computer peripherals have become a key component of how we interact with technology, from input devices like mice and keyboards, to output devices like printers, and more entertainment-driven hardware like speakers, gaming controllers, webcams and memory card readers. These devices are more than just an addendum to the computing experience; they are the hands-on part of it. These devices have become so ingrained as part of our everyday work and entertainment, that it would be difficult to imagine a desktop without them.

One of the most revolutionary peripherals, even to this day, is the mouse. Not such a simple contraption anymore, the invention of the computer mouse is credited to (and patented by) one researcher and his staff back in 1963. [Doug Engelbart](#), whom I had the pleasure of meeting at his offices just a few years ago, was then a researcher at Stanford Research Institute (now simply SRI), and was looking for ways to improve the interaction between computer and user. His vision of a point-and-click interface resulted in the first mouse,

with a casing he carved from wood and one button. He also created the first computer monitor, using a cathode-ray tube to display text, graphics and the mouse pointer. He was a pioneer in the development of online computing and e-mail.

Engelbart is one of the foremost geniuses of our day, having shepherded many of the computer interaction technologies we now take for granted.

Engelbart's team had also experimented with track balls, joysticks, light pens, foot and knee-operated pointers, and even a head-operated nose-pointing contraption. Many of these devices would eventually also become available, especially for those with disabilities, though in the early days the focus was on efficiency and accuracy.

The mouse and other peripherals have continued to evolve, from digital optical mice that no longer use a trackball, to wireless devices and the latest generation of laser-pointing devices. For those readers who still have cords running around their desktop, it's time to wake up! Wireless mice and keyboards are extremely convenient, freeing the user from stretching the mouse to get more wire, and can prevent those coffee and soda spills that are the result of "cord accidents."

Here are a few of the latest mice and keyboards that, aside from being cool, can help increase productivity, accuracy and efficiency.

Logitech

MX Revolution

This latest cordless laser mouse from Logitech (www.Logitech.com)

includes a four-way scroll wheel with "hyper-fast scrolling," which lets users move up and down through hundreds of pages of long documents or spreadsheets

with a quick flick, or can precisely move line-by-line. The mouse also includes a search feature, an e-mail button, and the ability to easily cut and past between documents. The MX Revolution costs about \$99 and is available through Logitech or at retailers including Dell, Wal-Mart and office stores. Logitech also makes a laptop version called the VX Revolution, which is smaller but offers the same features for \$79.

Logitech

Cordless Desktop MX 5000

Logitech also offers several cordless desktop mouse-keyboard combinations, including

Bluetooth-enabled systems like the Logitech Cordless Desktop MX 5000, which lets users turn their PC into a wireless hub, enabling data syncing between PC and a mobile phone or PDA, as well as the ability to view message alerts and media information on an integrated LED display. The mouse and keyboard include

functions for controlling multimedia audio systems and other enhanced function keys and can work from as far as 30 feet away from the computer. The MX 5000 laser desktop combo costs about \$149 and is available through Logitech or at retailers including Dell, Wal-Mart and office stores.

Dell

Bluetooth Keyboard and Mouse Bundle

Dell (www.Dell.com) also offers

its own Bluetooth wireless set, with a programmable seven-button mouse and multimedia

keyboard that includes eight hotkeys and eight programmable keys. The system's Bluetooth receiver enables up to seven devices to be connected and functioning simultaneously. The wireless keyboard and mouse set has a 33-foot maximum range and costs \$89 from Dell's website.

Microsoft

Wireless Entertainment Desktop 7000

Microsoft's (www.Microsoft.com)

top-of-the-line wireless Bluetooth-enabled desktop combo sports a high-definition laser mouse with four-direction scrolling and a magnifier button for enlarging on-screen text and images. The curved thin keyboard features various Windows shortcuts, such as the Start button and a Windows Live Call Button to access the user's Messenger buddy list. The keyboard also has a navigation pad.

Other keys are available for accessing Favorites, folders, files and web pages.

The mouse and keyboard have up to a 30-foot range.

Belkin

Wireless Combo

For the more cost-conscious, Belkin's (www.Belkin.com)

Wireless Keyboard and Optical Mouse desktop combination provides the advantages of a wireless optical system in a basic package that offers a six-foot range of wireless capability, with the ability to customize shortcut buttons for quickly

accessing various websites or programs. The combo costs \$59.99 at the company's website or at various retailers.

Kensington

PilotBoard Laser Wireless Desktop Set

Kensington (www.Kensington.com)

offers keyboard-mouse combinations for both PC and Mac users, giving the convenience

of wireless and functionality of optical technology, with one-touch access to a user's multimedia system. The systems start at \$69.99.

Logitech

Harmony Remotes

This is definitely not your dad's old TV clicker. Think of the Harmony as a mouse for the non-computer electronics in your home. The line of universal remotes provides users with a color LED touch-screen interface on a handheld device that can be used to control everything from the most advanced HDTV and TiVo systems, as well as audio and entertainment systems, and even home lighting. The Harmony supports more than 5,000 electronics brands and 175,000 devices, with programming updated daily and syncable from Logitech's website. These tech marvels start at about \$130.

I love the mouse. There are many other peripherals that have evolved since it, of course, including digital pens, advanced audio systems, two-way headsets, webcams, gaming devices, virtual reality goggles, etc. But the mouse was the start of it all. So look at your mouse, upgrade if you think it's time, but also reflect on your mouse's evolution. It started just about 40 years ago with a hand-carved wooden model. More on Doug Engelbart can be found at the Bootstrap Institute (www.Bootstrap.org), including a pictorial history of the development of the mouse and other input devices. While you're there, also check out his curriculum vitae. All that's missing is a Nobel, but I expect he may yet meet the King of Sweden.

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